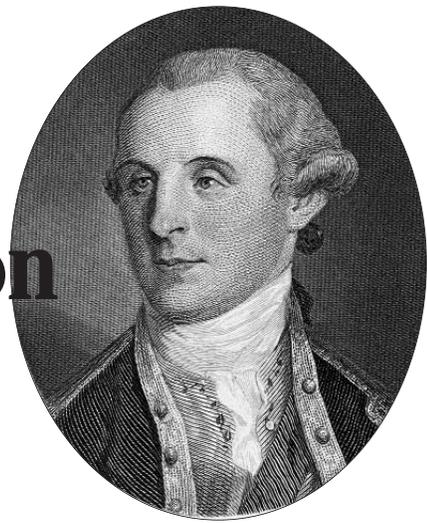


Timeline: Young George Washington



George Washington is born on February 22 in Westmoreland County, Virginia. He is the first child of Augustine and his second wife, Mary Ball Washington. Washington has two half brothers, Lawrence and Augustine, and one half sister, Jane.

1732

Sister Betty is born.

1733

Brother Samuel is born.

1734

1735

Half sister Jane dies. Washington and his family move to a family property on the Potomac River in Virginia. Lawrence will inherit this house and call it Mount Vernon. After Lawrence's death, George will inherit Mount Vernon and the surrounding lands.

Brother John Augustine is born.

1736

1738

Brother Charles is born. Washington and his family move to Ferry Farm on the Rappahannock River in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

Sister Mildred is born.

1739

1740

Mildred dies.

Washington's father dies. Washington will inherit Ferry Farm, some land, ten slaves, and three town lots when he is 18 years old.

1743

At the age of 15, Washington's formal education ends. (Little is known about his education, including whether he attended school or was tutored at home.)

Washington spends a great deal of time with Lawrence and his family at Mount Vernon and at Belvoir, the nearby Fairfax estate. He attends balls, hunting parties, and fancy dinners. Washington becomes a skilled horseman and dancer.

1747

Washington becomes the official surveyor of Culpeper County, Virginia.

1748

Washington takes a surveying trip to the Virginia wilderness for Lord Fairfax, a wealthy landowner.

1749

Washington takes his only trip out of the country, accompanying Lawrence to Barbados where they seek a cure for Lawrence's tuberculosis. He contracts smallpox but recovers. He attends the theater for the first time.

1750

Washington buys land in Frederick County, Virginia. In two years, he will own more than 1,000 acres of land there.

1751

Washington volunteers to deliver a message to the French in the Ohio River Valley, for the Virginia governor.

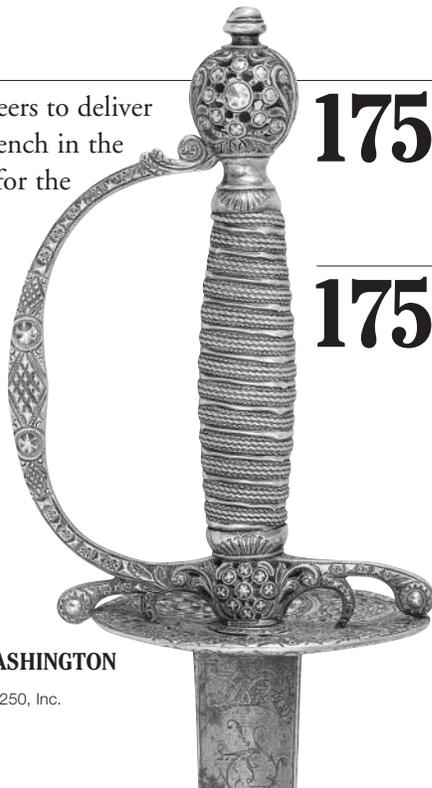
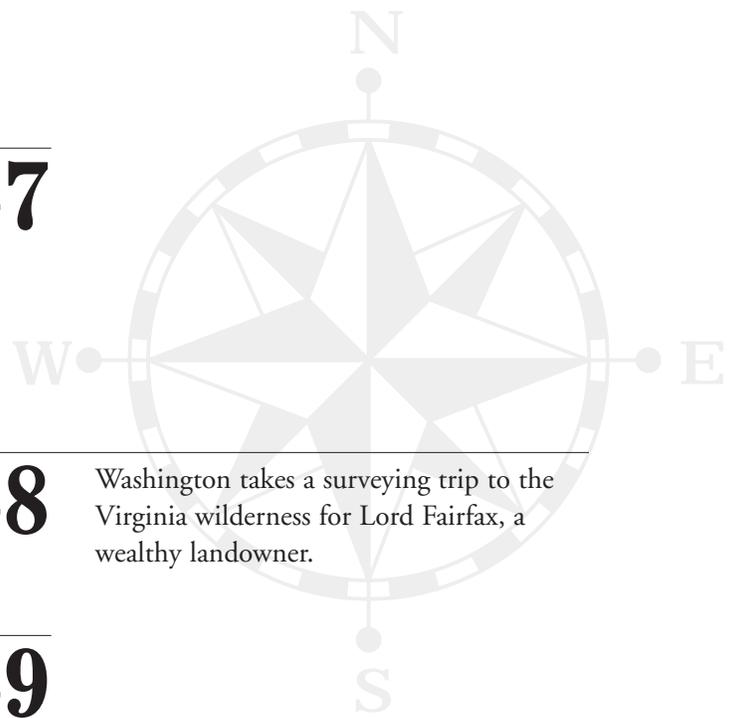
1752

Lawrence dies. Washington becomes an officer in one of Virginia's military districts.

1753

1754

Washington returns from his trip to the Ohio River Valley in January. His journal about his trip is published, and he becomes widely known. In May, Lieutenant Colonel Washington is involved in a skirmish that sparks the beginning of the French and Indian War.



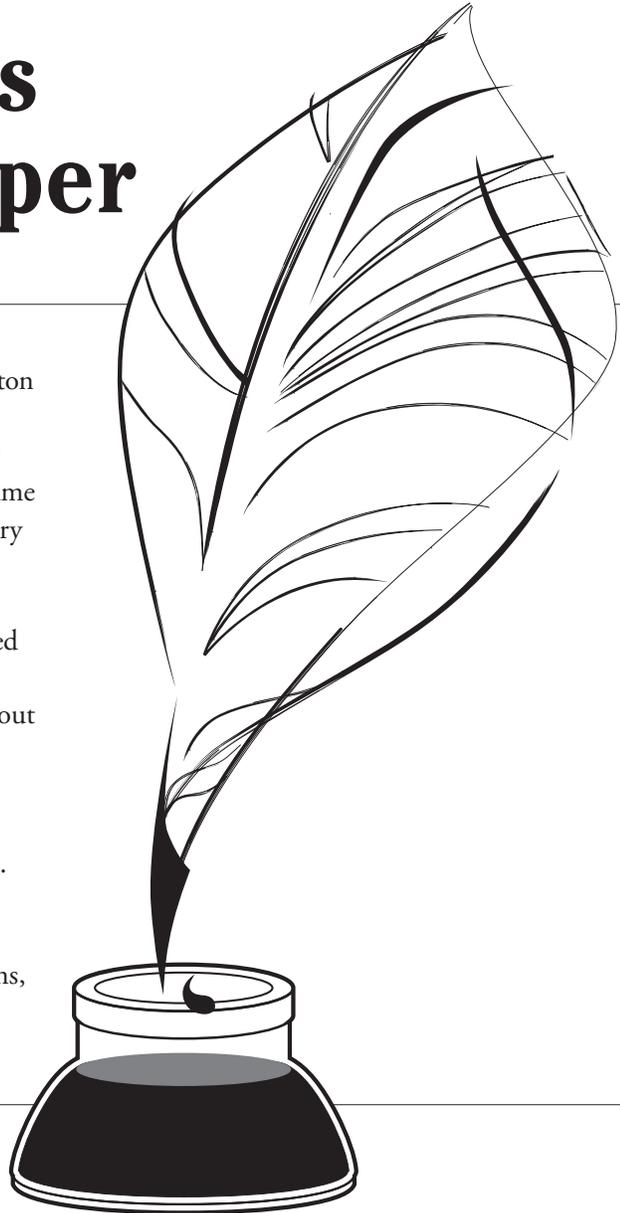
Becoming GEORGE WASHINGTON

Washington as a Record Keeper

Keeping Track of His Life

Beginning when he was a teenager, George Washington kept a record of his life. He was devoted to diary writing in his late teens and early twenties, but it wasn't until he was in his mid-thirties that he became serious about the writing. During the Revolutionary War, General Washington was preoccupied with fighting and writing letters, orders, and addresses. After the war he returned to his diary and remained faithful to it for the rest of his life. On the day before he died, for example, Washington wrote about the weather in his diary.

Washington felt that a diary should include the where, the how, and with whom he spent his time. He kept journals while he was away from home (such as the two journals quoted in Part A). He compiled his thoughts on the weather, his farms, and personal activities in his diary.



Your Turn

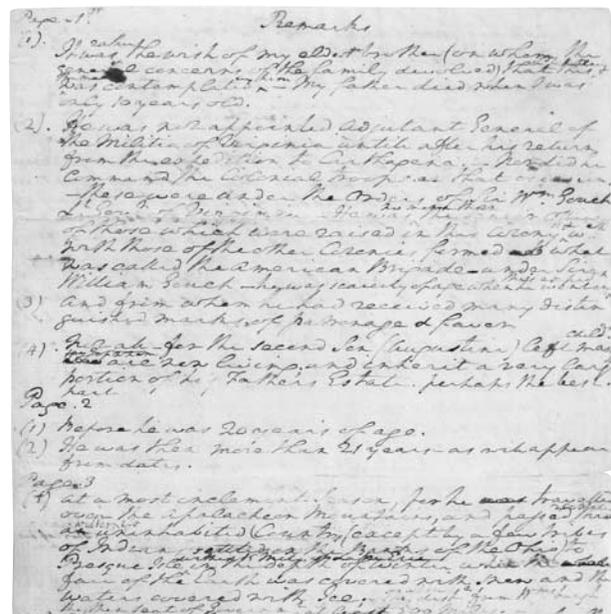
Do you keep a diary?

What do you record in it?

Compare your writings to Washington's in Part A.

For much of his adult life Washington probably knew that his diaries and journals would be read by future generations. How do you think that affected his writing? Write about an event, person, or thing as if you are writing for yourself only. Then write about the same subject as if future generations would read it. How are the two entries different? How are they alike?

Image credit: Fort Ligonier Association



Becoming GEORGE WASHINGTON

George Washington, Surveyor, 1748

Reading George Washington's Words



Original

Tuesday, March 15

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 returned to Penningtons we got out 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 will Appear hereafter.

Wednesday, March 16

We set out early & finish'd about one oClock & then Travell'd up to Frederick Town where our Baggage came to us. We cleaned ourselves (to get Rid of the Game we had caught the Night before) & took a Review of the Town & then return'd to our Lodgings where we had a good Dinner prepar'd for us ... & a good Feather Bed with clean Sheets which was a very agreeable regale.

Adaptation

Tuesday, March 15

We set out early to inspect the surveyed land, but it started to rain heavily and we had to return. It cleared up about 1 o'clock. We had little time to waste, so we went out again a second time and worked hard until nighttime.

We then returned to the Penningtons. We had supper and were taken into our rooms. I was not as experienced a woodsman as the rest of the company. I carefully took off my clothes and got into bed. The bed turned out to be nothing but a little straw matted together without sheets or anything else. There was only a thin blanket and lots of lice and fleas.

When it was dark, I got out of bed, put on my clothes, and lay like my friends. If we weren't so tired we wouldn't have slept much that night. I made a promise to myself that from that time on I would sleep outside before a fire.

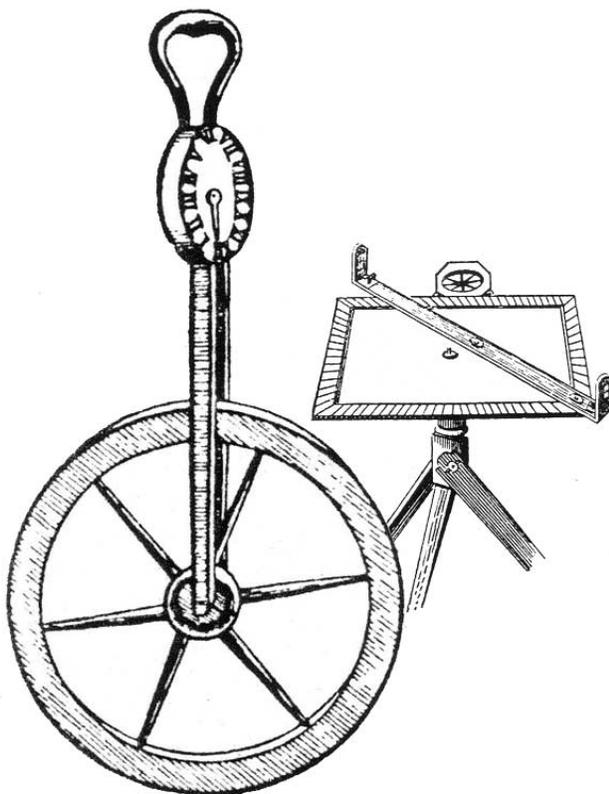
Wednesday, March 16

We got up early and finished about 1 o'clock. We then traveled to Fredericktown. (Our baggage was being sent there.) We washed up. (We smelled of the animals we had caught the night before.) We then toured the town and then went back to where we were staying. We had a good dinner and a good feather bed with clean sheets. It was a very agreeable time.

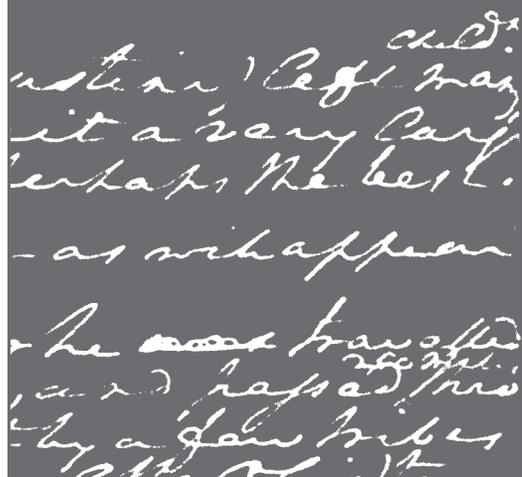


Guided Reading Questions

- 1 To whom was George Washington writing?
- 2 Where was he?
- 3 What did George Washington do before “returning to the Penningtons”?
- 4 What did George Washington do that was unlike his companions?
- 5 Did Washington have a good night's sleep? What was his bed like?
- 6 What was Washington's attitude?
- 7 What decision did Washington make at the end of the March 15th journal entry?
- 8 What happened the next day?



People spelled and constructed their sentences a bit differently in Washington's time. Some words that are easy to identify—such as “child'n”—might be missing a few letters. The word *sd.* probably stands for “surveyed.”



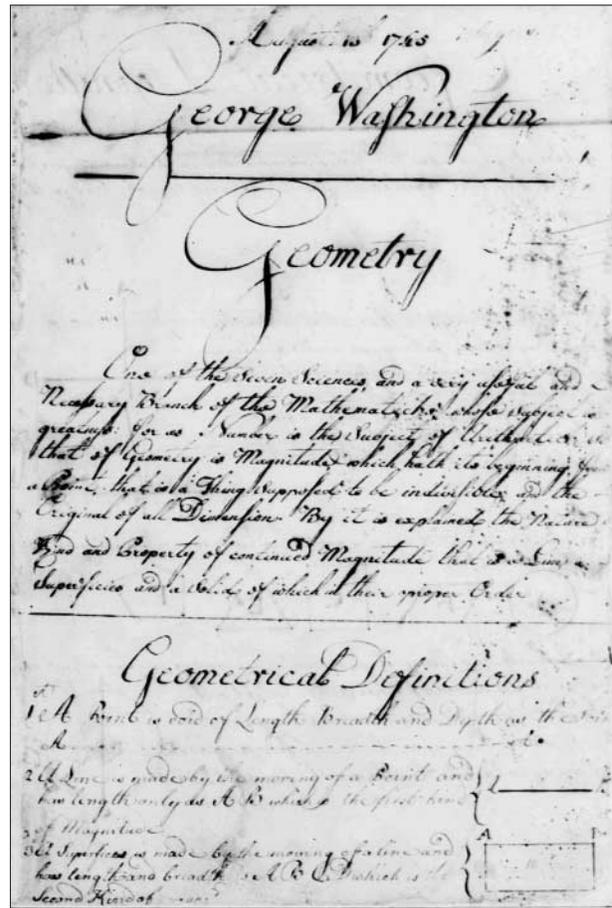
Becoming GEORGE WASHINGTON

Spelling the Washington Way

Like most other young people at the time, George Washington did not spend much time going to school. It has been said that he “spelled like a gentleman,” however. Washington learned to spell, write clearly, and form good sentences by copying passages into his copybook. One of his best-known entries was a list of 110 rules from an etiquette book of the time, *Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*.

In the 1700s there was no uniform system of spelling in the colonies. In 1828 Noah Webster published *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, which standardized American English. Literate people—those who could read and write—used a variety of accepted spellings or spelled according to how words sounded. Like many people, Washington often invented his own abbreviations and capitalized words that he felt were important.

Washington worked hard to expand and enlighten his mind. As a result of reading and writing so much, his spelling and grammar improved over time.



Your Turn

• Make a copybook—a small book of blank pages. Then copy a favorite poem, song, or part of a book to begin your copybook. Write “in a clear hand”—in other words, as neatly and carefully as you can. Add favorite passages or sayings to your copybook.

• Washington copied more than 100 rules of conduct into his copybook. Can you think of 100 rules of good behavior? In your copybook, list what you consider the 10 most important rules of good behavior.

• Try spelling “the Washington way.” Write a paragraph, spelling words as they sound and making up your own abbreviations. Trade paragraphs with a friend. Can you read one another’s paragraphs?

Return from Fort LeBoeuf, 1753

Reading George Washington's Words

Original

December 1753

The next Day we continued traveling 'till it was quite Dark, & got to the River...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...

From The Diaries of George Washington, Vol. 1. Courtesy of University Press of Virginia, 1976 and 1979.

Adaptation

December 1753

The next day we continued to travel until it got dark. We got to the river. We expected to find it frozen but the only parts that were frozen were near the shores. The ice had probably broken up above where we were, and you could see a lot of it moving in the river.

There was no way to cross the river except by raft. We went to work building one with only a hatchet that wasn't very good. At sunset, after working all day, we got onboard and set off. When we were halfway across, we got jammed in the ice. We thought our raft would sink, and we would die. I put out my pole that I used to move the raft. I wanted to stop the raft so that the ice might pass by. The water was so powerful against my pole that it threw me into ten feet of water. I saved myself by grabbing hold of one of the raft logs. Despite all our efforts we could not get the raft to either shore. Because we were near an island we left the raft and waded to the island. It was so cold that all of Mr. Gist's fingers and some of his toes froze. In the morning the water was frozen, and we were able to walk across the ice and easily get off the island.



Image credit: The Granger Collection, New York

Becoming GEORGE WASHINGTON



Guided Reading Questions

- 1 To whom was George Washington writing?
- 2 What time of year was it? What was the weather like?
- 3 Who was involved in this incident?
- 4 What did Washington have to do when he got to the river? How was he able to do it?
- 5 What happened to Washington in the river?
- 6 Where did Washington spend the night? How did he get there?
- 7 What happened to the river the next day?
- 8 Did the weather affect Washington's body?

Cast of Characters

General Edward Braddock (1695–1755)

was made commander-in-chief of the British army in North America in 1755. His mission was to drive the French from British-claimed land in North America, capturing their forts there. Braddock concentrated on taking Fort Duquesne in the Ohio River Valley. Braddock was new to America and was not familiar with the Valley's wilderness. With a large army, he set out for the Ohio valley in May. In early July, eight miles from Fort Duquesne, Braddock's army ran into an army of French and their Indian allies. Braddock was wounded during the battle. After calling for a retreat, he died on July 13 and was buried by Washington near Great Meadows.



Richard Corbin (1708–1790) served as receiver-general of Virginia from 1754 to 1776. The receiver general controlled the revenues of the colony. Corbin also was the president of the council that appointed officers in the Virginia militia.

Robert Dinwiddie (1693–1770) played a key role in the French and Indian War conflict. He served as lieutenant governor of the Virginia colony from 1751–58 and supported George Washington's early military career. Dinwiddie moved to England in 1758 where he retired.

Lord Fairfax owned more than five million acres of land in Virginia. His cousin, Colonel William Fairfax, owned Belvoir, the estate near Mount Vernon. The Colonel's son, George William Fairfax, was a good friend of George Washington's. The Colonel's daughter, Anne Fairfax, married Lawrence Washington, George's half-brother. Rich and well connected, the Fairfaxes helped George Washington on his path to fame.

Christopher Gist (about 1706–1759) was a well-known surveyor and explorer in the Ohio River Valley. He served as Washington's guide on the trip to Fort LeBoeuf to deliver the message to the French. Like Washington, Gist wrote a journal of their trip. Later, Gist served with Washington at the Battle at Fort Necessity and during the Braddock campaign. The next year, 1756, Gist was in Tennessee looking for allies for the British. In 1759 he died of disease, most likely smallpox.

Ensign Joseph Coulon de Jumonville (1718–1755), an officer in the French army, was involved in a minor skirmish with George Washington and his troops in May 1754. The fifteen-minute confrontation took place near Great Meadows in the Ohio River Valley. No one is certain who fired the first shots, but 12 French soldiers were killed. Then, the wounded Jumonville was killed by the Seneca Indian Tanaghrisson. The shots fired in this skirmish were the first shots of the French and Indian War.

George Mercer (1733–1784) was an officer in the Virginia regiment along with Washington during the French and Indian War. Later he served in the Virginia House of Burgesses and as the London agent of the Ohio Company.

Captain Jacques Legardeur de Sainte-Pierre (about 1700–1755) served as the commander at Fort LeBoeuf in 1753. It was Legardeur de Sainte-Pierre who met Washington at the fort and replied to Dinwiddie’s message to leave the Ohio River Valley. Legardeur de Sainte-Pierre died in 1755 during the French and Indian War conflict, attacking the British near Fort Edward, New York.

**Tanaghrisson—
The Half King** was selected by the Iroquois to serve as the leader of the American Indians in the Ohio River Valley. Born into the Catawba nation, he was captured by the French as a young boy and later



adopted into the Seneca nation. After his father was killed by the French, Tanaghrisson sided with the British. They gave him the title “Half King.” He lived in Logstown where in 1753 he met George Washington and accompanied him to Fort LeBoeuf. The next year he and Washington were involved in the skirmish with Ensign de Jumonville. It was Tanaghrisson who killed the wounded French officer. Tanaghrisson died in 1754.

Captain Louis Coulon de Villiers (1710–1757), the brother of Ensign Jumonville, led the attack on Washington at Fort Necessity in July 1754. His orders were to march against the English to punish them for having “violated the most sacred laws of civilized nations.” (The French believed that Washington and his soldiers had attacked without cause and had “assassinated” Jumonville.) Captain de Villiers died three years after the battle at Fort Necessity.

Seeking Promotion, 1754

Letter to Richard Corbin, January 28, 1754

Reading George Washington's Words

Original

Dear Sir:

In a conversation at Green Spring you gave me some room to hope for a commission above that of a Major, and to be ranked among the chief officers of this expedition. The command of the whole forces is what I neither look for, expect, not desire; for I must be impartial enough to confess, it is a charge too great for my youth and inexperience to be intrusted with. Knowing this, I have too sincere a love for my country, to undertake that which may tend to the prejudice of it. But if I could entertain hopes that you thought me worthy of the post of Lieutenant-colonel, and would favour me so far as to mention it at the appointment of officers, I could not but entertain a true sense of the kindness.

I flatter myself that under a skilful commander, or man of sense, (which I most sincerely wish to serve under,) with my own application and diligent study of my duty, I shall be able to conduct my steps without censure, and in time, render myself worthy of the promotion that I shall be favoured with now.

Adaptation

Dear Sir:

When we talked at Green Spring, you gave me reason to hope that I could obtain a commission above that of Major – that I would be ranked among the chief officers of this expedition. I don't seek, expect or want to command ALL the forces. I realize that I'm too young and inexperienced to take on such an important position. I also love my country too much to take a position I'm not qualified for. But I do hope that you think I am right for the post of lieutenant colonel and that you would mention this when officers are appointed. I would be very grateful.

I flatter myself that under a skillful commander or a man of sense, which I hope to serve under, I would do well and wouldn't get into any trouble and would be worthy of the promotion to lieutenant colonel.

Guided Reading Questions

- 1 To whom was George Washington writing?
- 2 Was Corbin a stranger to Washington?
- 3 What did Washington want?
- 4 Did Washington feel he was capable of commanding all the forces?
- 5 What did Washington want Corbin to do for him?
- 6 Did Washington feel capable of serving as lieutenant colonel?
- 7 Does Washington appear confident, ambitious, and optimistic?

Becoming GEORGE WASHINGTON

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