



## George Washington & Civic Virtue: The Necessary Elements of the Republic

**Intended Grade Level:** Middle School

**Lesson Purpose:** Washington, as one of the founders of our nation, was admired as a leader and for his character while Commander-in-Chief and President. He recognized the importance of character and civic virtue as necessary to preserve a strong constitutional republic. This lesson focuses on George Washington's character and civic virtues and examines the connection between those virtues and fostering a democratic and free society in the United States.

### Lesson Objectives:

- Students will analyze Washington-related primary source documents, including the *Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior*, his *First Inaugural Address*, and his *Farewell Address*
- Students will examine the concept of civic virtues as written and exemplified by George Washington, and how civic virtues foster democracy
- Students will discuss how the relationship between citizens and civic virtue helps to preserve a strong democracy

### National Standards:

#### **NSS-USH.5-12.3 ERA 3: REVOLUTION AND THE NEW NATION (1754-1820S)**

Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in forging the revolutionary movement, and the reasons for the American victory

Understands the impact of the American Revolution on politics, economy, and society

Understands the institutions and practices of government created during the Revolution and how they were revised between 1787 and 1815 to create the foundation of the American political system based on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights

#### **NSS-C.5-8.1 CIVIC LIFE, POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT**

What are Civic Life, Politics, and Government?

What is civic life? What is politics? What is government? Why are government and politics necessary? What purposes should government serve?

What are the essential characteristics of limited and unlimited government?

What are the nature and purposes of constitutions?

What are alternative ways of organizing constitutional governments?

#### **NSS-C.5-8.2 FOUNDATIONS OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM**

What are the Foundations of the American Political System?



- What is the American idea of constitutional government?  
What are the distinctive characteristics of American society?  
What is American political culture?  
What values and principles are basic to American constitutional democracy?

**Time Frame:** Approximately two class sessions

### Materials:

Washington's *Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior In Company & Conversation*:  
<http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/civility/transcript.html>

Washington's *First Inaugural Address*:  
<http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/inaugural/final.html>

Washington's *Farewell Address*:  
<http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/farewell/intro.html>

### Procedure:

1. As a class, define *good character, manners, civic virtue* and *civic knowledge*. Discuss with the class how George Washington believed in the importance of character and civic virtue. Throughout his life, Washington was known for his strong character and as a "man of action." Have students list on the board what they know about George Washington. After the list is complete, discuss character traits that are reflected by each item on the list (ex. Washington was Commander-in-Chief during the Revolution- strong leader, courageous, good reputation, etc).
2. Distribute Washington's *Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior, Inaugural Address, and Farewell Address* for students to read. Have each student analyze the documents and record their impression in the Document Analysis Table (included below). Review the students' answers as a class.
3. Have each student choose three of Washington's *Rules* that they think are the most important in today's society and share their choices with the class. As a class, discuss why certain Rules were chosen more often than others. Do they think that the Rules of Civility may have influenced Washington's behavior and



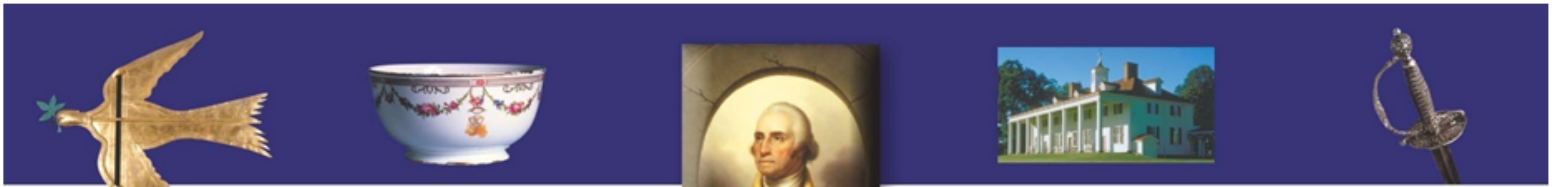
views? Ask students if they can find examples in the *Inaugural Address* and the *Farewell Address* that encapsulate the ideals expressed in the *Rules of Civility*.

4. For further class discussion, have students consider the following questions:

- Why is it important that citizens participate in a democratic society?
- If participation by citizens is important to a democratic society, why are civic virtues important?
- What is the relationship between a citizen's societal roles and responsibilities and his or her character and virtues?
- How might civic virtues foster and support democracy?
- Can you provide instances of civic virtue in today's society and from current events?



*Adapted from a lesson plan by Susan Mitchell,  
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## Document Analysis Table

	Rules of Civility	Inaugural Address	Farewell Address
When was the document written?			
Who is the audience for this document?			
What is the purpose of this document?			
What civic virtues are mentioned in the document?			
What is it important to learn from this document?			