

RESOURCES

Activity 1

Our Forgotten Man

The Secret to Our Forgotten Man

He is the most famous American in history, but a man who is a mystery to most people living today. Most know that he was the commanding general of the Colonial troops that won the Revolutionary War. They know, too, that he was our first president. Many will quickly tell the story of young Washington's cutting down the cherry tree and, when confronted by his father, replying, "I cannot tell a lie. I cut it down." As it turns out, this story is an invention, created by an early biographer. But while most people know a few details of George Washington's life, the man on our one-dollar bill is a shadowy figure. Historians refer to him as "America's forgotten man."

Washington was born on a plantation—a farm—and he decided early that, while he loved the land, he wanted something more in life. As a teenager, he desired to become a military leader. As he read biographies of great generals and military heroes, he saw a common theme in their lives—responsibility. So as a young man, Washington set out to be seen as a person of responsibility.

Farm life gave him many opportunities, but Washington hungered to serve in the military. At an early age, he joined the local militia and very quickly became recognized for his dependability and bravery. There was no standing army in those days, so through most of his late teens until the Revolutionary War, he transitioned between plantation life and the militia.

During these years of on-again, off-again military experience, Washington worked on his leadership skills, the most important of which was his clear sense of responsibility for the men under his command. In the meantime, however, leaders of the 13 Colonies were becoming increasingly frustrated by the rule of King George of England. Finally, in Philadelphia in 1776, they decided to break away from England, and on July 4 formally broke with what was their motherland by signing the Declaration of Independence.

Not only was the Declaration of Independence the birth of our nation, but it meant our new nation had to go to war with England. It meant that a nation without an army or navy had to do battle with what was, at the time, the strongest military power in the world. Our Founding Fathers searched for a man of proven experience who would be able to unite volunteers and train them for this huge assignment.

George Washington, then 44 years old, was offered the job. Now a prepared military leader, Washington fully understood the enormous disadvantages he and his forces would face. But duty called and George Washington answered.

Outmanned, out-trained, and outgunned, Washington and his ragtag army took to the field of battle and stayed there for eight long years. Continually confronted by superior forces, Washington fought a brilliant campaign. He and his army were like a lightweight boxer facing a dangerous heavyweight. They would retreat and retreat and retreat and then suddenly attack with a flurry of force that enraged and confused their opponent. But still the British forces pursued them from state to state.

The war took an enormous toll on Washington's volunteer army, made up largely of farmers and shopkeepers. Their continual retreating and lack of adequate weapons and supplies wore down their spirits. Shortages of food, medicine, and even blankets drained their bodies and souls. In Valley Forge, where Washington's forces wintered in 1777 and 1778, a third of the soldiers died of hunger, exposure to the elements, or both. What kept this army together and eventually led to victory was the soldiers' loyalty to their commander. It was a loyalty that Washington earned by his constant concern for the well-being of his troops. They felt his concern and sense of responsibility not just to winning the war, but to them personally. He took care for their safety in battle and continually fought to get them the weapons and supplies they needed.

When the British, finally exhausted by Washington and his Continental Army, surrendered, his officers tried to convince him to be the king of the new nation. Washington firmly refused and said he was going back to his family and his Virginia farm. He felt in his heart that his responsibilities were fulfilled, his duty served.

But it did not turn out as he had hoped. The young nation began to flounder dangerously, and the leadership organized a Continental Congress to form the rules for governing what had previously been a collection of states. They knew that only one man in the entire country had the prestige, authority, and skills to lead such an effort. So against his desires, Washington again left his farm and family and went to Philadelphia to lead the effort to form a governing constitution.

Once the document was completed, the Founding Fathers realized that the one man with the stature and widespread respect of his countrymen to be the first president was Washington. Again, out of a deep sense of responsibility, he put the needs of the nation ahead of his own desires and served not four but eight years in office.

To many Americans living today, Washington may be the "Forgotten Man of History." However, during his lifetime and for several generations thereafter, Washington was known as "First in war. First in peace. First in the hearts of his countrymen."

Activity 2
Developing Responsibility

The Habit of Responsibility

This activity sheet will help you develop a plan to become more responsible.

1. Define “responsibility” in your own words.

2. State how you will be different if you succeed in developing a strong habit of responsibility.

3. List the everyday events or issues in which you typically have trouble with responsibility.

4. What are you going to do to learn more about responsible behavior?

5. What are you going to do on a regular basis that will give you the opportunity to practice responsibility? Be specific. For instance, “I’m going to complete all chores and homework before watching TV.” Or “Every day I am going to do something to help out at home.”

6. What will you do if you forget to practice responsibility or become discouraged?

Activity 2
Developing Responsibility

My Daily Progress Report

Over the next two weeks, write a sentence each day describing your progress toward acquiring the habit of responsibility.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

11.

12.

13.

14.