



## Origin of the Purple Heart

**Intended Grade Level:** Upper Elementary School

**Lesson Purpose:** Students will learn that during the American Revolution, George Washington established the Purple Heart military decoration, known at the time as the Badge of Military Merit. Students will explore the historical and modern significance of this award.

### Lesson Objectives:

- To research the origins of the Purple Heart and its modern use.
- To research and present to the class personal stories of friends and/or family members who have received the Purple Heart.
- To create their own armed forces medal with an essay explaining the medal design and award criteria.

### 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.K-4.5 ROLES OF THE CITIZEN

What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?

- What does it mean to be a citizen of the United States?
- How does a person become a citizen?
- What are important rights in the United States?
- What are important responsibilities of Americans?
- What dispositions or traits of character are important to the preservation and improvement of American democracy?
- How can Americans participate in their government?
- What is the importance of political leadership and public service?
- How should Americans select leaders?



### **NSS-C.5-8.5 ROLES OF THE CITIZEN**

What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?

- What is citizenship?
- What are the rights of citizens?
- What are the responsibilities of citizens?
- What dispositions or traits of character are important to the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy?
- How can citizens take part in civic life?

### **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.

## **Materials:**

- Crayons, colored pencils, and/or markers

**Timeframe:** Approximately three class sessions

## **Procedures:**

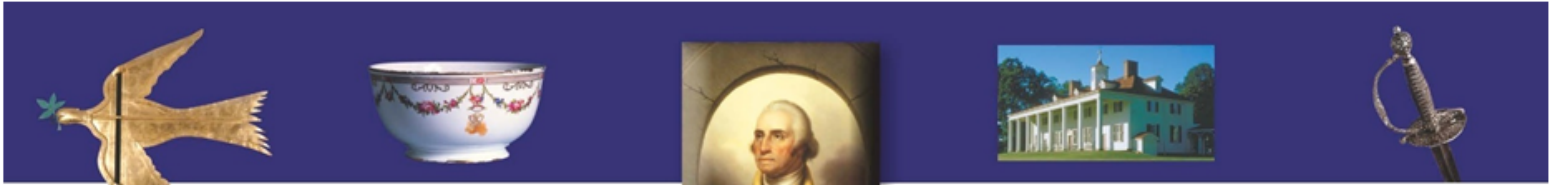
1. Introduce the Purple Heart to the class and discuss the honor of receiving this important military award.
2. Have students visit the following web sites to research the Purple Heart:
  - United States Department of Veterans Affairs  
<http://www1.va.gov/opa/feature/celebrate/purple-heart.asp>
  - Military Order of the Purple Heart of the USA  
<http://www.purpleheart.org>
3. Have students answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper:
  - a. Who created the Purple Heart Award?
  - b. What was the award originally called?



- c. Who were its first recipients?
  - d. Who is eligible for this award?
  - e. What is the difference between the original award and the current Purple Heart?
4. Have students locate a friend, family member, or neighbor who has received the Purple Heart. Students may need to contact a local veteran's organization if they do not know anyone personally who has received the award. Interview the recipient (or someone who knew him/her if the recipient is deceased) to find out what receiving the award meant to him/her. Students should use the Interview Worksheet (included below) to record the answers. Students will report back to the class on their findings.
5. Have students write thank-you letters to the Purple Heart awardees. (Some awardees can receive more than one letter if not all students find a Purple Heart winner.) The letters should thank the veteran for the interview, his or her service to the country, and tell him or her what the student learned about the Purple Heart and George Washington. Students may use the letter form included below.
6. Have students draw an original armed forces medal and write a brief essay explaining their design and criteria for the award.
7. Extension: Host a "Hometown Heroes" reception. Invite the Purple Heart winners as well as other area veterans to a reception at your school. Display the student-created military awards and essays.



*This has been adapted from a lesson by Patricia Turnbough,  
George Washington Teachers Institute 2008.*



*GW*

## Interview Worksheet



1. In which war(s) did you serve?

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2. Why were you awarded the Purple Heart?

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3. How did receiving the Purple Heart make you feel?

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4. Does knowing that General George Washington created the Purple Heart make it a more meaningful award?

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5. What would you tell General Washington about the Purple Heart if you had the chance?

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