Section I: War of Independence

Title: General George Washington, Military Leader

Grade Level: Elementary School

Objectives: Identify qualities of leadership, analyze how General Washington’s officers described their leader—and compare and contrast the two.

National History Standards:
- Standard 2: Student comprehends historical sources; Standard 3: Student engages in historical analysis and interpretation; Era 3: Revolution and the new nation (1754–1820s); Standard 1C: George Washington’s role as military leader.

Time: 45 minutes

Background:
George Washington was appointed general and commander in chief of the Continental army on June 15, 1775. He stood tall when he accepted his commission—more than six feet, in fact. And he cut an impressive figure in his uniform: “His frame is padded with well-developed muscles, indicating great strength,” wrote a friend in 1760. He has “rather long arms and legs,” large hands and feet, a head that is “well-shaped, though not large” with “blue gray penetrating eyes,” and “dark brown hair which he wears in a que [braid].” His “movements and gestures are graceful, his walk majestic, and he is a splendid horseman.”

Delegates to the Continental Congress who appointed Washington were impressed by his commanding presence, military experience, and political savvy. So were the officers and troops he led during the war. Washington won their confidence and admiration by combining “affability & Courtesie, without Arrogancy” with “the strictest discipline” and “the strictest justice” (he did not hesitate to whip, drum out of the army, or even execute those who failed to obey orders). He believed that maintaining the respect of his men was necessary “to support a proper command.” He did not fraternize with his men, but he asked nothing of them that he was not willing to do himself and often joined them in battle.

Washington also took special care to outfit himself in a fashion suitable to a commanding general. He wore a fine uniform with epaulets on the shoulders, and sometimes a blue ribbon across his waistcoat to distinguish himself. And he outfitted himself with accoutrements suitable to a general: tents, a collapsible bed, folding tables, camp stools, and bags and trunks filled with equipment and staples, including a set of silver camp cups engraved with the Washington family crest.
“[Washington] has a dignity that forbids familiarity, mixed with an easy affability that creates love and reverence.”

—Abigail Adams

Materials:

- George Washington’s camp chest, sword, uniform, epaulets, and camp cup
- Online Video—Lydia Post first-person account
  [http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/Lesson3.asx](http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/Lesson3.asx)
- Battle of Princeton, by William Mercer, 1786
- Letter of First Virginia Regiment to George Washington, December 31, 1758:
- Dictionary

Lesson:

Set the stage for this lesson by watching Lydia Post’s account of the war online. Explain to the class how George Washington became the general and commander in chief of the Continental army. Then introduce students to Washington using some of his military possessions—his camp chest, uniform, sword and camp cup. Lead a class discussion by asking the following questions:
1. Who were the members of the army? (farmers, citizens, some veterans of the French and Indian War, etc.)
2. How much experience did these men have? (most had almost none)
3. What did the soldiers think fighting a war against the British would be like?
4. What kind of leader did these men need?

Divide the class into teams of three to four students. Ask each group to make a list of the qualities they believe a good military leader needs. Have each group join with one other group, compare their lists, and then come up with one complete list. Get back together as a class and have the groups report out. Make one master list on the board of the qualities of a good military leader.

Print out several copies of the letter received by George Washington from his officers upon his retirement. Highlight and number the letter’s paragraphs—or even the sentences, depending on the level of your class—so that each group has to focus on only a small section of the letter. Have the students rejoin their groups and, with the help of a dictionary, analyze a small section of the letter. Ask them to make notes about what the officers say are Washington’s leadership qualities.

Come back together as a class to make a second list on the board (next to the first) of George Washington’s leadership qualities according to his officers. Finally, compare the two lists and discuss the differences.
George Washington’s uniform, epaulets, camp cup, sword
National Museum of American History
Lesson 3

Transcript of a letter written by the 1st Virginia Regiment to George Washington, December 31, 1758

FORT LOUDOUN Decr. 31st. 1758

The humble Address of the Officers of the Virginia Regiment.

SIR,

We your most obedient and affectionate Officers, beg leave to express our great Concern, at the disagreeable News we have received of your Determination to resign the Command of that Corps, in which we have under you long served.

The happiness we have enjoy’d, and the Honor we have acquir’d, together with the mutual Regard that has always subsisted between you and your Officers, have implanted so sensible an Affection in the Minds of us all, that we cannot be silent on this critical Occasion.

In our earliest Infancy you took us under your Tuition, train’d us up in the Practice of that Discipline, which alone can constitute good Troops, from the punctual Observance of which you never suffer’d the least Deviation.

Your steady adherance to impartial Justice, your quick Discernment and invariable Regard to Merit, wisely intended to inculcate those genuine Sentiments, of true Honor and Passion for Glory, from which the great military Atcheivements have been deriv’d, first heighten’d our natural Emulation, and our Desire to excel. How much we improv’d by those Regulations, and your own Example, with what Alacrity we have hitherto discharg’d our Duty, with what Cheerfulness we have encounter’d the several Toils, especially while under your particular Directions, we submit to yourself, and flatter ourselves, that we have in a great measure answer’d your Expectations.

Judge then, how sensibly we must be Affected with the loss of such an excellent Commander, such a sincere Friend, and so affable a Companion. How rare is it to find those amable Qualifications blended together in one Man? How great the Loss of such a Man? Adieu to that Superiority, which the Enemy have granted us over other Troops, and which even the Regulars and provincials have done us the Honor publicly to acknowledge. Adieu to that strict Discipline and order, which you have always maintain’d! Adieu to that happy Union and Harmony, which has been our principal Cement!

It gives us an additional Sorrow, when we reflect, to find, our unhappy Country will receive a loss, no less irreparable, than ourselves. Where will it meet a Man so experienc’d in military Affairs? One so renown’d for Patriotism, Courage and Conduct? Who has so great knowledge of the Enemy we have to deal with? Who so well acquainted with their Situation & Strength? Who so much respected by the Soldiery? Who in short so able to support the military Character of Virginia?

Your approv’d Love to your King and Country, and your uncommon Perseverance in promoting
the Honor and true Interest of the Service, convince us, that the most cogent Reasons only could induce you to quit it, Yet we with the greatest Deference, presume to entreat you to suspend those Thoughts for another Year, and to lead us on to assist in compleating the Glorious Work of extirpating our Enemies, towards which so considerable Advances have been already made. In you we place the most implicit Confidence. Your Presence only will cause a steady Firmness and Vigor to actuate in every Breast, despising the greatest Dangers, and thinking light of Toils and Hardships, while lead on by the Man we know and Love.

But if we must be so unhappy as to part, if the Exigencies of your Affairs force you to abandon Us, we beg it as our last Request that you will recommend some Person most capable to command, whose Military Knowledge, whose Honor, whose Conduct, and whose disinterested Principles we may depend upon.

Frankness, Sincerity, and a certain Openness of Soul, are the true Characteristics of an Officer, and we flatter ourselves that you do not think us capable of saying anything, contrary to the purest Dictates of our Minds. Fully persuaded of this, we beg Leave to assure you, that as you have hitherto been the actuating Soul of the whole Corps, we shall at all times pay the most invariable Regard to your Will and Pleasure, and will always be happy to demonstrate by our Actions, with how much Respect and Esteem we are,

... Sir.
... Your most affectionate
... & most obedt. humble Servants

GO. WEEDON  ROBERT STEWART
HENRY RUSSELL  JOHN MC. NEILL
JNO. LAWSON  H: WOODWARD
GEO: SPEAK  ROBT. MCKENZIE
WM. WOODFORD  THOS. BULLITT
JOHN MCCULLY  JOHN BLAGG
JOHN SALLARD  NATHAL. GIST
W HUGHES  MORDI. BUCKNER
WALT CUNINGHAM  WM. DAINGERFIELD
WILLIAM COCKE  WM FLEMING
DAVID KENNEDY  LEONARD PRICE
JAS. CRAIK, Surgeon  NATHL. THOMPSON
JAMES DUNCANSON  CHS. SMITH
AS. ROY

NOTE: Letters to Washington and Accompanying Papers. Published by the Society of the Colonial Dames of American. Edited by Stanislaus Murray Hamilton. This is a text version; the original is in The Library of Congress’s Washington Papers available online:
http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mgw:@field(DOCID+@lit(lw030097))
Bibliography

General

Section I: War of Independence

Section II: Wars of Expansion

Section III: Civil War

Section IV: World War II

Section V: Cold War/Vietnam

Section VI: September 11 and Its Aftermath
Americans at War, produced by The History Channel
An introduction to the themes of the exhibition

War of Independence
First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:
- Lydia Minturn Post, Long Island housewife, 1776
- James Collins, teenage soldier, no date
- Doonyontat, Wyandot chief, 1779
- Elijah Churchill, recipient of the first Purple Heart, 1783

Mexican War
First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:
- José María Tornel y Mendivil, Mexican secretary of war, 1837
- George Ballentine, English volunteer for the United States, 1853
- Juan Bautista Vigil y Alarid, acting governor of New Mexico, 1846
- Ulysses S. Grant, American soldier, 1885

Civil War
First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:
- Louis Myers, Third West Virginia Infantry, 1862
- William G. Christie, Minnesota soldier, 1863
- Eugenia Phillips, spy for the South in Washington D.C., 1861
- Spottwood Rice, African American Union soldier, 1864

World War I
World War I Overview, produced by The History Channel

World War II
World War II Cartoons, produced by The History Channel
World War II Overviews in the Newsreel format, produced by The History Channel
- From World War I to World War II
- The North Atlantic and North African Theater
- The European Theater
- The Pacific Theater
The USO in World War II, produced by The History Channel
First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:
- George Hynes, U.S. Army, a last letter home, 1942
- Robert Morris, U.S. Coast Guard, fighting in Italy, 1943
- Robert Sherrod, journalist, the beach at Tarawa, 1943
- Ann Darr, Women Airforce Service Pilots, 1997
- Daniel Inouye, Medal of Honor recipient, 2000

Vietnam
Excerpt from Huey Helicopter—Air Armada, The History Channel documentary, 2002
First-Person Accounts, produced by Arrowhead Film & Video:
- Hal Moore, commander of a Seventh Cavalry Regiment battalion, 2003
- Fred Castleberry, veteran of the Twenty-fifth Infantry Division, 2002
- Clarence Sasser, recipient of the Medal of Honor, 2004, (produced by Pyramid Studios)