The Many Faces of George Washington: Remaking a Presidential Icon

(Carolrhoda Books, 2011, ISBN 978-0-7613-5608-0)

by

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**Suggestions for using**

**The Many Faces of George Washington: Remaking a Presidential Icon**

**as a mentor text to accomplish CCSS goals in READING and WRITING**

I write complex nonfiction books, which are the type of book the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) require. The whole book—or just a section—can be used as a mentor text in the classroom. I’ve chosen one short section, pages 28-30, of The Many Faces of George Washington: Remaking a Presidential Icon to use as an example of how the book could be used to teach CCSS anchor standards in Reading and Writing.

I’ve chosen to concentrate on this brief section of the book for three reasons. First it can be read quickly, which will allow time to read it repeatedly—looking at different details each time. Second, I chose this section of the book is because it relates a little known event in the life of George Washington that shows him as a strong, athletic young man. Third, the information found in this section is taken exclusively from two primary source documents that are easily accessible to you and your students.

When using this section to teach READING, it is my hope that through close reading students will dissect the text in order to consider why I used the information the way I did, why I made specific word choices, and compare the text to the two primary sources from which this information comes.

When you use this section to teach WRITING, it is my hope that students will understand that what they see in the published book is only *one way* to use the primary source documents. It does not represent the *only way*, nor does it necessarily represent the *right way*. It is simply *my way.* There are countless ways to use primary source documents. Each student can use the same research material and each student will use them in a different way.

For your convenience, I have included:

1. Background for historical context

2. The text from pages 28-30, of The Many Faces of George Washington: Remaking a Presidential Icon

3. The text from the journal of George Washington

4. The text from the journal of Christopher Gist

5. Suggestions on how this section could be used

I would love to get feedback from you about these suggestions at: [ckmcclafferty@gmail.com](mailto:ckmcclafferty@gmail.com)

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

In December of 1753, a vast wilderness lay to the west of the thirteen British colonies. A power struggle was taking place between England and France over who would control the territory around the Ohio River valley. Tension between these two superpowers was growing.

Twenty-one year old Major George Washington of the Virginia Militia volunteered to be a messenger. His job was to deliver a letter from the British command, Colonial Virginia’s Governor Dinwiddie, to the French commander located in the Ohio River valley. Dinwiddie’s letter informed the French commander that his troops were in British territory—and insisted that the French leave the Ohio River valley immediately.

Major Washington waited for the French commander to write a letter in reply to the threat, then return to Williamsburg with it as soon as possible. The Frenchman’s letter informed Governor Dinwiddie that the Ohio River valley belonged to France—and insisted the British leave immediately.

With the French commander’s letter in his possession, Major Washington started the return trip to Williamsburg, Virginia, more than 350 miles away. To travel quickly, Washington took only Christopher Gist with him. When the two men reached the Allegheny River, it was nearly frozen. George Washington and Christopher Gist both wrote in their journals about what happened when they attempted to cross the Allegheny River on December 29, 1753.

TEXT EXCERPT FROM PAGES 28-30 of

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The next day, Washington started back toward Williamsburg to deliver the message to Governor Dinwiddie. Travel was difficult in the cold. Washington noted in his journal that the horses were soon weak and “less able to travel every day.” On December 26, Washington decided he could travel faster on foot. He changed into his Indian clothing—he likely found these more practical for walking when weather conditions were bad—and separated from the rest, taking only Christopher Gist with him. Step by step, the two men crunched through the frozen wilderness.

Washington and Gist arrived at the bank of the Allegheny on December 29. Frozen sheets of ice fifty yards wide had formed on each side of the bank, leaving a fast-flowing stream filled with massive chunks of ice in the middle. The only way across the treacherous river was to build a raft. Washington had only one tool: a hatchet.

They went to work. All day the two men cut down trees and lashed them together to make a raft. Finally, at just past sunset, they were ready to launch. Washington climbed aboard the teetering craft carrying his small pack, his gun, and the long pole he planned to use to steer the raft across the river. When both men were balanced and ready, they started across the water.

Huge shards of ice crashed into the raft one after the other. The flimsy raft dipped and rocked. It seemed that any moment they would be overwhelmed and sink. George Washington believed he was going to die.

Looking upriver, Washington saw massive ice flows careening toward them. He had to do something. If only he could stop the raft long enough for the huge pieces to pass them by without hitting them, maybe they could reach the other side.

With every ounce of strength in his body, Washington jammed his navigation pole through the churning water into the muddy river bottom ten feet below the surface. Instantly, water rushed against the pole with such violence that it jerked him off the raft.

Washington was swallowed up by the river. He kicked his muscular legs until his head popped up out of the freezing water. He reached for the raft and just barely caught hold of the rough edge.

The raft was beaten up by the ice and would not hold together long enough to get to the other side. As Washington drifted downstream in the freezing water, a tiny island in the middle of the river came into view. Letting go of the useless raft, Washington and Gist swam toward the strip of land.

Darkness had fallen by the time they dragged themselves out of the icy water. They were soaked to the skin and the temperature was falling fast. Washington and Gist shivered though the sub-freezing night and hoped they wouldn’t freeze to death before morning.

At dawn, they were still alive. Gist suffered from frostbite on all of his fingers and some of his toes. Washington survived without injury. They were relieved to see that during the miserable night, even the middle of the river had frozen solid. Both men walked across the river to the other side and kept going. T

The excerpt from pages 28-30 of

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is based on two primary source documents:

1. Journal of George Washington

2. Journal of Christopher Gist

NOTE: For space considerations, I’ve abbreviated the journal entries below. Read the journals in their entirety to learn how they traveled through the wilderness and about Indian relations in the 18th century.

**Diary of George Washington**

**[Journey to the French Commandant: Narrative]**

**1753**

On Wednesday the 31st. of October 1753 I was Commission’d & appointed by the Honble. Robert Dinwiddie Esqr. Governor &ca. of Virginia

To visit & deliver a Letter to the Commandant of the French Forces on the Ohio, & set out on the intended Journey the same Day. The next I arriv’d at Fredericksburg, & engag’d Mr. Jacob Vanbraam, Interpreter, & proceeded with him to Alexandria where we provided Necessaries. From thence we went to Winchester & got Baggage Horses &ca. & from there we pursued the new Road to Wills Creek, where we arriv’d the 14th: of November.

Here I engag’d Mr. Gist to Pilot us out, & also hired four others as Servitors (vizt.) Barnaby Currin, & John McGuier (Indian Traders) Henry Steward, & William Jenkins; & in Company with those Persons I left the Inhabitants the Day following. The excessive Rains & vast Quantity of Snow that had fallen prevented our reaching Mr. Frazer’s, an Indian Trader at the Mouth of Turtle Creek, on Monongehela, ’til Thursday.

. . .

[December 1753]

23d: When I got Things ready to set off I sent for the Half King, to know whether they intended to go with us, or by Water. He told me that the White Thunder had hurt himself much, & was Sick & unable to walk, therefore he was oblig’d to carry him down in a Canoe: As I found he intended to stay a Day or two here, & knew that Monsieur Joncaire wou’d employ every Scheme to set him against the English, as he had before done; I told him I hoped he wou’d guard against his Flattery, & let no fine Speeches Influence Him in their Favour: He desired I might not be concern’d, for he knew the French too well, for any Thing to engage him in their Behalf, & though he cou’d not go down with us, he wou’d endeavour to meet at the Forks with Joseph Campbell, to deliver a Speech for me to carry to his Honour the Governor. He told me he wou’d order the young Hunter to attend us, & get Provision &ca. if wanted. Our Horses were now so weak & feeble, & the Baggage heavy; as we were oblig’d to provide all the Necessaries the Journey wou’d require, that we doubted much their performing it; therefore my Self & others (except the Drivers which were oblig’d to ride) gave up our Horses for Packs, to assist along with the Baggage; & put my Self into an Indian walking Dress, & continue’d with them three Day’s, ’till I found there was no Probability of their getting in, in any reasonable Time; the Horses grew less able to travel every Day. The Cold increas’d very fast, & the Roads were geting much worse by a deep Snow continually Freezing; And as I was uneasy to get back to make a report of my Proceedings to his Honour the Governor; I determin’d to prosecute my Journey the nearest way through the Woods on Foot. Accordingly I left Mr. Vanbraam in Charge of our Baggage, with Money and Directions to provide Necessaries from Place to Place for themselves & Horses & to make the most convenient Dispatch in. I took my necessary Papers, pull’d off my Cloths; tied My Self up in a Match Coat; & with my Pack at my back, with my Papers & Provisions in it, & a Gun, set out with Mr. Gist, fitted in the same Manner, on Wednesday the 26th.

The Day following, just after we had pass’d a Place call’d the Murdering Town where we intended to quit the Path & steer across the Country for Shanapins Town, we fell in with a Party of French Indians, which had laid in wait for us, one of them fired at Mr. Gist or me, not 15 Steps, but fortunately missed. We took this Fellow into Custody, & kept him ’till about 9 o’Clock at Night, & then let him go, & then walked all the remaining Part of the Night without making any Stop; that we might get the start, so far as to be out of the reach of their Pursuit next Day, as were well assur’d they wou’d follow upon our Tract as soon as it was Light: The next Day we continued traveling ’till it was quite Dark, & got to the River about two Miles above Shanapins; we expected to have found the River Froze, but it was not, only about 50 Yards from each Shoar; the Ice I suppose had broke up above, for it was driving in vast Quantities.

There was no way for us to get over but upon a Raft, which we set about with but one poor Hatchet, & got finish’d just after Sunsetting, after a whole days Work: We got it launch’d, & on board of it, & sett off; but before we got half over, we were jamed in the Ice in such a Manner, that we expected every Moment our Raft wou’d sink, & we Perish; I put out my seting Pole, to try to stop the Raft, that the Ice might pass by, when the Rapidity of the Stream through it with so much Violence against the Pole, that it Jirk’d me into 10 Feet Water, but I fortunately saved my Self by catching hold of one of the Raft Logs. Notwithstanding all our Efforts we cou’d not get the Raft to either Shoar, but were oblig’d, as we were pretty near an Island, to quit our Raft & wade to it. The Cold was so extream severe, that Mr. Gist got all his Fingers, & some of his Toes Froze, & the Water was shut up so hard, that We found no Difficulty in getting off the Island on the Ice in the Morning, & went to Mr. Frazers.

SOURCE FOR GEORGE WASHINGTON JOURNAL:

There are several different places where this diary of George Washington can be found online:

The Papers of George Washington digital edition, University of Virginia, access through Mount Vernon Guest. To use this database you must first go through Mount Vernon:

<http://www.mountvernon.org/educational-resources/research-collections/databases>

Then choose the link: The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition. This will give you access a guest of Mount Vernon.

Transcription of Diary: Credit Line: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division. (This one has scholarly footnotes.)

Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig, eds. *The Diaries of George Washington*. 6 vols. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976-79

[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mgwd&fileName=mgwd/gwpagewd01.db&recNum=213&itemLink=P?mgw:1:./temp/~ammem\_HqFF::%23wd010212&linkText=1](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mgwd&fileName=mgwd/gwpagewd01.db&recNum=213&itemLink=P?mgw:1:./temp/~ammem_HqFF::)

**Diary of Christopher Gist**

**1753**

Wednesday 14 November, 175.—Then Major George Washington came to my house at Will's Creek, and delivered me a letter from the council in Virginia, requesting me to attend him up to the commandant of the French fort on the Ohio River.

. . .

Friday 7.—All encamped at Sugar creek, five miles from Venango. The creek being very high we were obliged to carry all our baggage over on trees, and swim our horses The Major and I went first over, with our boots on.

. . .

Monday 10.—Set out, travelled about eight miles, and encamped. Our Indians killed a bear. Here we had a creek to cross, very deep; we got over on a tree, and got our goods over.

. . .

Monday 24.—Here Major Washington set out on foot in Indian dress Our horses grew weak, that we were mostly obliged to travel on foot, and had snow all day. Encamped near the barrens.

Tuesday 25.—Set out and travelled on foot to branches of Great Beaver creek.

Wednesday 26.—The Major desired me to set out on foot, and leave our company, as the creeks were frozen, and our horses could make but little way. Indeed, I was unwilling he should undertake such a travel, who had never been used to walking before this time. But as he insisted on it, I set out with our packs, like Indians, and travelled eighteen miles. That night we lodged at an Indian cabin, and the Major was much fatigued. It was very cold; all the small runs were frozen, that we could hardly get water to drink.

. . .

Saturday 29.—We set out early, got to Alleghany, made a raft, and with much difficulty got over to an island, a little above Shannopin's town. The Major having fallen in from off the raft, and my fingers frostbitten, and the sun down, and very cold, we contented ourselves to encamp upon that island. It was deep water between us and the shore; but the cold did, us some service, for in the morning it was frozen hard enough for us to pass over on the ice.

Sunday 30.—We set out about ten miles to John Frazier's, at Turtle creek, and rested that evening.

SOURCE FOR GIST JOURNAL:

Christopher Gist's Journals With Historical, Geographical And Ethnological Notes And Biographies Of His Contemporaries, by William M. Darlington [1815-1889] Pittsburgh, J. R. Weldin & Co., 1893.

Contributed for use in the USGenWeb Archives by [Donna Bluemink](mailto:dbluemink@cox.net)

<http://www.usgwarchives.net/pa/1pa/1picts/gist/gjtoc.html>

CCSS for READING

USING PAGES 28-30 OF The Many Faces of George Washington: Remaking a Presidential Icon

Closely read the text. It may be helpful to read the text section and discuss one Anchor Standard in READING at a time. I suggest reading the same section of the book several times, looking at the text for different information each time.

For example, I’ll take one standard from each READING Anchor Standard section:

## Key Ideas and Details

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/CCRA/R/1/) **Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.**

Discuss using questions like “Why was Washington in a hurry?” “Why did the author mention specifically mention Washington had a hatchet?” (I mentioned it as a nod to the MYTH of Washington using a hatchet to chop down the cherry tree.)

Does the text tell us anything about Washington’s physical abilities? Where in the text can you find evidence of this? (“step by step, the two men crunched through the frozen wilderness” “cut down trees and lashed them together to make a raft” “He kicked his muscular legs”)

## Craft and Structure

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/CCRA/R/4/) **Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.**

Discuss specific words and phrases I used in the text, using questions like “Why do you think the author included the detail that George Washington “changed into his Indian clothing”? (I wanted a reader to see Washington as a strong young man making his way through the wilderness dressed as an Indian. I wanted to give readers an image of George Washington that contrasts significantly with his image on the dollar bill.)

Does this image change the way you think of Washington?

Do word choices in a text determine the tone of it? Why do you think the author wrote “water *rushed* against the pole *with such force* that it *jerked* him off the raft.” (I used these active words that accurately convey the emergency situation.) Would the text carry the same meaning if she wrote: “so much water passed by the pole that he fell off the raft.” Can anyone think of an alternate way the author may have written this while keeping it exciting and accurate?

## Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/CCRA/R/7/) **Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words**.

Look up the primary source documents from which this section of the book is based. See above for the online locations of the journals of Washington and Gist. Compare the journal entries to the text to see where and how I integrated information found in these documents.

Find the quote from Washington’s journal where he says the horses were “less able to travel every day” and see how I used this quote in my text. Discuss why the author may have quoted directly here (I wanted to use as many direct quotes from Washington as possible to show authenticity and that these events were written down by Washington at the time they happened.)

Compare the way Washington and Gist wrote about the events to the way I wrote about them. Both Washington and Gist were writing in what they thought were private journals, never imagining that anyone would ever read them. They wrote about this harrowing experience in a matter of fact way, with little emotion. (When I wrote about this event, my purpose was to tell what happened in the most interesting and exciting way possible.) Discuss how the purpose of a writing project influences how it is written.

By reading three pages—or the whole book—you can cover each standard for READING with your students as they:

1. Do close reading for explicit/inferred meanings

2. Determine central ideas/themes

3. Analyze development of events etc.

4. Interpret meanings of word choices

5. Study structure of text

6. Determine Point of View and style

7. Evaluate content of text/images

8. Evaluate claims and evidence

9. Compare this text with other books on GW

10. Read and comprehend text

\* Often one classroom discussion or activity covers more than one standard simultaneously.

CCSS for WRITING

The Many Faces of George Washington: Remaking a Presidential Icon can be used as a mentor text to accomplish the Anchor Standards in WRITING by using the whole book, or by using one section of the book.

The following examples focus on using one section of the book (pages 28-30) and the primary source documents I used to write the text.

USING PAGES 28-30 OF The Many Faces of George Washington: Remaking a Presidential Icon

Integrate technology and research into this section by having students search online for the primary sources listed above (journals of Washington and Gist). Have students to write an argument, informational/explanatory, and narrative text using these two journals as the source of information.

Students in grade levels that require both primary and secondary sources can use my book as a secondary source.

**1. Argument**

Have students write an argument text based on the journal entries of both George Washington and Christopher Gist (primary sources).

Give students a few suggestions on possible ways to approach this assignment, such as:

a. George Washington was an athletic man.

b. Washington’s actions played a part in the start of the French and Indian War.

c. Washington had leadership abilities at a young age.

d. Or any other argument they can think of where they can site these primary sources to prove their point.

*The complexity of what you require in this text will depend upon the grade level you teach. Refer to the CCSS to find the specific skills required for your grade.*

**2. Informational/Explanatory:**

Have students write an informational/explanatory text based on the journal entries of both George Washington and Christopher Gist (primary sources). This could be any sort of informational piece, even a how-to article:

Give students a few suggestions on possible ways to approach this assignment, such as:

1. A timeline of the French and Indian War or timeline of the life of George Washington.
2. The steps leading to the French and Indian War that includes this event.

c. How to build a raft or how to live off the land by hunting/fishing etc.

d. Or any other informative piece they can think of where they could use the information from these journals.

*The complexity of what you require in this text will depend upon the grade level you teach. Refer to the CCSS to find the specific skills required for your grade.*

**3**. **Narrative:**

Have students write a narrative text based on the journal entries of both George Washington and Christopher Gist (primary sources).

Students can use the two journal entries to write a narrative that is creative and historically accurate.

Give students a few suggestions on possible ways to approach this assignment, such as:

a. Write a narrative about this event by opening the scene with Washington shivering in the island, and use a flashback to tell what happened.

b. Write a narrative about this event that uses quotes from Washington’s journal.

c. Write a narrative from the point of view of Christopher Gist.

d. Or a narrative about anything they can think of that uses the information found in these journals.

*The complexity of what you require in this text will depend upon the grade level you teach. Refer to the CCSS to find the specific skills required for your grade*.

By using only three pages of the book, and the primary sources listed above, you can cover each standard for WRITING with your students as they:

1. Write argument text

2. Write informative text

3. Write narrative text

4. Produce clear writing for the task

5. Revise, edit, revise

6. Use technology to produce text

7. Conduct short and long research

8. Gather a variety of information

9. Use evidence to support analysis

10. Write over short/long time frame

NOTE: Many of the skills above simultaneously cover Speaking / Listening, and Language Anchor Standards.

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HANDOUT FOR USING PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENTS

Example 2

THE MANY FACES OF GEORGE WASHINGTON

By Carla Killough McClafferty

WHICH PRIMARY SOURCE?

A journal entry written by sixteen-year-old George Washington dated March 15, 1748. It was written while Washington was on a trip to survey property owned by the Fairfax family. They were traveling through the wilderness.

This journal entry can be found at the Library of Congress:

<http://international.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mgw:@field(DOCID+@lit(mgw1b481))>:

George Washington wrote:

**“Tuesday 15th. We set out early with Intent to Run round the sd. Land but being taken in a Rain & it Increasing very fast obliged us to return. It clearing about one oClock & our time being too Precious to Loose we a second time ventured out & Worked hard till Night & then returnd to Penningtons we got our Suppers & was Lighted in to a Room & I not being so good a Woodsman as the rest of my Company striped my self very orderly & went in to the Bed as they call'd it when to my Surprize I found it to be nothing but a Little Straw--Matted together without Sheets or any thing else but only one Thread Bear blanket with double its Weight of Vermin such as Lice Fleas &c. I was glad to get up (as soon as the Light was carried from us) & put on my Cloths & Lay as my Companions. Had we not have been very tired, I am sure we should not have slep'd much that night. I made a Promise not to Sleep so from that time forward chusing rather to sleep in the open Air before a fire as will Appear hereafter.”**

This excerpt from George Washington’s journal could be used in many different ways. You could use this information as background material, or paraphrase it, or quote all of it, or quote part of it.

An author could choose to use one or more of these following possibilities.

1. General information about George Washington that is not specifically mentioned in the text.

2. General information about George Washington that mentions he went on a trip when he was a teenager.

3. Specific information that relates that when Washington was 16, he went on surveying trip with the Fairfax family.

4. Use this paragraph to know that he was working as a surveyor—you could research to find out how surveying was done during the mid 18th century. Then you could mention some of the tools Washington used.

5. Use this paragraph to talk about how people traveled through the wilderness during the mid 18th century, and include the names and places where Washington stayed. In this paragraph he states they stayed with the “Penningtons.”

6. See if you could find out more about the Pennington family—are they mentioned by Washington again later?

7. What did homes in the wilderness look like?

8. Why was Washington surprised by what they called the “bed.” What does that tell you about young Washington?

9. How did Washington describe the blanket, and what does that tell you about his personality?

10. Did Washington sleep that night? Why?

11. What did teenage Washington learn from the experience?

12. What does the way Washington writes tell you about his personality?

DID I USE THIS PASSAGE IN THE MANY FACES OF GEORGE WASHINGTON: REMAKING A PRESIDENTIAL ICON?

Yes

WHY DID I CHOOSE TO USE THIS PASSAGE?

I used it for several reasons. I wanted readers to “see” George Washington at the age of sixteen. Because one of the Mount Vernon figures is of young Washington as a surveyor, I wanted readers to understand he worked at this profession. It shows a real slice of life in the mid 18th century with the vermin infested blanket. It shows Washington’s dry sense of humor. It sets up Washington’s later trips through the wilderness.

HOW DID I USE THIS EXCERPT?

Below you will see the paragraph where I quoted some of this passage:

**When George Washington was sixteen, George William Fairfax invited him to accompany him on a working trip into the wilderness to survey the exact size and position of the Fairfax property. Washington jumped at the chance to go. During the trip, George Washington assisted the surveyor with his work. As they traveled, he began a life-long habit of writing in his journal. He made notes about the weather, about the first rattlesnake he saw, and about an encounter they had with about thirty Indians who danced a war dance for them. When they stayed overnight at the home of an acquaintance on March 15, 1748, Washington wrote that he “ went into the Bed as they call’d it when to my Surprize I found it to be nothing but a Little Straw—Matted together without Sheets or any thing else but only one Thread Bear blanket with double its Weight of Vermin such as Lice Fleas & c. I was glad to get up . . . I made a Promise not to Sleep so from that time forward chusing rather to sleep in the open Air before a fire.”**

This paragraph appears on page 25 of THE MANY FACES OF GEORGE WASHINGTON: REMAKING A PRESIDENTIAL ICON.

I believe this paragraph gives the reader some valuable information. It adds to the story when you put it with all the information that comes before and after it.

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