

IMPORTANCE OF HEALTH

LEVEL:

Elementary and Middle School

TIMEFRAME:

Approximately one class session

OBJECTIVES:

Student will analyze primary sources to understand the importance of personal health to George Washington

Students will reflect on their own health practices within a health journal

PROCEDURE:

1. Ask students to explain what personal health is. Why is it important for a person to be healthy? What are some practices that people can follow to stay healthy?
2. Explain that just like today, people in the 18th century also knew it was important to stay healthy. George Washington was always very concerned about his health and followed many practices to keep himself healthy. Ask the students to think about practices that he might have followed to stay healthy. How might he have encouraged others to stay healthy? What did medicine look like in the 18th century?
3. Distribute *Smallpox Inoculation Letter, Letter from George Washington to Richard Varnick, and Excerpt of Letter to James Anderson* for students to read (included in PDF). As a class, identify different statements made by Washington about health and practices he put in to place to keep others healthy.
4. Remind the students that Washington was very concerned about his health and followed many practices to stay healthy. He exercised, ate and drank moderately, attempted to get enough sleep, and avoided tobacco. Explain that he also kept a diary throughout this life. Ask the students to describe what type of things people record in a diary. How can keeping a diary be helpful to staying healthy?
5. Distribute *Excerpt of Washington's Diary* for students to read in groups (included in PDF). As a group, identify how Washington recorded his healthy habits in his diary. With a very busy schedule as President, was Washington still able to dedicate time to his health?

6. Have students take on the role of Washington and create their own diary where they can record their healthy habits and reflect on their personal approach to health.
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OPTIONAL EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

1. Examine *Enclosure- Invoice to Robert Cary* (included in PDF) with students and discuss some of the medical remedies of the 18th century.

SMALLPOX INOCULATION LETTER

1 Head Quarters Morris Town 12th March 1777

2 Sir,

3 You are hereby required immediately to send me an exact return of your regiment, and to send all
4 your recruits, who have had the small pox to join the Army. Those, who have not, are to be sent to
5 Philadelphia, and put under the direction of the commanding officer there, who will have them
6 inoculated. You are to leave a sufficient number of proper officers to carry on the recruiting
7 service, who are to bring up their men as soon as they are ready. No pleas, of delay, on account
8 of the dispersion of the officers can be admitted, as every commanding officer ought to know
9 where his inferior officers are, and they what recruits they have, and where they are to be found.

10 You are to remain at Philadelphia, to procure arms clothing &c., and send on, your Major to
11 Camp, to receive your detachments. Your Lieut. Colonel is also to come on, as soon as
12 circumstances will permit.

13 I am Sir

14 Your most humble servant

15 Go: Washington

FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON TO RICHARD VARICK, 26 SEPTEMBER 1785

1 To Richard Varick

2 Mount Vernon 26th Septr 1785

3 Dear Sir,

4 Mr Taylor brought me your favor of the 28th Ulto and I have received your other letter of the 2d
5 of December.¹ for both I thank you—as also for the proceedings of the Mayors Court in the case
6 of Rutgars & Waddington, enclosed in the latter. I have read this with attention, and though I
7 pretend not to be a competent judge of the Law of Nations—or of the Act of your Assembly—nor
8 of the spirit of the Confederation in their niceties, yet, it should seem to me that the interpretation
9 of them by the Court is founded in reason & common sense, which is, or ought to be, the
10 foundation of all Law & Government.²

11 I am sorry to hear of your long indispositions, and repeated attacks—It may be well to nurse
12 yourself a little. Disorders, often times, are easier prevented than cured. And while you are in the
13 way to re-establish your health (on which I heartily congratulate you) it is better to use
14 preventatives than alteratives &ca &ca of which the *Materiae Medicæ* is replete.

15 As you are at the source of foreign intelligence, I could only reverberate what you have before
16 heard; and having no domestic News worth communicating, I shall be rather laconic in my
17 pres[en]t address. I enjoy, thank God, very good health; but Mrs Washington is scarce ever
18 well—She joins me in best wishes for you and I am Dear Sir Yr Affecte friend and Obedt Hble
19 Servt

20 Go: Washington

EXCERPT FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON TO JAMES ANDERSON, 16 SEPTEMBER 1799

1 Mr Anderson,

2 The indisposition of Mrs Washington—Dispatches of a troublesome kind, which required all my
3 attention—and the house never being clear of company—have put it out of my power to take any
4 notice of your letter of the 13th instant, until now.

5 Health, being amongst (if not the most) precious gift of Heaven; without which, we are but little
6 capable of business, or enjoyment; and as you seem to be strongly impressed with a belief that the
7 place at which you live (or any near it) will not suffer you, or family to enjoy this blessing; and
8 moreover, as from what you have written, your views ultimately, if not immediately, are turned to
9 some other object than the management of my business; far, very far is it from my desire that you
10 should, in the meantime, hazard your health, or that of your family's, by remaining in your
11 present occupation, even another year; if that is the expected consequence of your stay.

EXCERPT FROM DIARIES OF GEORGE WASHINGTON, MARCH 1, 1790 TO MARCH 14, 1790

1 March 1790

2 Monday the First. Exercised on horseback this forenoon, attended by Mr. John Trumbull who
3 wanted to see me Mounted. Informed the House of Representatives (where the Bill originated) t
4 hat I had given my assent to the Act for taking a Census of the People. Also communicated to
5 both Houses the application from the field Officers of Harrison County (made through the County
6 Lieutenant Colo. Duval) for Assistance as they apprehend the season was near at hand when
7 Indian depredations would be commenced. With these, some other Papers respecting the western
8 Frontiers were sent.

9 Tuesday 2d.

10 Much, and respectable company was at the Levy to day. Caused a letter to be written to the Govt.
11 of St. Jago respecting the Imprisonment of a Captn. Hammond.

12 Wednesday 3d.

13 Exercised on Horse-back between 9 and 11 Oclock.

14 Thursday 4th.

15 Sat from 9 until half after 10 Oclk. for Mr. Trumbull. The following Gentlemen dined here to
16 day—viz.—The Vice-Presidt. Messrs. Langdon, Wingate, Dalton, Strong, Ellsworth, Schuyler,
17 King, Patterson, Morris, McClay, Bassett, Henry, Johnson, Hawkins, Izard, Butlar & Few all of
18 the Senate.

19 Friday 5th.

20 A very numerous company of Ladies & Gentlemen here this Evening.

21 Saturday 6th.

22 Exercised in the Coach with Mrs. Washington and the Children and in the Afternoon walked
23 round the Battery. Received a letter from the Govr. of the Western Territory dated at the Rapids
24 of Ohio giving an acct. of the State of Affairs in the Westn. Country.

25 Monday 8th.

26 Sent to both Houses of Congress the Resolves of the Delaware State to adopt and make part of the
27 Constitution of the United States the amendments proposed by the General Government except
28 the first article of the said amendments the consideration of which they postponed.

29 Tuesday 9th.

30 A good many Gentlemen attended the Levy to day; among whom were many members of
31 Congress.

32 Wednesday 10th.

33 Exercised on Horse-back between 9 and a 1 o'clock. On my return had a long conversation with
34 Colo. Willet, who was engaged to go as a private Agent, but for public purposes, to Mr.
35 McGillivray principal chief of the Creek Nation. In this conversation he was impressed with the
36 critical situation of our Affairs with that Nation—the importance of getting him & some other
37 chiefs to this City—the arguments justifiable for him to use to effect this—with such lures as
38 respected McGillivray personally & might be held out to him. His (Colo. Willits) going, was not
39 to have the appearance of a Governmental act. He & the business he went upon, would be
40 introduced to McGillivray by Colo. Hawkins of the Senate (from No. Carolina) who was a
41 corrispondant of McGillivrays—but he would be provided with a Pass-port for him and other
42 Indian chiefs if they inclined to make use of it; but not to part with it if they did not.
43 The letter from Colo. Hawkins to McGillivray was calculated to bring to his, & the view of the
44 Crk. Nation the direful consequences of a rupture with the United States. The disposition of the
45 General government to deal justly and honorably by them and the means by which they, the

46 Creeks, may avert the calamities of War which must be brought on by the disorderly people of
47 both nations, if a Treaty is not made & observed. His instructions relative to the principal points
48 to be negotiated would be given to Colo. Willet in writing by the Secretary of War.

49 Thursday 11th.

50 A Letter from Arthur Campbell Esqr. of Washington County Virginia to the Secretary at War was
51 put into my hands by the latter. The following Gentlemen dined here to day: Mr. Read of the
52 Senate, the Speaker, and following Gentlemen of the House of Representatives—viz.—Messrs.
53 Gilman, Goodhue, Aimes Wadsworth, Trumbull, Benson, Lawrence, Peter Muhlenberg,
54 Wynkoop Vining, Carroll, Contee, Madison Page & Sumpter—also Judge Bedford and Mr. John
55 Trumbull.

56 Friday the 12th.

57 Exercised in the Post Chaise with Mrs. Washington from 10 Oclock till near 12.
58 Signed the Passport which was to be committed to Colo. Willet for Mr. McGillivray and other
59 Chiefs of the Greek Nation of Indians, and other Papers necessary for his setting out on this
60 business. A Pretty numerous company of Visitors this evening to Mrs. Washington Levee.

61 Saturday 13th.

62 Exercised about 11 Oclock with Mrs. Washington & the Children, in the Coach.

63 Sunday 14th.

64 Went to St. Pauls Chapel in the forenoon. Wrote letters on private business afterwards.

IMPORTANCE OF HEALTH

In 1759, Washington put an order in for different natural items used as medical remedies. Take a look the list below that describes the inventory of the order and the medical ailments they help cure.

Item Ordered	Medical Use
Bottle of Turlingtons Balsam	Turlington's balsam was a tincture of benzoin applied externally to wounds and bruises and taken internally to ease many complaints.
Spirit of Lavender	Spirits of lavender was used particularly for women's complaints.
Ipecacuane Powdered	Ipecac is a powder derived from the root of a West Indian plant and was used in the treatment of dysentery.
Jallop Powderd	Jallop (Jalap), the powder of a dried root, was used as a purgative.
Venice Treacle	Venice treacle was a medicinal confection used to produce sweating as well as for its opiate effects.
Best Rhubarb	Rhubarb was used to prevent choler and to treat stomach ailments.
Disacordium	Diascordium was a syrup containing various herbs used as a diuretic and to produce sweating.
Pearle Barley	Pearl barley was a soothing substance used in fevers.
Sago	Sago jelly derived from palm trees was mixed with milk or broth to supplement the diet of a convalescent.

IMPORTANCE OF HEALTH

Balsam Capevi	Copaiva balsam, a resinous juice from a South American tree, was used as a purgative and diuretic.
Spirits Sal Armoniac	Salts of ammonia (sal ammonica) was used as a stimulant and as a tonic.
Spanish Flies	A powder produced by grinding Spanish flies was used in the treatment of venereal diseases.
Bird Lyme	Birdlime, an astringent and antacid, was applied both internally and externally for various ailments. It was derived from plants.
Allam	Alum is used to promote scabbing of a wound or burn.
Tincture of Myrrh	Myrrh was used for colic.
Balsum Sulpher	Balsam of sulfur was sulfur mixed in olive oil taken to relieve chest and abdominal complaints.
Mer. Dulcis	Mercurius dulcis, or sweet mercury, was supposed to promote the circulation and excretions of the body.
Salvolatile	Sal volatile is used to revive a fainting person.
Quarts strong Cinamon Water	Cinnamon water was used as an astringent.
Flower of Brimstone	Flour of brimstone is a mild laxative. It was also used as a cleansing agent to reduce skin disorders.
Anniseeds	Aniseed was used to treat intestinal disorders.
Carthamus	Carthamus is a kind of thistle used as a catharsis
Syrup of Colts foot	Coltsfoot is an herb used to treat lung disorders.

IMPORTANCE OF HEALTH

Diapente	Diapente was a mixture of myrrh, laurel berries, Sention root, ivory shavings, and bathwort root given to horses as a purgative.
Cummin Seeds ⁷²	The oil of cumin seeds was used to make poultices
Fenugreek	The seeds of the plant fenugreek were used in poultices and liniments
Juice of Liquorice ⁷⁴	Licorice was used for treatment of chest disorders
Long Pepper	These are the immature fruit spikes of two kinds of peppers used to make medicine for expelling gas in cases of colic.