

Lesson Twenty-Two

George Washington

LESSON IDEA

To demonstrate how the courage, wisdom, and integrity of George Washington were formed in his early years.

PREPARATION

Collect pictures of George Washington from library books or textbooks, illustrating his early years and young manhood. There is, for example, an excellent portrait of young Washington on the cover of *The Making of George Washington* by William H. Wilbur.

WHEN IT CAME to washing behind his ears, wiping his feet, and bringing garter snakes into the house, George Washington was little different from other boys. He received his share of switchings from his mother, woodshed sessions with his father, and scolding and correction from both. Together, August and Mary Washington prepared their tall, muscular son to become America's first great soldier and statesman — and the Father of his Country.

The Washingtons lived a simple life on a farm in Virginia. An inventory of their household goods taken in 1743 revealed a modest and crowded dwelling. For example, three beds are listed in the parlor, along with one old table, three ancient chairs, an old desk, window curtains, and a sugar box. There were no rugs, carpets, glittering silver tea services, or niceties for social entertaining — no wines, liquors, coaches, or carriages.

Meals were simple affairs, typically consisting of cornmeal cakes with milk for breakfast; meat, fowl, or fish with vegetables for the mid-day dinner; and corn cakes, milk, and sometimes noon-time leftovers for the evening supper. Simple desserts were served on Sundays. Both August

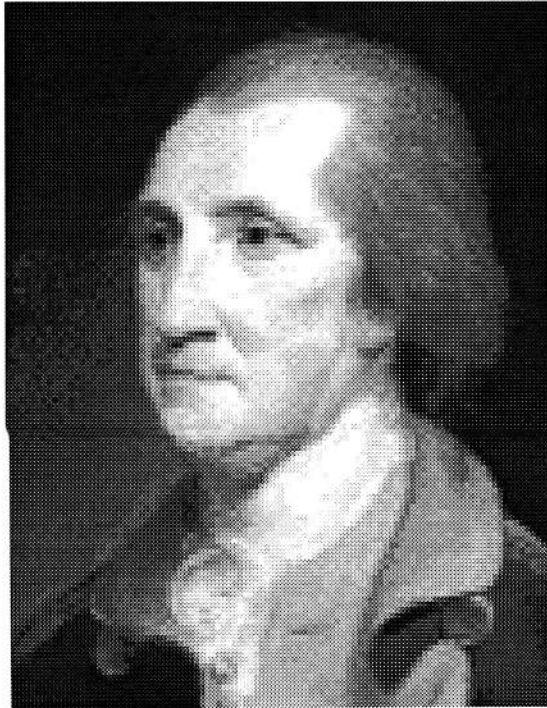
and Mary believed heavy eating dulled the mind and slowed the muscles. Hard work was a Washington standard.

AT AN EARLY AGE George was sent to the tobacco fields with the black workers to hoe weeds and kill the ugly, fat, white worms that devoured roots of the young plants. August Washington believed that one must first learn a job himself before becoming a supervisor. Time spent in the fields was also a time for lessons and conversation between father and son. As they walked about the farm or rode into town, young George solved math problems, learned geography, and discovered the meaning of Bible passages.

August Washington placed a high value on education. In his early years, he had acquired a superior basic education (especially in mathematics and history) at Appleby Grammar School in England. He also developed sound study habits which enabled him, after returning to Virginia, to build on the Appleby foundation. August Washington was considered to be a well-educated man. George's two older stepbrothers (August's sons by an earlier marriage) were also sent

to Appleby after their mother died. Upon their return, they tutored young George.

On most days, George was up by 4:00 a.m., working on his lessons for an hour or two before breakfast. Often, he studied by himself in the little hut that his father had built for a farm office. The habit of working without immediate supervision, coupled with his responsibility for daily assignments, did much to his strong, independent



George Washington

character.

BUT FACTS, FIGURES, and physical discipline were only part of the education August Washington sought for his young son. He knew that high moral standards (the rights and wrongs of daily conduct) — and good character training (responsibility, thrift, thoroughness, and self-discipline) were even more important. August, an excellent teacher, wove the moral lessons into the routine of daily living.

When, for example, friends and neighbors commented on George's extraordinary size and strength, August used the compliment to teach humility and modesty. "George," he would say, "we are all very pleased that you are big and strong. But while you also can be pleased, you should realize that you have no reason to preen yourself about it. My father was a big man. He passed on to me an unusually fine, powerful body. The Lord has seen fit to pass it on to you. You have not achieved it by your own thinking or working. It is entirely a gift from your parents and grandparents."

"But, if someone says, 'George is very well-behaved' or 'obedient' or 'thoughtful' or 'helpful' or 'considerate,' then the situation would be very different. Then you could be proud and somewhat satisfied because you, yourself, had created a situation that brought deserved praise."

FOR SERIOUS STUDENTS

The Making of George Washington, by William H. Wilbur, is an important book for those who want to know more about the early life of a truly great man. Parents will appreciate the philosophy and training employed by August Washington in raising his young son. Many of the chapters, which are short and simply worded, would make interesting family reading during the week.

Other scholarly works about Washington are available at most public libraries. Two of the most outstanding are the studies by Dr. Douglas Freeman and Henry Cabot Lodge, Sr.

Do you think the temptation to cheat would be a problem for some teenagers you know? Why? Is honesty stressed as much or esteemed as highly in our schools today? [Contrast teaching today — and influence of books, newspapers, magazines, television, movies, video games, the Internet, and other contemporary cultural influences — with the training Washington received.]

Have you ever thought about your own characteristics in this way? [Encourage family members to realize the physical assets that are their legacy and the character traits that are their own responsibility.]

August Washington died when George was ten years old. One of his last statements was a powerful lesson that left a permanent impression on his young son. "I thank God," the dying man said, "that in all my life I have never struck a man in anger, for if I had done so I am sure (so great is my strength) that I would have killed my antagonist. Then his blood, at this awesome moment, would lie heavily on my soul. As it is, I die at peace with all mankind."

Failure to control his temper was one of George's boyhood shortcomings, but he worked hard to overcome it, and by the time he was a teenager he was faithfully following his father's deathbed injunction. He did not mistreat or bully his associates. As a man, he did not misuse his great physical strength or abuse his enormous power as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. Nor did he misapply his authority as president of the Constitutional Convention, nor as our nation's first President.

Imagine for a moment what a man like Benedict Arnold would likely have done in Washington's position. How do you think he might have used the power of the presidency? [Ask for examples of possible misuse of power by such a man as Arnold.]

August Washington left young George a legacy of moral character, integrity, and wisdom. By his father's example and teachings, George learned to be considerate in dealing with others, to be responsible for his own conduct in the sight both of God and man, to make deliberate decisions instead of snap judgments, and to seek additional information when uncertain what to do.

ONE CHARACTER TRAIT that August passed along to his son was judging men by their ability and moral worth instead of by their wealth or social position. This attribute was vividly demonstrated during the War for Independence as when Washington chose men for positions of trust and leadership. It mattered not to him that Daniel Morgan was a self-educated frontiersman while Alexander Hamilton knew

