THE NEWARK MUSEUM

NEH *Picturing America* School Collaboration Conference Project

Lesson: George Washington: The Qualities of a Leader

1. **Essential Question:**

How does art contribute to the historical narrative?

1. **Getting Ready:**

This lesson may be used to introduce a unit on the American Revolution or it may be used at the conclusion of the unit. If used at the beginning of the unit, students will find the lesson helpful because it will give them insight into the leadership of General Washington throughout the war. If used at the end of the unit, students can revisit what they have learned and select events and incidents in which Washington’s decisions and actions most closely reflect the readings and art of this lesson.

1. **Art and Readings Needed For This Lesson:**

*Washington Crossing The Delaware, 1851 by* Emanuel Leutze

(from NEH Picturing America Poster Set)

*Peace Ball at Fredericksburg, Virginia, 1897* by Jennie Brownscombe

(From Newark Museum Collection)

Excerpts from *1776* by David McCullough

(New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005)

Excerpts from *His Excellency* by Joseph Ellis

(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004)

1. **Objectives:**

Students will develop the ability to:

1. Recognize the importance of individuals who have made a difference in history, and the significance of personal character for both good and ill. (History Habit of Mind #10)
2. Read widely and critically in order to recognize the difference between fact and conjecture, between evidence and assertion, and thereby to frame useful questions (History Habit of Mind #13)

3. Evaluate the importance of literature and paintings in conveying the narrative of historical events and people.

4. Draw conclusions, make inferences, or interpret events through the study and analysis of art.

1. **Lesson Steps:**

Divide students into six groups and give each group an excerpt to read. After students read the excerpts, ask each group to share what they have read and have each group respond to the following: *“What image of George Washington does this convey?” “What does this excerpt tell us about George Washington’s personality and character?”*

Record student responses on the board. When all groups have shared their responses, tell students to look for patterns in their responses. Ask: *“Is there one characteristic that seems to be present in all the excerpts? “Are there several characteristics that have been identified more than once?”* Discuss what type of person Washington was based on the students’ responses.

Next have students view *Washington Crossing the Delaware* by Emanuel Leutze. Utilizing the Visual Thinking Strategies, ask students: *“What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find?”*

After students have spent some time analyzing the painting, discuss the following questions:

*Considering the excerpts we have just read, to what extent are these qualities portrayed in the painting?*

*Are there other qualities of Washington in the painting that were not revealed in the excerpts?*

*Which source is more powerful in conveying the qualities and story of George Washington – the painting or the reading excerpts? Explain your answer*.

Next have students view *Peace Ball at Fredericksburg* by Jennie Brownscombe. Analyze this painting by utilizing the same strategies described above. When students have finished with this, ask them: *“Do these two paintings converge in any way?” “To what extent do the two paintings and the excerpts share some common traits?”*

1. **Assessment Strategies/Writing Activities/Extension Activities:**
2. Have students write an essay comparing or contrasting the literature excerpts with the paintings. The following prompts may be useful:

Contrast: “Though these sources share some common aspects, such as (list of similarities), their real historical value lies in their differences.”

Compare: “There are a number of similarities that can be observed regarding the leadership qualities of George Washington as portrayed in the literature excerpts and the paintings, namely…”.

2. Select three other paintings of George Washington, such as John Trumbull’s *General George Washington Resigning His Commission,* Gilbert Stuart’s *The Lansdowne Portrait,* and Charles Wilson Peale’s *George Washington at Princeton*. Tell students that they are the curator of a museum and that they must choose ONE of the above paintings to include in an exhibit on Leadership in American History. Students must present two persuasive arguments for the painting they choose.

**National History Standards:**

1. Chronological Thinking
2. Historical Comprehension
3. Historical Analysis and Interpretation
4. Historical Research Capabilities
5. Historical Issues – Analysis and Decision-Making