



## My Very Own Washington Exhibition

**Intended Grade Level:** Middle School

**Lesson Purpose:** The curator of a museum is responsible for choosing objects that can demonstrate a specific exhibit theme in an interesting and engaging manner. At Mount Vernon, curators are responsible for creating exhibits that educate visitors about the importance of George Washington to our nation's founding, but also encourage the general public to see Washington as a real person. In this lesson, students will use multiple research sources to choose objects and create an exhibition on a specific theme of George Washington's life.

### Lesson Objectives:

- Students will learn about the life of George Washington through the process of curating a museum exhibition.
- Students will conduct primary research in order to choose objects, art, and primary documents for their exhibition.

### 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

#### NL-ENG.K-12.7 EVALUATING DATA

Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

#### NL-ENG.K-12.8 DEVELOPING RESEARCH SKILLS

Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.



### **NL-ENG.K-12.5 COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**

Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

### **NA-VA.5-8.4 UNDERSTANDING THE VISUAL ARTS IN RELATION TO HISTORY AND CULTURES**

- Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures
- Students describe and place a variety of art objects in historical and cultural contexts
- Students analyze, describe, and demonstrate how factors of time and place (such as climate, resources, ideas, and technology) influence visual characteristics that give meaning and value to a work of art

### **Materials:**

- Poster board
- Art supplies

**Timeframe:** Approximately five class sessions

### **Procedure:**

1. Make a class list of museum exhibitions that your students have visited. Discuss which aspects of the exhibitions they enjoyed and what they learned. Ask students if they can remember art, artifacts, documents, interactive experiences, etc. from the exhibitions and why they believe a curator chose to use that particular object. Students should understand that the role of a curator is to choose objects that will be displayed in an exhibition in order to educate about a specific theme.
2. Either as a class or on their own, have students explore the online exhibition for the Smithsonian Museum of American Art's, "George Washington: A National Treasure," [www.georgewashington.si.edu](http://www.georgewashington.si.edu). Ask students to define the theme of the exhibition, then choose one object from the exhibition and explain why they believe curators included it.
3. Distribute the assignment sheet, "My Very Own Washington Exhibition," (included below) and answer any questions students may have after reading the assignment.



4. Divide students into four groups and assign each group a theme:

- Washington: Surveyor & Soldier
- Revolutionary War General
- The First President
- Life at Mount Vernon

The group will be responsible for choosing objects and documents that demonstrate their theme clearly and also provide support for why they chose each item.

5. Students can use a variety of text and online resources for choosing items, such as the online Collections of Mount Vernon. The Mount Vernon library also offers a number of online databases for public use on their website, [www.mountvernon.org/learn/collections](http://www.mountvernon.org/learn/collections). An easy way to familiarize students with this type of research is to have them use an online database to search for an item. Good examples are:

- Find Rembrandt Peale's "Portrait of George Washington" on GroveArt.
- Find Edward Savage's "The Washington Family" on ARTstor.
- Find Washington's Will on the Digital Papers of George Washington.

6. If you choose to have groups create an online exhibition to accompany their physical display, a simple way to do this is creating a PowerPoint show. As a supplement to their exhibition, you may also have them create a poster or movie using the National Archives Digital Vault website, [www.digitalvaults.org](http://www.digitalvaults.org).

7. After students have completed their exhibitions, display them in the classroom or a public space in the school if possible. Allow the class sufficient time to explore their "museum," then have groups explain their exhibition to the class. Students should be ready to justify why they chose each object.

### Extension Activities:

1. Have students visit a local museum and discuss their impressions of the exhibition and why they think certain objects were chosen.
2. Have students research a museum career and write an overview of the position.



## My Very Own Washington Exhibition

You have been chosen to curate an exhibition about the life of George Washington. Your job as a curator will be to choose objects that teach your classmates about a theme of Washington's life. You must use at least five different resources for research (websites, books, video, etc.) and choose at least 15 objects to be in your exhibition.

The objects can be physical artifacts that represent objects that would have been used by George Washington, copies of paintings, sculpture, video clips, primary documents, etc. Each item must have a printed label that states in three-five sentences the use, materials (if applicable), and importance of the object. The labels will be displayed as a part of your exhibition. All objects must be cited to include any applicable information such as title, artist, author, year it was created, and current owner.

The background of your exhibition should be mounted on poster board and have a clearly displayed title (not the same as your theme). Upon completion of your exhibition, it will become part of the "class museum." As curators, your group will introduce the purpose of your exhibition, describe each item, and be prepared to explain why the object was chosen. Your group will also need to turn in a typed copy of your labels and answers to the following:

- Exhibition Title
- Purpose
- Research Sources (at least five)

Remember that your exhibition needs to be historically accurate and educational, but also engaging and attractive!

