



What Makes a General?

Intended Grade Level: High School

Lesson Purpose: This lesson explores George Washington's leadership and character as commander-in-chief of the Revolutionary War by bringing to life the relationships that formed between him and his generals as they fought for our nation's freedom. This lesson plan can accompany the Mount Vernon exhibition, "George Washington & His Generals," on display February 21, 2009-January 10, 2010 in the Donald W. Reynolds Museum.

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will discuss the leadership characteristics that made Washington an effective leader.
- Students will analyze primary documents and images to understand the relationship between Washington and his Revolutionary War generals.
- Students will research a Revolutionary War military leader using primary documents and decide whether the general displayed leadership characteristics.

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

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



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 three class sessions

Background: There were 81 major and brigadier generals serving under General George Washington during the Revolutionary War. This diverse group of men came from all 13 colonies and 10 foreign lands and represented over a dozen professions. Drawing on his innate sense of leadership, Washington skillfully led these individuals – some of whom were imposed upon him, some of whom he chose, and others who were fresh from Europe – to victory against the British, whose military forces ranked among the most powerful and disciplined in the world. His ability to place the greatest responsibility in the hands of those with the most talent proved to be one of his most important leadership skills. However, Washington was not infallible in his judgment of character – he was initially a great admirer and supporter of Benedict Arnold, the most infamous traitor in American history.

Procedure:

1. Tell students that today they will be exploring Washington's military leadership and the characteristics that made him a great leader during the Revolutionary War. As a class, discuss the concept of leadership and the characteristics exhibited by George Washington that made him such an effective leader. List these characteristics on the blackboard.
2. Distribute copies of *Transcription: Henry Knox's Orders of March to Trenton* (included below). Colonel Henry Knox was responsible for the treacherous task of leading the Continental troops over the icy Delaware River in order to surprise the British army at Trenton. The battle proceeded almost exactly as drawn up in these orders. Washington's army, split in two, surprised the Hessians, trapped them in the town, and overpowered the enemy force. Knox's artillery played a decisive role, inflicting heavy damage inside the close quarters of the town. The Continentals killed or captured nearly one thousand Hessian troops during their victory at Trenton. Two days later Knox was promoted to Brigadier General of



Artillery. More information about this document can be found at the Gilder Lehrman website:

http://www.gilderlehrman.org/collection/docs_archive/docs_archive_Trenton_March.html

As a class, discuss the historical significance of this battle and the role that Henry Knox played in the victory at Trenton. Ask students what their reaction would be if they had received these detailed orders from Gen. Washington? Which leadership characteristics did Henry Knox display during the battle?

3. Distribute class copies of Emanuel Leutze's monumental painting, *Washington Rallying the Troops at Monmouth* (included below). This painting dramatically captures the contentious relationship between Washington and Charles Lee, one of Washington's most outspoken critics. Charles Lee desired the position of commander-in-chief and engaged in a long campaign of character attack against Washington. Lee was arrested at the Battle of Monmouth for retreating with his troops instead of attacking the British troops as ordered by Washington. Lee's troops retreated into Washington's advancing soldiers, and the incident was described by fellow generals as the only time that Washington swore. In Leutze's painting, Washington, the sunlight shining on his wrathful face, waves aloft his sword as he starts to rally the troops of the advance corps. Hamilton and a bareheaded Lafayette have ridden up with him and are reining in their horses. Lee sits back in the saddle, his crestfallen face in shadow. In the foreground, exhausted riflemen – and a thirsty dog – scoop water from a spring; farther back, on the left, the soldiers raise a cheer for their Commander in Chief, while some of them have already turned to fire on the redcoats, who can be seen outside Monmouth Court House in the distance at upper left. On the hilltop, behind the figure of Washington, American artillery gallops into position to stem the retreat; and at far right the regular ranks of Continentals approach the scene to do battle.

As a class, have students identify the figures in the painting and discuss their overall impressions. Why do they believe that Charles Lee was an ineffective leader? What leadership characteristics did he lack?

4. Distribute class copies of the *Transcription: Memoir of Colonel Benjamin Tallmadge* (included below). Tallmadge was chosen by Washington as the chief intelligence officer of the Revolutionary War, and he organized the Culper Spy Ring. This memoir excerpt is a firsthand account of General Washington's resignation at Fraunces Tavern.



As a class, discuss the emotional parting of Washington and his generals recorded in this excerpt. What characteristics are displayed by Washington as he respectfully thanks the men he fought alongside through the Revolutionary War?

5. Assign each student a Revolutionary War military leader. Have each student research his/her assigned leader and write a biography of him. Each biography should include the leadership characteristics that were or were not displayed by the officer. At least one primary document, such as a letter or journal excerpt, should be referenced by the students to support their views. Revolutionary War military leaders who would be good choices for research are: Benedict Arnold, Horatio Gates, Benjamin Gould, Nathaniel Greene, Henry Knox, Tadeusz Kosciuszko, Marquis de Lafayette, Charles Lee, Alexander McDougall, Daniel Morgan, Israel Putnam, Philip John Schuyler, Baron von Steuben, Benjamin Tallmadge, Artemis Ward, Anthony Wayne, Samuel Blachley Webb, Otho Holland Williams.



Transcription: Henry Knox's Order of March to Trenton, December 25, 1776

Each Brigade to be furnish'd with two good Guides. General Stevens Brigade to form the advanced party & to have with them a detachment of the Artillery without Cannon provided with Spikes and Hammers to Spike up the enemies Cannon in case of necessity or to bring them off if it can be effected. The party to be provided with drag ropes for the purpose of dragging off the Cannon. General Stevens is to attack and force the enemies guards and seize such posts as may pressure them from forming in the streets and in case they are annoy'd from the houses to set them on fire. The Brigades of Mercer & Lord Stirling under the Command of Major General Greene to support General Stevens, this is the second division or left wing of the Army and to march by the way of the Pennington Road.

St Clairs Glovers & Sargents Brigades under Major General Sullivan to march by the river road, this is the first division of the Army and to form the right wing. Lord Stirlings Brigade to form the reserve of the left wing and General St Clairs Brigade the reserve of the right wing. These reserves to form a second line in Conjunction or a second hand to each division as circumstances may require — Each Brigadier to make the Colonels acquainted with the parts of their respective Regiments in the Brigade and the Major Generals will inform them of the parts of their Brigades in the Line.

Four peices of artillery to march at the head of each Column, three pieces at the head of the second Brigade of each Division and two peices with each of the Reserves. The troops to be assembled one Miles back of McKonkeys Ferry and as soon as it begins to grow dark the troops to be March'd to McKonkeys Ferry and embark onboard the boats in following order under the direction of Colonel Knox General Stevens Brigade with the detachment of Artillery men to embark first General Mercers next; Lord Stirlings next, Genl Fermoy's next who will march in the rear of the Second Division and file off from the Princeton Road in such direction that he can with the greatest ease & safety secure the passes between Princeton & Trenton the Guides will be the best judge of this. he is to take two pieces of artillery with him St Clair Glover & Sargents Brigades to embark in order. Immediately upon their debarkation the whole to form & march in Subdivisions from the Right

The Commanding officers of Regiments to observe that the Divisions be equal & that proper officers be appointed to each — a profound silence to be enjoynd & no man to quit his Ranks on the pain of Death — each Brigadier to appoint flanking parties — the reserve Brigades to appoint the rear Guards of the Columns — The heads of the Columns to be appointed to arrive at Trenton at five oClock

Capt Washington & Capt Flahavan with a party of 40 men each to march before the Divisions & post themselves on the road about three miles from Trenton & make



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prisoner of all going in or coming out of Town General Stevens will appoint a Guard to form a chain of centries round the landing place at a sufficient distance from the river to permit the troops to form This Guard not to suffer any person to gone in or out but to detain all persons who attempts either this Guard to join their Brigade when the troops are all over.



Image: Emanuel Leutze, “Washington Rallying the Troops at Monmouth,” 1853.





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Transcription: *The Memoirs of Colonel Benjamin Tallmadge, 1830*

The time now drew near when General Washington intended to leave this part of the country for his beloved retreat at Mt. Vernon. On Tuesday the 4th of December it was made known to the officers then in New York that General Washington intended to commence his journey on that day.

At 12 o'clock the officers repaired to Fraunces Tavern in Pearl Street where General Washington had appointed to meet them and to take his final leave of them. We had been assembled but a few moments when his excellency entered the room. His emotions were too strong to be concealed which seemed to be reciprocated by every officer present. After partaking of a slight refreshment in almost breathless silence the General filled his glass with wine and turning to the officers said, 'With a heart full of love and gratitude I now take leave of you. I most devoutly wish that your latter days may be as prosperous and happy as your former ones have been glorious and honorable.'

After the officers had taken a glass of wine General Washington said 'I cannot come to each of you but shall feel obliged if each of you will come and take me by the hand.' General Knox being nearest to him turned to the Commander-in-chief who, suffused in tears, was incapable of utterance but grasped his hand when they embraced each other in silence. In the same affectionate manner every officer in the room marched up and parted with his general in chief. Such a scene of sorrow and weeping I had never before witnessed and fondly hope I may never be called to witness again.