



GW

The Right Choice

Intended Grade Level: High School

Lesson Purpose: Students will discuss the selection of George Washington as Commander of the Continental Army. They will evaluate Washington's qualifications and decide if he was, indeed, the right choice.

Lesson Objectives:

- The students will identify characteristics, skills, and experience required to command the Continental Army.
- The students will evaluate the strategies and leadership of the Continental Army leaders.

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.9-12.5 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-12.5 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.



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.

Timeframe: Approximately two class sessions

Background Knowledge: The students should have knowledge of events leading up to the Continental Congress' decision to establish a Continental Army.

Procedures:

1. Divide the students into groups of 3 and ask them to list characteristics and skills that a person should have when leading an army. The group should come to a consensus and only list the characteristics and skills upon which the group agrees.
2. One by one, have each group share a characteristic or skill they have on their list. As the group shares, they need to explain why they feel this is important for a leader of an army to possess. If the class agrees that the characteristic or skill is important, list it on the board or on a piece of butcher paper.
3. Give each group a copy of the "Generalship" reading (included below).
4. The groups will now be told that they have been selected by the Continental Congress to write a job description and an advertisement for a commander of the newly formed Continental Army.
5. The students will decide on candidates to be interviewed and what questions they want to ask. Guide students to research other members of the Continental Congress and other military leaders of Washington's day.
6. Distribute "Candidate for Commander in Chief" reading (included below).



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7. The students will write a persuasive report to the Continental Congress recommending or not recommending the hiring of George Washington as Commander of the Continental Army.



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



Generalship

Excerpts from *Generalship: Qualities, Instincts, and Character* by Montgomery C. Meigs. The article was printed in *Parameters*, US Army War College Quarterly in the summer of 2001.

Generals, like athletes, are made not born, despite the fact that some are born with a natural ability that gives them more promise than the rest of us. But all of us need development to progress to the level of competence and character our potential allows. In a letter to his son on the eve of D-Day, George S. Patton wrote: "To be a successful soldier you must know history....What you must know is how man reacts. Weapons change, but the men who use them change not at all."

There seems to be no real conclusive body of thought on what makes a good general. So as a start point, study of the leadership attributes of generals, past and present, should be useful. Historians and commentators alike usually cite character as the essential ingredient of enlightened senior leadership, especially of military leaders. Character is a set of qualities, but what is the essence of the person that compels him or her to exhibit those traits? How do aspiring military leaders develop that kind of character? One of the most important things a soldier does is to prepare himself for the time when the nation calls, when he is thrown into a situation in which his decisions and his ability to drive execution affect national interests. If one agrees that self-development is one of the essential aspects of the personal growth of military leaders, we must get the characteristics of generalship right. When the crucial test comes for a senior military leader, whether in peacetime or in war, it is too late then for preparation. The list of essential characteristics of generalship starts with the force of intellect, from which derive the elements of decision and execution – competence, intuition, and will. The second is energy; they get around and influence the battle with their presence. They best ones have that uncanny knack of being at the critical point just at the right time. The third trait is selflessness – moral and physical courage. Finally, no general is worth his salt unless he has the basic humanity that gives him a feel for the troops that engenders the bond between leader and led which is so fundamental to the personal sacrifices that bring victory.

Intellect

Under the greatest pressures, successful flag officers have shown the ability to think their way through problems to derive innovative solutions. They calculated and



accepted the risks inherent in those solutions and through force of personality disciplined their organizations to execute their intent. Intellect also involves intense professional study.

General Ulysses S. Grant comes immediately to mind as an example of the force of intellect. Grant was no scholar. He graduated at the halfway mark in his West Point class. His distinguishing characteristic as a cadet, and later as a young officer, was a startling aptitude for horsemanship. After promising regimental service in the Mexican War followed by the boredom of the frontier army and resulting depression, Grant left the Army as a captain, went home to Illinois, and tried his hand in the civilian economy. He failed in business and farming--several times. It took the subsequent challenges of the Civil War to uncover the character that made him a great captain. Two examples of Grant's generalship stand out, one at Shiloh, one before Vicksburg.

By the Battle of Shiloh, Grant had moved from regimental command to command of an army. His experiences in the Mexican War and the fighting at Belmont and Forts Henry and Donelson had given him the basic tactical competence and confidence that served as the foundation of his operational decisions.

At Shiloh, Grant arrived on the battlefield with the situation in doubt. Albert Sidney Johnson had attacked and driven into the unsuspecting and unprepared camps of the Union divisions, who fell back attempting to regroup. Many Union soldiers had abandoned their regiments and cowered under the cover of the bluff above the river's edge upon which the Union right was hinged. Grant arrived well into a fight going badly, and late in the day. He had a sprained ankle and was helped onto his horse and propped there by a crutch lashed to his saddle. He rode from division commander to division commander, giving orders to restore the line, reissue ammunition, defend in place. Halfway up the line of divisions, Grant stopped and from the saddle wrote to Buell, who controlled reinforcements on their way down river:

The attack on my forces has been very spirited since early this morning. The appearance of fresh troops in the field now would have a powerful effect both by inspiring our men and disheartening the enemy. If you can get upon the field, leaving all your baggage on the east bank of the river, it will be a move to our advantage and possibly save the day to us. The rebel force is estimated at over 100,000 men. My headquarters will be in the log building on top of the hill, where you will be furnished a staff officer to guide you to your place on the field.[3]



In the midst of the fight, Grant had the mental discipline to give Buell a clear commander's intent that laid out exactly what he needed to do to intervene successfully in the battle: "spirited attack . . . 100,000 men . . . appearance of fresh troops . . . powerful effect . . . get on the field without tarrying with the baggage . . . save the day to us . . . my headquarters is on the hill above the landing--go there for final orders." Written in haste under the greatest stress, this fragmentary order shows mental clarity and discipline.

Throughout the day, Grant rode through his command rallying the force in spite of the lateness of reinforcements. As matters reached the culminating point, Grant supervised the placement of artillery batteries hub-to-hub to defend the point where his left flank hooked into the high ground above the landing. The Confederate attack began to weaken. That night, after Grant's divisions had stabilized the situation and the Confederate momentum had stalled, Sherman met Grant under a tree near the Union headquarters. Grant was not able to sleep. The cabin in which he had placed his headquarters became a hospital. Unable to stand the gore and agony of the ongoing surgery, he left the cabin. It was raining. Grant was wet and tired, in pain from his ankle; he had been shot at all day; a cigar was clamped between his teeth. Running on pure nervous energy, he was caught in the temporary lethargy that comes after great effort:

Sherman: "We've had the Devil's own day, haven't we?"

Grant: "Yes. . . . Yes, lick'em tomorrow though." He later issues the order to "advance and recapture our original camps." [4]

Later in the Western campaign, Grant was stymied before Vicksburg. He had attacked the city six times. He had failed at places like Chickasaw Bluff, Yazoo Pass, Lake Providence. The Ole Miss had risen unexpectedly and spoiled his attempt to build a canal west of the city to provide a route for his flotilla to pass south out of the range of the batteries at Vicksburg. In addition, McClellan, a subordinate and a political general, was lobbying with friends in Washington to secure Grant's removal. His efforts caused Lincoln to remark that he remained Grant's only supporter. Grant had a mess on his hands.

He responded by closeting himself in the former ladies' cabin of the steamer *Magnolia* while he pored over maps pondering the situation. Refusing the company of his more amiable subordinates, he studied the alternatives. The plan that resulted was to have the navy run the batteries at Vicksburg and the army simultaneously march to the west and south to a point south of the city where Admiral Porter's ships could ferry them



across the river, allowing Grant to cut his opponent's lines of communication and take Vicksburg from the rear. Grant was willing to take the risk of putting his army across the river separated from its own lines of communication and between the two opposing forces of Pemberton, the defender of Vicksburg, and J. E. Johnston, the district commander. He did this based on a detailed study of the realities of the situation, the risks, and a sense of the abilities of his opponents.

Energy – The art of being in the critical place at crucial times -influencing the battle with one’s presence.

Gettysburg - On the first day, the Army of the Potomac fought a delaying battle and managed to hold on to the key terrain, the ridge above the town. The second day consisted of a seesaw battle in which Lee sought a flank or a breakthrough. On the afternoon of the second day, through the incompetence of Sickles, who moved his corps forward into the Peach Orchard opening a gap in the Union line, the Confederates gained an unrecognized advantage. But George Gordon Meade was a very good tactical commander. Remember, it was his corps that made the greatest advance at bloody Fredricksburg. Meade knew how to fight a corps. Meade rode the line during the battle and visited Sickles. He recognized the mistake immediately, reprimanded Sickles, and, realizing there was no time to move the troops back, gave orders to hold and rode back to get reinforcements to close the gap. Regiments and brigades literally ran to arrive just in time. Barksdale's Mississippians could not break through. Longstreet's brigades were stopped, but barely. The battle flowed to the right up onto Little Round Top. Again commander presence won the day, this time by Gouverneur Warren who put a brigade onto the dominant hill just in time.

If you dissect the events of the second day at Gettysburg, you find similar patterns all over the Army of the Potomac. Hancock, Meade, Schofield, Warren--all were more aggressive and active than their Confederate counterparts. They controlled the tactical tempo of the battlefield. Precisely because of their energy and being at the right place at the right time and the quality of their tactical decisions, they fought a better battle than their gray-clad opponents. Their actions established the conditions for the fateful events of the third day.

Selflessness – The ability to take responsibility for what happens, not worried about themselves when making decisions. The ability to forge consensus among other generals who have troops who follow them. The ability to execute a plan he or she



doesn't totally agree with at the time. Only those who have trained themselves to remove any self-interest from the equation will be able to successfully face the dilemmas, abstractions, and uncertainty, and handle the stress, to apply their intellect to frame the best possible decision or to render the best advice. Only those who can put away their own self-interest to face the risk to reputation in peacetime and the physical risk in combat will be able to do what is right.

Think of Eisenhower on 5 June 1944. He had irrevocably unleashed the D-Day assault in what would be--along with the Battle of Britain, Midway, Stalingrad, and the events in the Battle of the Atlantic in Spring 1943--one of the significant turning points of the war. But that night, the outcome was not certain. The weather looked promising for only a short time. No one knew how deeply the hook of Allied strategic deception had sunk into the German High Command's strategic appreciations. No one could have known how much Hitler's personal interference would hamstring the Wehrmacht's ability to counterattack the landings. Knowing the outcome was in doubt and that in case of failure an accounting would be made, Ike wrote this short message to have on hand in case of a reverse:

Our landings in the Cherbourg-Havre area have failed to gain a satisfactory foothold and I have withdrawn the troops. My decision to attack at this time and place was based upon the best information available. The troops, the Army and the Navy did all that bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt it is mine alone.--July 5[10]

Ike was not worrying about himself. He was preparing for the eventuality that, if defeat came, he would have to leave command taking responsibility for it.

Ike's diary is very useful for understanding the powerful, self-effacing nature of his generalship. In February 1944 Ike was newly assigned as Supreme Allied Commander. He mused about the events of 1942 in Northern Africa and the assessment the British press made of his contribution to the campaign--mere "friendliness in welding an Allied team," not boldness or initiative. Ike wrote privately to himself:

The truth is that the bold British commanders in the Med were [Admiral Cunningham] and Tedder. (Not the English ground commanders.) I had peremptorily to order the holding of the forward air fields in the bitter days of January 1943. I had to order the integration of an American corps and its use on the battlelines. I had to order the attack on Pantelleria. And finally the British ground commanders (but not Sir Andrew and Tedder) wanted to put all our



ground forces into the toe of Italy. They didn't like Salerno--but after days of work I got them to accept. On the other hand, no British commander ever held back when once an operation was ordered. We had a happy family--and to all the C-in-C's must go the great share of the operational credit. But it wearies me to be thought of as timid, when I've had to do things that were so risky as to be almost crazy.--Oh hum--."[11]

Ike's reaction, "Oh hum," gives an understanding of his unique contribution as Supreme Allied Commander. He could forge consensus and order reluctant generals with large followings in their own country to take risky action precisely because his absence of self-interest was a given. Ike could manage the precarious balance between American and British strategic points of view and the personalities that represented them, and he could bring together dissenting American and British generals simply because he advocated on the merits and without animus or personal bent what was right operationally and what would work, and he had the patience to see the issue through.

Humanity – The ability to respect your soldiers and how they feel. Also show respectful treatment of enemies. A general exerts power, but is sensitive.

Not only does this kind of emotion matter in combat. It matters in peacetime as well. In one of the most poignant moments of our republic's history, George Washington's standing with the officers of the Continental Army secured for us Americans what is unique about our revolution, the willing submission of the military arm of the revolution to political will. Recall March of 1783. The American War of Revolution was over. The officers of the Continental Army made up perhaps the most cohesive and most national of institutions. The new states were now independent. There existed no system for taxation, no federal government to speak of. There was great concern that the revolutionary experiment was doomed even as it was being born. There was no historical example of a successful democracy that our founding fathers could follow. Nationalists argued for a military coup. Many of a more republican mind argued for restraint.

Washington was caught in the middle of this debate and pressured from both sides. He decided not to intervene. The Army's officers became restive, seditious, and called a secret meeting. Washington at first refused to attend, but then did so unannounced, surprising those in the hall. He addressed the officers, endorsing moderation. But the officers remained angry, unsettled, and ill-disposed toward his message. Remember, these were men who had served with Washington, many since Brooklyn and the



reverses that led to Trenton. They had weathered Valley Forge and a number of defeats and near-victories that finally had culminated at Yorktown. They had risked the hangman's noose. They had followed Washington through seven years of tough soldiering during which the outcome remained always in doubt.

Finally, Washington remembered a letter he was carrying from a representative in the Congress and decided to read it to the audience to buttress his argument. He pulled out the letter and stared at it for a moment, seemingly uncomprehendingly. Then he took from his pocket a pair of eyeglasses most of the officers had never seen him use. He said simply, "Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country." [16] This simple human gesture carried the day and shifted the mood of the officers present. The Continental Army disbanded and went home, no longer a threat to the evolution of a republican government it had fought so hard to foster. There is no question that Washington's Newburgh Address and his stand against any usurpation of the government by the officers of the Continental Army was a crucial moment in our history, as well as a founding precept of our citizen Army. It was Washington's human touch and the hard-won emotional loyalty of his officers that made his intervention effective.



Candidate for Commander in Chief

George Washington was a delegate from Virginia to the Constitutional Convention. He was part of a committee that was to consider the general defensive needs of New York. He was active in the planning committees for the Continental Army and began to wear his old military uniform to the meetings. He served on the committee to draft rules and regulations for the government of the Continental Army.

George Washington was the best qualified native-born American. He was a part of the Virginia Militia that fought in the French and Indian War. He served with General Braddock. He was the only American to command a large force. (There was no rival to his experience.)

John Adams nominated Washington because he believed that appointing a Southerner to lead an army made up of primarily Northerners would unite the colonies. Washington was from Virginia – the largest colony.

Washington asked for no pay, just reimbursement for expenses. He believed that the civilian elected officials possessed ultimate authority over military and made clear he would defer to the authority of Congress.

Washington wanted to build a regular army on the European model. He had a conservative strategy –

1. Keep control of 90% of population at all times
2. Keep the army intact
3. Suppress Loyalists
4. Avoid decisive battles except to exploit enemy mistakes