

GEORGE WASHINGTON IN SONG

LEVEL:

Elementary School

TIMEFRAME:

Approximately two class sessions

OBJECTIVES:

Students will analyze the life of George Washington and identify 5-10 major events in his life.

Student will analyze verses of *Yankee Doodle* and their relationship to the American Revolution and founding of the United States of America.

Students will compare and contrast major events in Washington's life with verses from *Yankee Doodle*.

Students will create additional verses about George Washington's life to the tune of *Yankee Doodle*.

STANDARDS:

- Colonial America
- Revolution and the New Nation
- Reading and Writing Literacy in History/Social Studies
- Developing Research Skills
- Speaking and Listening

PROCEDURE:

1. Individually, in small groups, or as a class use the *George Washington Biography* web page and/or the *George Washington Timeline* page on the Mount Vernon website to construct a timeline of major events in George Washington's life. Be sure to include:
 - a. A title
 - b. 5-10 events that include a date and summary of the event
 - c. Appropriate decoration and/or graphics

George Washington Biography web page:

<http://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/biography/>

George Washington Timeline

<http://www.mountvernon.org/education/for-students/gw-k-5>

2. Read the *Background Information* handout (included in the ZIP file download) about the origin of the song *Yankee Doodle*.
3. As a class, read the *Lyrics – Select American Verses Yankee Doodle* and *Lyrics – Select British Verses Yankee Doodle* handouts (included in the ZIP file download) and create a second timeline highlighting the events described in the lyrics.
4. Ask students to compare the George Washington timeline and the *Yankee Doodle* timeline. Students should answer the following questions:
 - a. Do the timelines have any events in common?
 - b. If yes, how many and what events?
5. Instruct students to select an event from George Washington's life featured on their George Washington Timeline, that does not have a companion event on their *Yankee Doodle* timeline, and write a new verse to *Yankee Doodle* featuring that event.
6. Have students present their new verses to the class. Students who are not presenting should analyze the words to the new verses and select which event from the George Washington Timeline they refer to.

GEORGE WASHINGTON IN SONG

There are many stories about the origin of the song *Yankee Doodle*. One version says the following:

In 1756, the British army was fighting the French army and their Native American allies during the French and Indian War. American colonists were asked to volunteer to assist the British soldiers in this fight. A group of young men from Connecticut were among those who volunteered. Before they left to meet the army at Fort Crailo, these young recruits met at the home of Colonel Thomas Fitch, the son of the Governor of Connecticut. Thomas Fitch's sixteen year old daughter Elizabeth saw these volunteers and thought they did not look like they were ready to go off and fight a war. The young men from Connecticut were dressed in their everyday work clothes, and armed with muskets used for hunting rather than military rifles. Elizabeth wanted the men to look more like soldiers, so she and her friends went to the chicken yard and gathered up feathers for the men to put into their hatbands.

When the Connecticut volunteers arrived at the British headquarters at Fort Crailo, the British soldiers were wildly amused at the feathers they were wearing. The British soldiers thought the new recruits did not look like soldiers at all with feathers in their hats and no uniforms. Dr. Richard Schuckberg, a British army surgeon, exclaimed, "Why, stab my vitals, they're macaronis!" Then he was heard singing the words to a jingle that he made up, set to a familiar song called "Lucy Locket Lost Her Pocket." The words to this original verse of *Yankee Doodle*, and the chorus, are familiar to many Americans today.

Yankee Doodle went to town

A-riding on a pony,

Stuck a feather in his cap

And called it macaroni

Yankee Doodle keep it up,

Yankee Doodle dandy

Mind the music and the step,

And with the girls be handy.

The original verse and chorus to the song *Yankee Doodle* express the Europeans' opinion of the colonists as simple people with no sense of style or fashion. When the American Revolution broke out, the song became popular with British troops. It poked fun at the colonists' culture and speech. In 1775, on their way to Lexington and Concord to reinforce British soldiers already fighting, Brigadier General Hugh Percy played a verse for his troops as they marched that threatened to tar and feather both "Yankee Doodle" and the Patriot leader John Hancock.

During the Revolutionary War, the song became a rallying song for the colonists. *Yankee Doodle* was well known in the New England colonies before the war, but it was after the first skirmishes at Lexington and Concord that Americans began to use the song. They may have been at a disadvantage to the British

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

army, but they beat them back to Boston on April 19, 1775 and began to create their own verses. New verses emerged during the Battle of Bunker Hill in June 1775 as well as during the Siege of Boston.

When the British troops under General Burgoyne surrendered after the Battle of Saratoga in October 1777, the Americans played *Yankee Doodle*. In 1781, the Marquis de Lafayette reported that the French army at Yorktown played the tune as British soldiers marched from the fort between the triumphant French and American forces.

The song's history did not end with the American Revolution. New verses appeared during the formation of the American government and the Union army sang it during the Civil War. Later, American soldiers in World War I and World War II made it known internationally. This song made the term "Yankee" synonymous with American. *Yankee Doodle* even became the official state song for Connecticut.

Lyrics	Context
Yankee Doodle went to town	<p>The British called Americans Jonathans. The term Yankee is Dutch for <i>jankee</i> or little John. The Dutch called the English who settled in Connecticut Yankees.</p> <p>A doodle is a foolish person.</p> <p>The first line was intended to insult the rural nature of the Yankees by referring to the fact that going to town was a big event.</p>
A-riding on a pony,	<p>The pony is intended to again ridicule the Connecticut soldiers. Soldiers in the army rode steeds. The colonial soldiers arrived on horses used to plow the fields.</p>
Stuck a feather in his hat	<p>The feathers supplied by Elizabeth Fitch and her friends</p>
And called it macaroni	<p>"Macaroni" refers to an Italian and French fashion that the British accused the colonials of trying to copy. Macaroni fashion often included over-the-top accessories and behavior. The feathers on the hats of the colonial soldiers was seen by the British as a failed attempt to copy this fashion.</p>
Yankee Doodle keep it up,	<p>The first line encourages the colonials to keep up pretending to be soldiers because it amused the British troops.</p>
Yankee Doodle Dandy	<p>A dandy is someone who spends his money on clothes to try and look like he is upper class.</p>
Mind the music and the step,	<p>Dancing was popular in colonial times, but American folk dances did not have the sophistication of European ones.</p>
And with the girls be handy	<p>This line is intended to insult the colonists' wives and girlfriends, implying that they will be unfaithful while the soldiers are away at war.</p>

LYRICS
SELECT AMERICAN VERSES TO *YANKEE DOODLE*

1 [CHORUS]

2 Yankee Doodle keep it up,
3 Yankee Doodle dandy
4 Mind the music and the step,
5 And with the girls be handy.

6 Yankee Doodle is the tune
7 That we all delight in,
8 It suits for feasts, it suits for fun,
9 And just as well for fightin'

10 [CHORUS]

11 Fath'r and I went down to camp,
12 Along with Captain Gooding,
13 And there we saw the men and boys
14 As thick as hasty pudding.

15 [CHORUS]

16 And there was Cap'n Washington,
17 And gentle folks about him;
18 They say he's grown so 'tarnal proud
19 He will not ride without em'.

20 [CHORUS]

21 He got him on his meeting clothes,
22 Upon a slapping stallion,
23 He set the world along in rows,
24 In hundreds and in millions.

25 [CHORUS]

26 And there was Captain Washington
27 Upon a slapping stallion,
28 Giving orders to his men;
29 I guess there was a million.

30 [CHORUS]

31 Cornwallis led a country dance
32 The like was never seen, sir
33 Much retrograde, and much advance
34 And all with General Greene, sir.

35 [CHORUS]

36 The vention did in Boston meet,
37 The State House could not hold 'em
38 So then they went to Fed'ral Street,
39 And there the truth was told 'em...

40 [CHORUS]

41 And ev'ry morning went to prayer,
42 And then began disputing,
43 Till oppositions silenced were,
44 By arguments refuting.

45 [CHORUS]

46 Now politicians of all kinds,
47 Who are not yet decided,
48 May see how Yankees speak their minds,
49 And yet are not divided.

50 [CHORUS]

51 So here I end my Fed'ral song,
52 Composed of sixteen verses;
53 May agriculture flourish long
54 And commerce fill our purses!

LYRICS
SELECT BRITISH VERSES TO *YANKEE DOODLE*

1 [CHORUS]

2 Yankee Doodle keep it up,
3 Yankee Doodle dandy
4 Mind the music and the step,
5 And with the girls be handy.

6 Yankee Doodle went to town
7 A-riding on a pony,
8 Stuck a feather in his cap
9 And called it macaroni.

10 [CHORUS]

11 Yankee Doodle's come to town
12 For to buy a firelock,
13 We will tar and feather him
14 And so will we John Hancock.

15 [CHORUS]

16 The seventeen of June, at Break of Day
17 The rebels they surpriz'd us,
18 With their strong Works, which they'd thrown up
19 To burn the Town and drive us.

20 [CHORUS]