

AN UNALTERABLE AFFECTION: DID GEORGE WASHINGTON HAVE A SOFT SIDE?

LEVEL:

Middle School and High School

TIMEFRAME:

Two class periods or less, depending on if assigned as an individual or group project

OBJECTIVES:

Students will analyze and interpret primary and secondary sources in order to recognize change over time

Students will respond to a writing prompt in a clear, thesis-driven essay that uses evidence from the provided sources

STANDARDS:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| · Primary Source Analysis | · Civic Values and Social Norms |
| · Writing Standards | · Contextualization |
| · Reading Standards | · Comparison |
| · Early American History | · Causation |
-

PROCEDURE:

1. Distribute the handout *An Unalterable Affection Source Set* (included in ZIP file download). Ask students to evaluate the following statement using the documents.

George Washington was a stern and unknowable man, always in complete control, with little tolerance for sentimentality or familiarity.

- A. *The Washington Family* by Edward Savage, 1798
- B. Excerpt: *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*, George Washington Parke Custis, 1861
- C. Excerpt: Thomas, Lord Fairfax to Mary Ball Washington, 1748
- D. Excerpt: George Washington to Martha Washington, June 23, 1775
- E. Excerpt: *A Narrative of My Life for My Family*, Judge Francis T. Brooke, 1784
- F. *George Washington* by Gilbert Stuart, 1797
- G. George Washington to Frances (Fanny) Bassett Washington, February 24, 1793

H. Excerpt: *An Oration Upon the Death of General Washington, December 31, 1799*, Gouverneur Morris

OPTIONAL EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

1. Hold a class discussion evaluating the following questions:

Is sensitivity and affection a necessary quality for a strong leader? Or, does a strong leader simply need emotional and physical strength? Does a strong leader need a combination of both sensitivity and strength?

Source A – *The Washington Family* by Edward Savage, 1798

Source Type: Engraving

Courtesy of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association



Source B – Excerpt: *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*, George Washington Parke Custis, 1861

Source Type: Book

1 It is related of the Honorable Gouverneur Morris, who was remarkable for his freedom of
2 deportment toward his friends, that on one occasion he offered a wager that he could treat General
3 [George] Washington with the same familiarity as he did others. This challenge was accepted, and
4 the performance tried. Mr. Morris slapped Washington familiarly on the shoulder, and said, “How
5 are you, this morning, general?” Washington made no reply, but turned his eyes upon Mr. Morris
6 with a glance that fairly withered him. He afterward acknowledged, that nothing could induce him
7 to attempt the same thing again.

Source C – Excerpt: Thomas, Lord Fairfax to Mary Ball Washington, 1748

Source Type: Letter

8 I wish I could say that he governs his temper. He is subject to attacks of anger on provocation,
9 sometimes without just cause.

Source D – Excerpt: George Washington to Martha Washington, June 23. 1775

Source Type: Letter

10 I go fully trusting in that Providence, which has been more bountiful to me than I deserve, & in
11 full confidence of a happy meeting with you sometime in the fall...I retain an unalterable
12 affection for you, which neither time or distance can change, my best love to Jack and Nelly, &
13 regard for the rest of the family concludes me with the utmost truth & sincerity, Your entire
14 G(eorge): Washington

Source E – Excerpt: *A Narrative of My Life for My Family*, Judge Francis T. Brooke, 1784

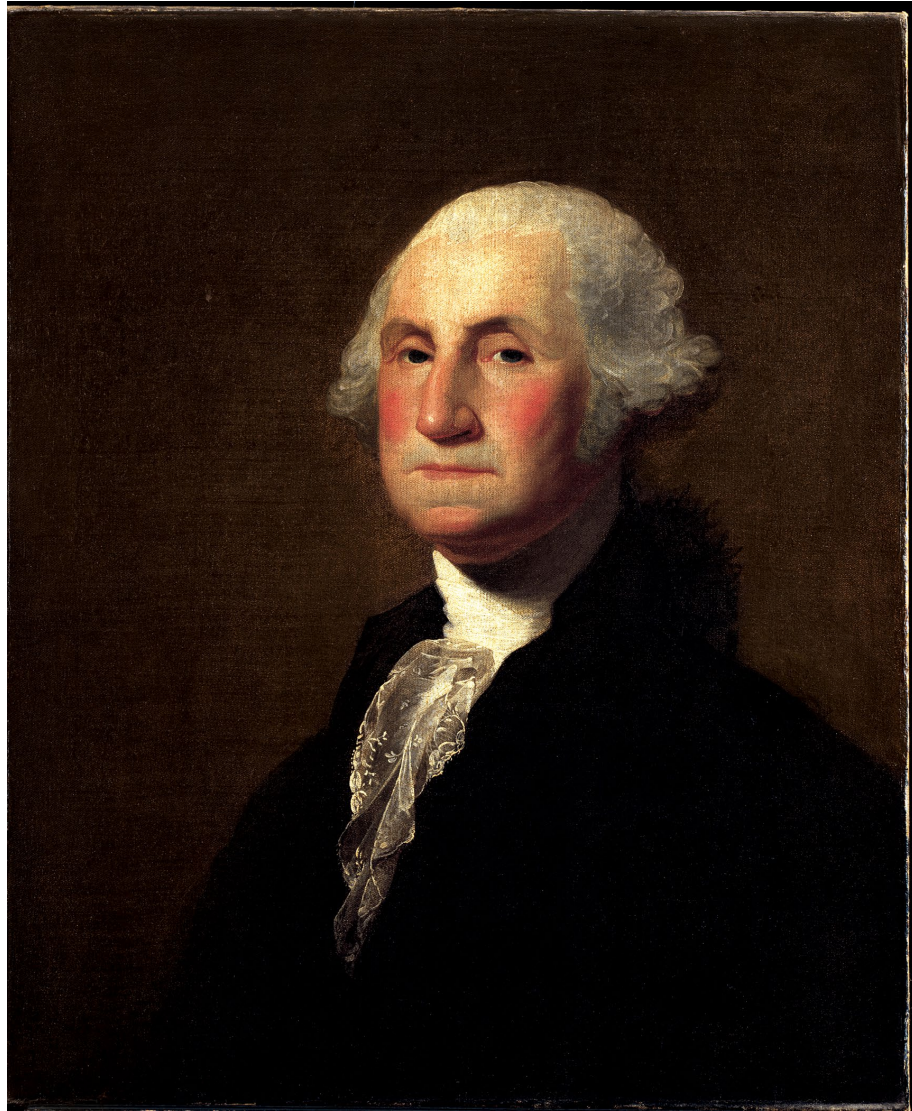
Source Type: Book

15 He [George Washington] attended the ball of the 22nd of February; opened it by dancing a minuet
16 with some lady, and then danced cotillions and country dances; was very gallant, and always
17 attached himself, by his attentions, to some one or more of the most beautiful and attractive ladies
18 at the balls.

Source F – *George Washington* by Gilbert Stuart, 1798

Source Type: Painting

Courtesy of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association



Source G – George Washington to Frances (Fanny) Bassett Washington, February 24, 1793

Source Type: Letter

19 My dear Fanny,
20 To you, who so well know the affectionate regard I had for our departed friend, it is unnecessary
21 to describe the sorrow with which I was afflicted at the news of his death; although it was an
22 event I had expected many weeks before it happened. To express this sorrow with the force I feel
23 it, would answer no other purpose than to revive, in your breast, that poignancy of anguish,
24 which, by this time, I hope is abated. Reason, and resignation to the Divine Will (which is wise &
25 Just in its dispensations) cannot in such a mind as yours, fail to produce this effect.

26 The object of the present letter is to convey to your mind the warmest assurances of my love,
27 friendship, and disposition to serve you. These also I profess to have, in an eminent degree, for
28 your Children.

29 What plan you have contemplated, or whether in so short a time you have thought of any, is
30 unknown to me; and therefore I add that, the one which strikes me most favorably (by being best
31 calculated to promote the interest of yourself & Children) is to return to your habitation at Mount
32 Vernon. You can go to no place where you will be more welcome—nor to any where you can live
33 at less expence, or trouble; matters at Mount Vernon being now so arranged as to be under the
34 care of responsible persons; and may so continue; which would ease you of that anxiety which the
35 care of so large a family would, otherwise, naturally involve you in. It is unnecessary to observe
36 to you, that House keeping under any circumstances and with the greatest economy, is expensive;
37 and where provision for it is to be made, will be found, I fear, beyond your means.

38 You might bring my Niece, Harriot Washington with you for a Companion, whose conduct,
39 learn with pleasure, has given much satisfaction to my Sister.

40 Under the present view I have of the Subject, I shall be at Mount Vernon about the first of April
41 for (perhaps) a fortnight; But your Aunt & family will not, I expect, be there before the middle of
42 July. My love to the Children—and with Affectionate Sentiments I am—always Yours

**Source H – Excerpt: *An Oration Upon the Death of General Washington, December 31, 1799*,
Gouverneur Morris**

Source Type: Speech

43 So great the empire he there acquired, that calmness of manner and conduct, distinguished him
44 through life. Yet those who have seen him strongly moved, will bear witness that his wrath was
45 terrible; they have seen boiling in his bosom, passion almost too mighty for man...

Source A – *The Washington Family* by Edward Savage, 1798

Source Type: Engraving

Courtesy of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

Background Information: George and Martha Washington, with Martha's grandson George Washington (Wash) Parke Custis, Martha's granddaughter Eleanor (Nelly) Parke Custis, and an unknown enslaved man. Both Wash and Nelly lived with the Washingtons after the death of their father, John (Jacky) Parke Custis, in 1781.



Source B – Excerpt: *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*, George Washington Parke Custis, 1861

Source Type: Book

Background Information: A popular anecdote passed down through oral tradition regarding George Washington’s annoyance and avoidance of familiarity in public. It appeared in a book written by Washington’s step-grandson.

1 It is related of the Honorable Gouverneur Morris, who was remarkable for his freedom of
2 deportment toward his friends, that on one occasion he offered a wager that he could treat General
3 [George] Washington with the same familiarity as he did others. This challenge was accepted, and
4 the performance tried. Mr. Morris slapped Washington familiarly on the shoulder, and said, “How
5 are you, this morning, general?” Washington made no reply, but turned his eyes upon Mr. Morris
6 with a glance that fairly withered him. He afterward acknowledged, that nothing could induce him
7 to attempt the same thing again.

Source C – Excerpt: Thomas, Lord Fairfax to Mary Ball Washington, 1748

Source Type: Letter

Background Information: Lord Fairfax describes the 16-year-old George Washington. Fairfax served as Washington’s mentor and knew him well. This was not the only time someone commented on Washington’s temperament during his entire life.

8 I wish I could say that he governs his temper. He is subject to attacks of anger on provocation,
9 sometimes without just cause.

Source D – Excerpt: George Washington to Martha Washington, June 23. 1775

Source Type: Letter

Background Information: George Washington dashed off a final letter to his wife, Martha, from Philadelphia before he left to take command of the patriot forces outside Boston.

10 I go fully trusting in that Providence, which has been more bountiful to me than I deserve, & in
11 full confidence of a happy meeting with you sometime in the fall...I retain an unalterable
12 affection for you, which neither time or distance can change, my best love to Jack and Nelly, &
13 regard for the rest of the family concludes me with the utmost truth & sincerity, Your entire
14 G(eorge): Washington

Source E – Excerpt: *A Narrative of My Life for My Family*, Judge Francis T. Brooke, 1784

Source Type: Book

Background Information: George Washington's skill on the dancefloor was the stuff of legend. He was quite skilled at many different styles of dance; he was said to be very graceful and gifted with the ability to dance for very long stretches of time.

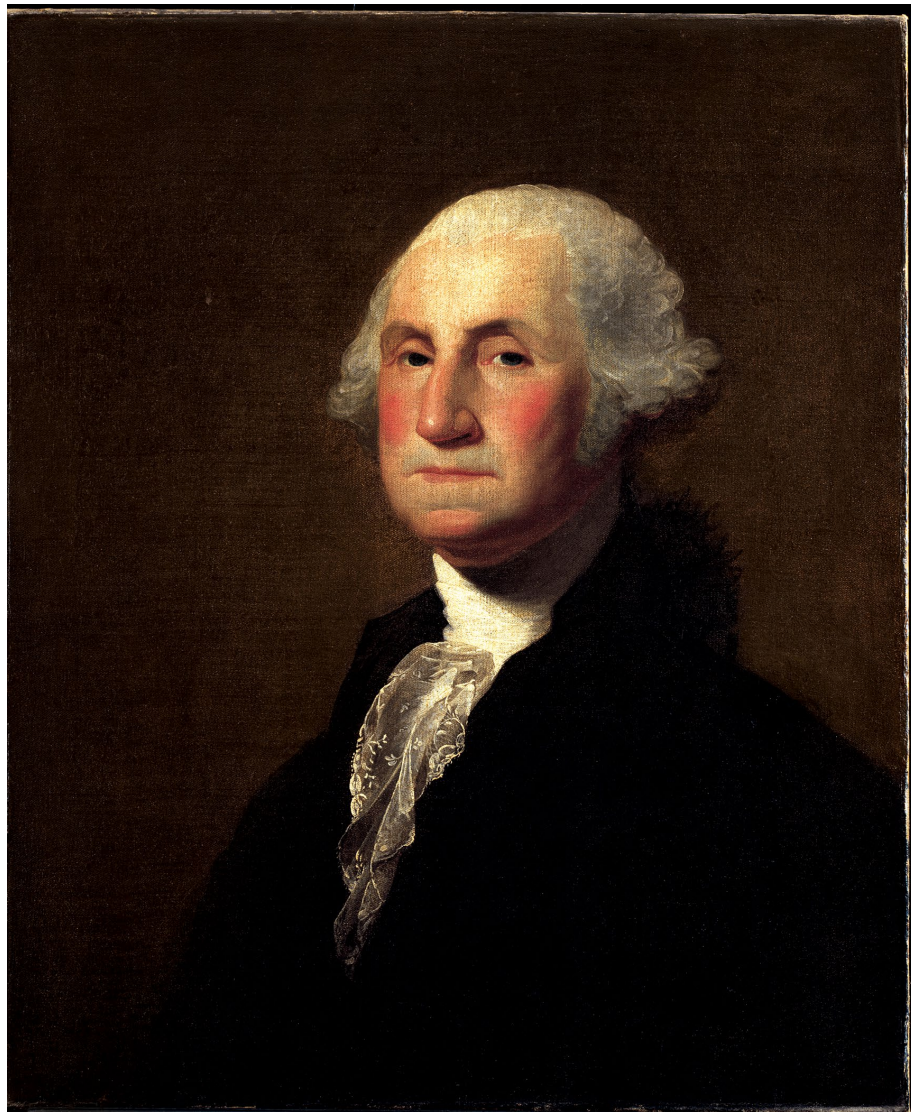
15 He [George Washington] attended the ball of the 22nd of February; opened it by dancing a minuet
16 with some lady, and then danced cotillions and country dances; was very gallant, and always
17 attached himself, by his attentions, to some one or more of the most beautiful and attractive ladies
18 at the balls.

Source F – *George Washington* by Gilbert Stuart, 1798

Source Type: Painting

Courtesy of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

Background: A stern and sober Washington stares back at the viewer with a grave countenance.



Source G – George Washington to Frances (Fanny) Bassett Washington, February 24, 1793

Source Type: Letter

Background: George Washington wrote this emotional letter to Frances (Fanny) Bassett Washington upon the death of her husband, George Augustine Washington, George Washington's nephew.

19 My dear Fanny,
20 To you, who so well know the affectionate regard I had for our departed friend, it is unnecessary
21 to describe the sorrow with which I was afflicted at the news of his death; although it was an
22 event I had expected many weeks before it happened. To express this sorrow with the force I feel
23 it, would answer no other purpose than to revive, in your breast, that poignancy of anguish,
24 which, by this time, I hope is abated. Reason, and resignation to the Divine Will (which is wise &
25 Just in its dispensations) cannot in such a mind as yours, fail to produce this effect.

26 The object of the present letter is to convey to your mind the warmest assurances of my love,
27 friendship, and disposition to serve you. These also I profess to have, in an eminent degree, for
28 your Children.

29 What plan you have contemplated, or whether in so short a time you have thought of any, is
30 unknown to me; and therefore I add that, the one which strikes me most favorably (by being best
31 calculated to promote the interest of yourself & Children) is to return to your habitation at Mount
32 Vernon. You can go to no place where you will be more welcome—nor to any where you can live
33 at less expence, or trouble; matters at Mount Vernon being now so arranged as to be under the
34 care of responsible persons; and may so continue; which would ease you of that anxiety which the
35 care of so large a family would, otherwise, naturally involve you in. It is unnecessary to observe
36 to you, that House keeping under any circumstances and with the greatest economy, is expensive;
37 and where provision for it is to be made, will be found, I fear, beyond your means.

38 You might bring my Niece, Harriot Washington with you for a Companion, whose conduct,
39 learn with pleasure, has given much satisfaction to my Sister.

40 Under the present view I have of the Subject, I shall be at Mount Vernon about the first of April
41 for (perhaps) a fortnight; But your Aunt & family will not, I expect, be there before the middle of
42 July. My love to the Children—and with Affectionate Sentiments I am—always Yours

**Source H – Excerpt: *An Oration Upon the Death of General Washington, December 31, 1799*,
Gouverneur Morris**

Source Type: Speech

Background Information: Even upon the occasion of Washington's death, his fiery temperament was deemed worthy of comment.

43 So great the empire he there acquired, that calmness of manner and conduct, distinguished him
44 through life. Yet those who have seen him strongly moved, will bear witness that his wrath was
45 terrible; they have seen boiling in his bosom, passion almost too mighty for man...
