

What Made George Washington so Great? A Lesson about Leadership For grade 1

Students will explore, through a variety of images and items, why our first president, George Washington was, and still is, considered to have been a great leader. They will end the lesson by creating their own toasts to Washington.

All images are included in the lesson plan for printing and distributing, and they are also in an accompanying slideshow.

Introduction- hold an online discussion:

Show the image of **George Washington (slide #2)** and ask students what they know about him. Make sure they understand that he was our first president. Tell them he was a great leader and they'll be discovering why people thought that a long time ago and why we still think that today.

Today we have lots of things to help us remember and honor George Washington.

What is the name of the capitol of our country?

Presidents' Day is one of our holidays. We celebrate it in February. It is the day when we celebrate the birthdays of two presidents. Do you know who they are?

Here are some other ways we honor and remember George Washington. Show or pass around the following images.

- **US map (slide #3)**-point out WA state & MA
- **Washington monument (slide #4)**
- **George Washington Bridge (slide #5)**

1. Let's take a look at another famous painting of George: **"Washington Crossing the Delaware" (slide #6)**, by Emmanuel Leutze. At the time, this country was owned by England and the people here all had to do what the king of England told them to do. This made the people here mad, so they started a war to fight against England so that America could be its own country and the people here could do what they wanted. This war was called the "Revolutionary War". In this picture Washington and his soldiers are crossing a river on Christmas night in 1776. They were crossing at night because they wanted to make a surprise attack on their enemy, the English soldiers. The artist knew this event and George Washington were very important, so he made one of the largest paintings ever created in America, and it became famous! The painting would probably take up most of the space on a classroom wall! Imagine standing in front of it.

Ask:

- Find George
- How can you tell it is him? (standing in front of boat, dressed nicer, has sword, maybe looks more important)
- Find the long line of boats full of men and horses behind George's boat. There are 2,400 soldiers in those boats! Remember that Washington's boat is the first in line. What does that tell you? (He is the leader; he is important)
- Those chunks in the water are ice, and there's a lot of it! What does that tell you about what these men are doing? (it is dangerous work in the cold, icy water). Why might they feel brave enough to do this work? (They knew George Washington was brave and he cared about them. He knew what to do and his men trusted him to get them across the dangerous river.)
- They finished crossing the river at 3:00 in the morning. George and his men were cold and wet but they couldn't rest yet. They had to march 9 miles to get to where they would fight. Even though he was the leader, George didn't stay behind to get warm and dry. He stayed with his men. What do you think he thought about his men? What do you think they thought about him? (He cared about what happened to them and wanted to support them by staying with them, even in cold, wet, dangerous times; he was one of them.)

Make a list with students of what they learned from this painting about what made George Washington a good leader. Save the list for steps #2 & #4. They'll be adding to the list in step #2 and using items from it to create their toasts in step #4.

2. **Item Exploration**- show each item below one at a time and ask the questions about them. As students come up with new character traits, add them to the list created in step #1 above.

Painting of the cherry tree myth (“Parson Weems’ Fable) (slide #7)

This painting is about a story that someone made up about George Washington when he was 6 years old. It is not true! On his 6th birthday George’s father gave him an axe. When his dad wasn’t looking, George used it on his dad’s cherry tree. When his dad saw what had been done to his tree, he went straight to George and asked, “Did you do this?”. George said, “I cannot tell a lie..... I did cut it with my hatchet (axe).” His father was so happy that George told the truth that he didn’t punish his son. Instead, he said that George’s honesty was more important than 1,000 cherry trees!

- What does this story tell you about George? (He was honest; even when he was scared, he was brave)
- Why do you think someone made up this story? (to show how honest and brave George Washington was, even when he was a boy)

A round barn that Washington invented (slide #8)

George made up the design for this barn all by himself. It is special because it is round, and it had a special use. Wheat plants were placed on the floor and horses walked around and around on them to separate out the seeds. What does that tell you about George? (He was clever, smart)

money- dollar & quarter (slide #9)

That’s George on the quarter AND the dollar. What does that tell you? (He was important and honest. They wouldn’t put a robber’s face on money!)

Rules of Civility (slides #10-13)

George copied these rules when he was about 14 years old. There were 110 of them! They are about good behavior. Here are just a few. What do they tell you about him? (He was polite, nice, kind to others)

3. Celebrating the man then & now

You learned about some ways we remember and honor George Washington. What are they? (paintings of him; a holiday for him; a state, the country’s capitol, a monument, and a bridge named after him; money with his face on it)

A long time ago, people honored important people by “toasting” them on important days like their birthdays. That doesn’t mean they gave the important person toast to eat! It means they stood up and said something nice about that person in front of others. Here are two old toasts about George Washington.

To Washington- may we honor him by copying the best things about him!

To Washington- the father of his country!

What do you think it means that George was the “father” of his country? (It means he took good care of it like a father would take good care of his children.)

Let’s stand up and say each toast altogether. You might want to put one arm up when you say the toast.

4. Now it is your turn to make up your own toast to George Washington. Let’s look again at the list we made of what made him a good leader. Choose one thing for your toast. Start by saying, “To Washington!”. Then add the rest of your toast.

Further Information

Round barn

Massachusetts History and Social Studies Frameworks for Grade 1

Topic 1. Civics: communities, elections, and leadership [1.T1]

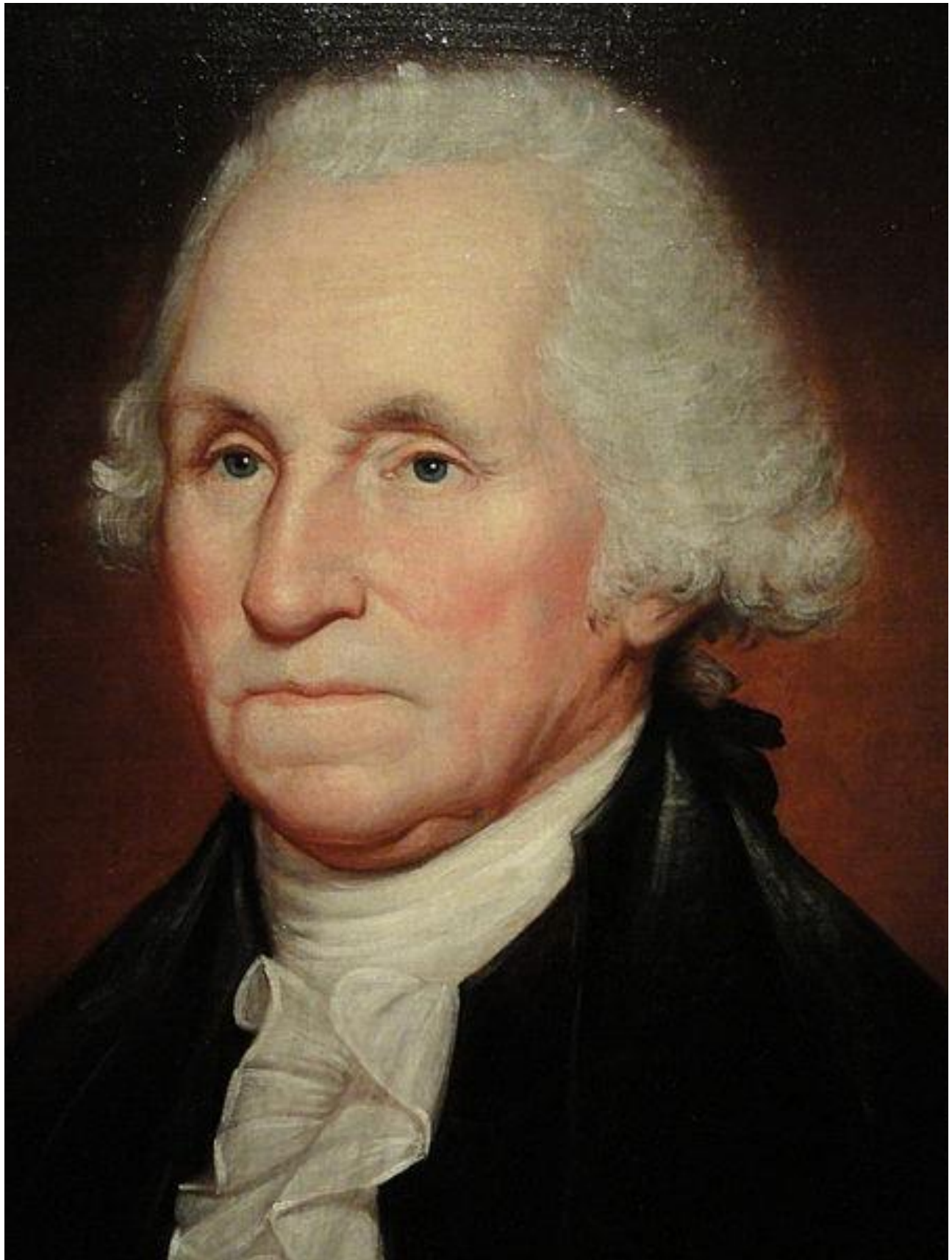
Supporting Question: What does it mean to belong to or lead a group?

3. Demonstrate understanding that a leader is also a member of a group, but takes on a different role with more responsibility for inspiring others, organizing and delegating activities, and helping the group make decisions. For example, students working on a project in a small group take on the roles of leader, recorder or reporter, illustrator, or timekeeper.

4. Analyze examples of leadership and leaders from history, everyday life, and from literature and informational texts read or read aloud, and describe the qualities of a good leader. Clarification Statement: Students should be able to discuss leaders from all walks of life. These may include people they know from personal experience (e.g., teachers, leaders of activities at a girls' and boys' club or scout group, religious leaders) and ones they learn about from reading and viewing (e.g., leaders in stories and biographies about leaders in the United States and other countries). They discuss what it means to have "character" as a leader: to be honest, caring, unselfish, courageous, and act for the common good, rather than just out of self-interest. From this discussion, they draw up a list of the desired qualities of a good leader.

10. Evaluate the qualities of a good citizen or member of the community, drawing on examples from history, literature, informational texts, news reports, and personal experiences. Clarification Statements:

- Students should listen to and read folktales, contemporary fiction, and biographies from the United States and around the world that illustrate the values of civic-mindedness and civic engagement on the part of individuals and groups from diverse backgrounds. They should be able to describe characters' interactions that show citizenship in action. Note that the grade 1 standards for reading in the Massachusetts English Language Arts and Literacy Framework ask students to describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.
- Students should learn and use academic language to describe the qualities of a good citizens or community members, (e.g., well-informed, honest, reliable, respectful, polite, yet firm in speaking up to defend fairness).



George Washington

By Rembrandt Peale, 1795
Wikimedia Commons

Excerpts from “Rules of Civility”

Kill no vermin as fleas, lice, ticks &c in the sight of others, if you see any filth or thick spittle put your foot dexteriously upon it if it be upon the cloths of your companions, put it off privately, and if it be upon your own cloths return thanks to him who puts it off.

What this means

If you have fleas, ticks, or lice on you, kill them when other people are not watching. If you see spit on the floor, cover it with your foot. If you see spit on someone’s clothes, wipe it off when no one is looking and if someone wipes spit off your clothes, thank them.

Speak not injurious words neither in jest or earnest scoff at none although they give occasion.

What this means

Don’t say hurtful things to people, even if they make you mad.

Shew nothing to your friend that may affright him.

What this means

Don’t show scary things to your friend.

If you cough, sneeze, sigh, or yawn, do it not loud but privately; and speak not in your yawning, but put your handkerchief or hand before your face and turn aside.

What this means

Cough, sneeze, sigh, or yawn quietly. While you are yawning, don’t talk. Cover your face with your hankie or your hand and turn your face away from people.

Put not off your clothes in the presence of others, nor go out your chamber half dressed.

What this means

Don’t take off your clothes when other people are around and don’t leave your bedroom unless you are dressed all the way.





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Find the state named after George.



Washington Monument

Wikimedia Commons



Parson Weems' Fable
By Grant Woods
Wikimedia Commons



George Washington Bridge, New York

pixabay.com



Washington Crossing the Delaware

By Emmanuel Leutze

Wikimedia Commons



George Washington's Round Barn

Mt. Vernon, VA

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