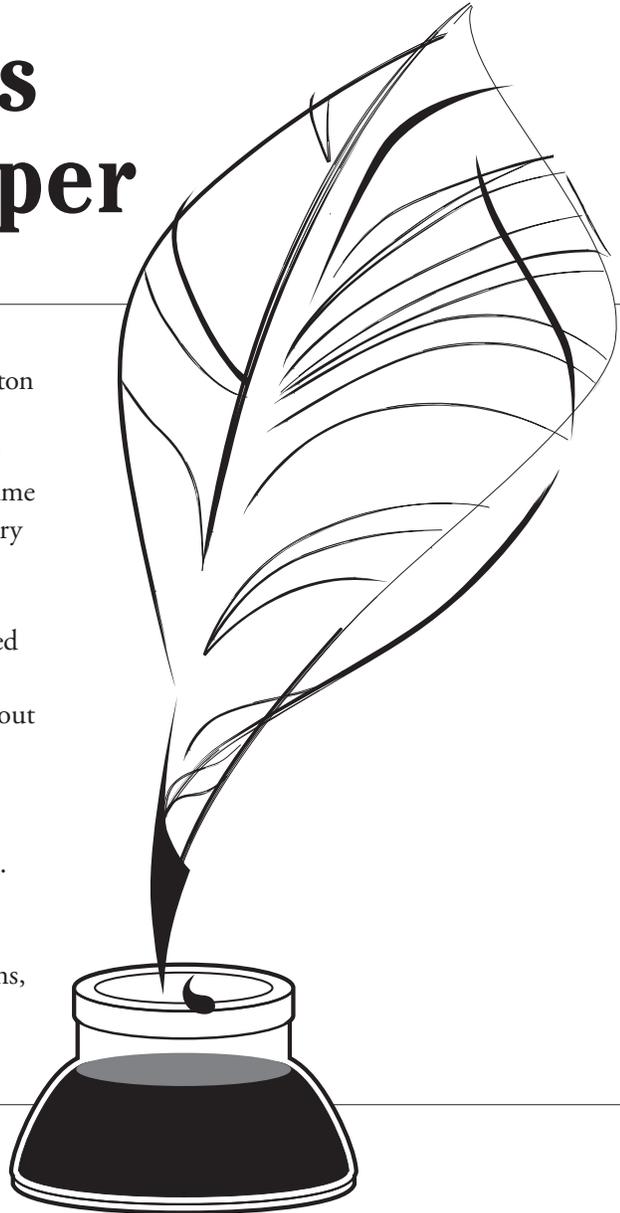


Washington as a Record Keeper

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

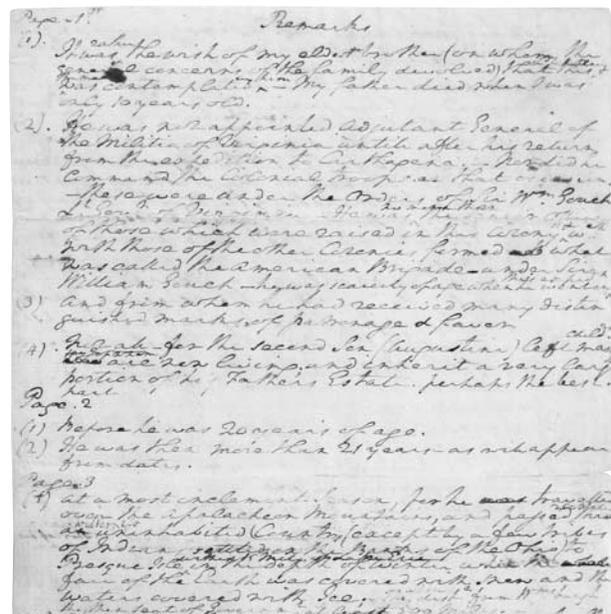
Do you keep a diary?

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?

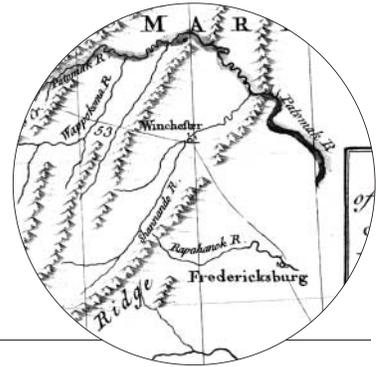
Image credit: Fort Ligonier Association



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.

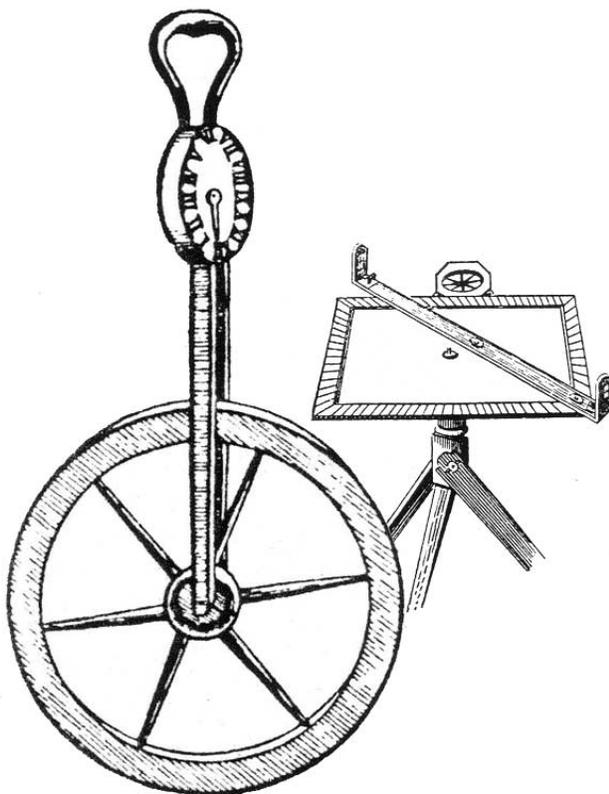
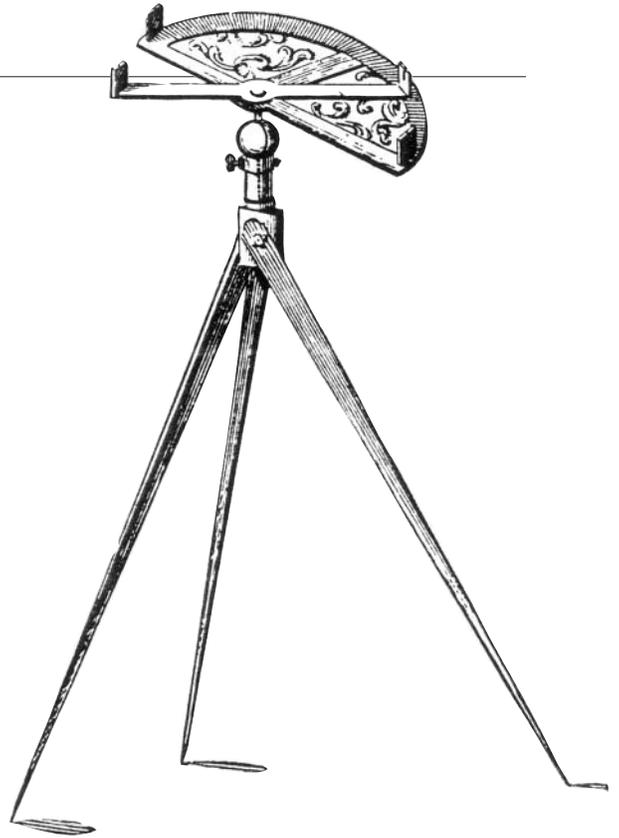
Wednesday, March 16

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.

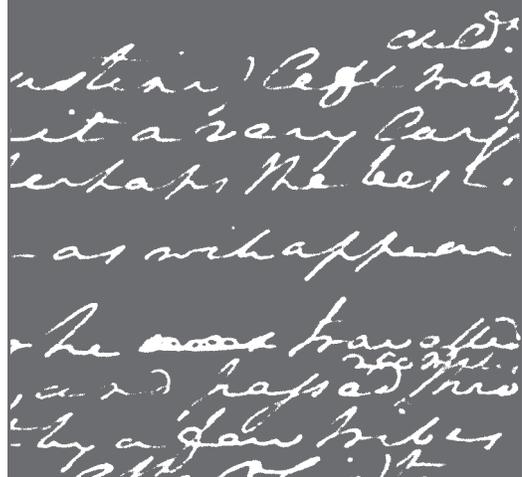


Guided Reading Questions

- 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.”



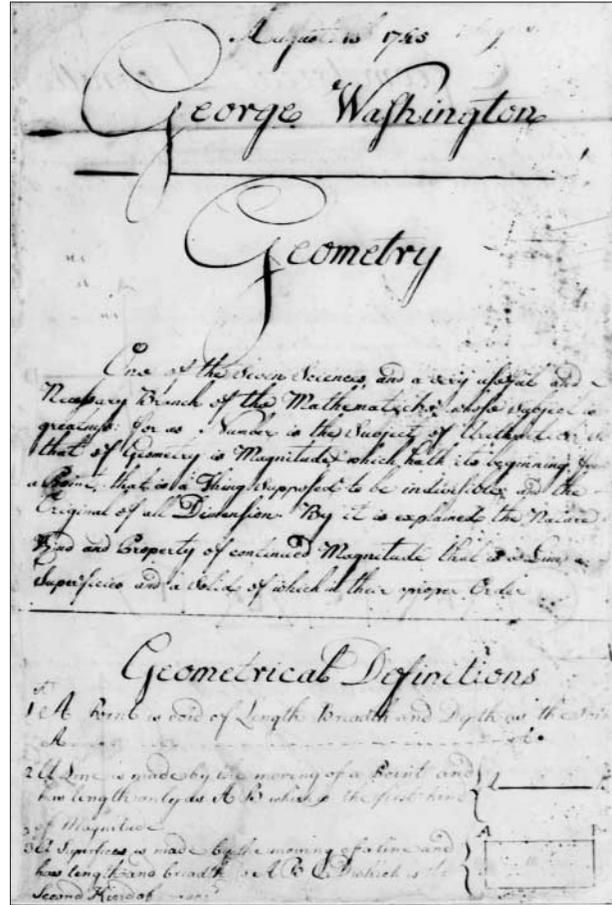
Becoming GEORGE WASHINGTON

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?