

# LEADERSHIP: SORTING IT OUT

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George Washington's leadership traits shaped his impact on the world. What qualities are associated with being a good citizen today?

**LEVEL:**

Grades 4-8

**TIMEFRAME:**

Approximately one class session

**STANDARDS:**

- Primary Source Analysis
- Working in teams
- SEL
- Civics
- Speaking and listening
- Early American History

**EAD THEME:**

Civic Participation

**QUESTIONS:**

- What individual characteristics define effective leaders?
  - What does public service and leadership look like locally, in a state, or nationally?
  - What qualities of character, virtues, or values make a good citizen, resident, or leader?
  - What motivated and prepared George Washington for civic engagement?
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**PLAN:**

**Engage:**

1. Display Washington's quote on leadership:
  - a. *"Remember that it is the actions, and not the commission, that make the officer, and that there is more expected from him, than the title."*
2. Discuss the meaning of the quote with the students. Tell the students that Washington was a 23-year-old officer when he made this remark to the Virginia Regiment officers in 1756.
3. Ask the students to list possible character traits that would make a good military officer and leader.
4. Ask students to circle any character traits that may describe them on their lists.

**Explore:**

1. Divide the class into four groups.

- a. Each group will need a set of 22 quotes about Washington (included in PDF), cut into strips and shuffled. Give each group several index cards.
  - b. A **modified** option of the quotes is provided for students and teachers who would prefer differentiated and more current language (included in PDF).
2. Model the first quote by reading it out loud. Ask the students to describe the character trait that Washington exhibited by reading the Abigail Adams quote. (Ex: Dignity; modesty).
  - a. Tell the students to write the character trait on the index card and place the quote underneath it.
3. Model the second quote by reading it out loud and describing a character trait (Ex: commanding presence).
  - a. Since this trait is different from the first one, make another character trait card and start a separate list.
4. Continue examples as needed.
5. Allow each group to read the quotes together, or have each student in the group to read 2-4 quotes and discuss.
6. Ask the students to sort the quotes, making new character trait cards when needed.
  - a. (Don't give too much direction on how to sort them. Students should be creative. There is no set number for each sort; they should be discovering Washington's leadership traits. The traits will typically fall into 3-6 categories)
7. When the groups are finished, allow the students time to walk around to each group and see different ways to sort the quotes.
8. After students have had time to see other groups' work, share their ideas for categories and write them on the board.

### **Explain/Evaluate:**

1. Remind students that not everyone who came into contact with General Washington left written accounts of him. We don't know if they had positive or negative thoughts about Washington.
  - a. Ask students, "Whose voices are not heard in these quotes and statements?"
2. Ask the students if the categories describe typical leadership characteristics.
3. Ask students if the characteristics used to describe Washington's leadership traits would describe them.
  - a. Would the traits describe their local leaders? Coaches? Governors? Federal politicians?
  - b. Are there any leadership characteristics the students could start working on?

**Extend:**

Alexander Hamilton wrote that Washington, “... *consulted much, pondered much, resolved slowly, resolved surely.*” Would you say those characteristics made for a successful leader in the past and the present? **Are they characteristics you find in yourself?** Explain your reasoning.

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LESSON PLAN: LEADERSHIP SORTING IT OUT  
ACTIVITY QUOTES

Quotes:

- A. "Dignity with ease and complacency, the gentleman and soldier look agreeably blended in him. Modesty marks every line and feature in his face." – Abigail Adams
- B. "Be assured his influence carried this government; for my own part I have a boundless confidence in him nor have I any reason to believe he will ever furnish occasion for withdrawing it." James Monroe
- C. "He is polite with dignity, affable without formality, distant without haughtiness, grave without austerity; modest, wise and good." – Abigail Adams
- D. "No harum-scarum, ranting, swearing fellow, but sober, steady, and calm. His modesty will induce him I dare say to take & order every step with the best advice possible to be obtained in the Army." – Connecticut Congressman Eliphalet Dyer
- E. "In the place he occupies, he is surrounded by flatterers and secret enemies. He finds in me a trustworthy friend in whom he can confide and who will always tell him the truth. Not a day goes by without his talking to me at length or writing long letters to me. And he is willing to consult me on most interesting points." – Marquis de Lafayette
- F. Washington "...possessed the gift of silence. This I esteem as one of the most precious Talents." – John Adams
- G. "Whenever he lost his temper as he did Sometimes, either Love or fear in those about him induced them to conceal his Weakness from the World." – John Adams
- H. "General Washington has astonished his most intimate friends with a display of the most wonderful talents for the government of an army. His zeal, his activity, and his politeness have captivated the hearts of the public and his friends. He seems to be one of those illustrious heroes whom providence raises up once in three or four hundred years to save a nation from ruin. If you do not know his person, perhaps you will be pleased to hear that he has so much martial dignity in his deportment that you would distinguish him to be a general and a soldier from among ten thousand people." – Benjamin Rush
- I. "One circumstance in reading this letter must not be omitted. His Excellency, after reading the first paragraph, made a short pause, took out his spectacles, and begged the indulgence of his audience while he put them on, observing at the same time, that he had grown gray in their service, and now found himself growing blind. There was something so natural, so unaffected, in this appeal, as rendered it superior to the most studied oratory; it forced its way to the heart, and you might see sensibility moisten every eye. The General, having finished, took leave of the assembly..." – Samuel Shaw

- J. “He was incapable of fear, meeting personal dangers with the calmest unconcern. Perhaps the strongest feature in his character was prudence, never acting until every circumstance, every consideration, was maturely weighed; refraining if he saw a doubt, but, when once decided, going through with his purpose, whatever obstacles opposed.” – Thomas Jefferson
- K. “His integrity was most pure, his justice the most inflexible I have ever known, no motives of interest, of friendship or hatred, being able to bias his decision. He was, indeed, in every sense of the words, a wise, a good, and a great man.” – Thomas Jefferson
- L. “His person, you know, was fine, his stature exactly what one would wish, his deportment easy, erect and noble; the best horseman of his age, and the most graceful figure that could be seen on horseback.” – Thomas Jefferson
- M. “The conduct you had on that occasion was highly praised throughout all Europe, and your returning to a private station is called the finishing stroke to an unparalleled character. Never did a man exist who so honorably stood in the opinions of mankind, and your name, if possible, will become still greater in posterity. Everything that is Great, and everything that is Good were not hitherto united in one man. Never did one man live whom the soldier, statesman, patriot, and philosopher could equally admire, and never was a Revolution brought about, that in its motives, its conduct, and its consequences could so well immortalize its Glorious Chief. I am proud of you, My dear General, your Glory makes me feel as if it was my own—and while the world is gaping at you, I am pleased to think, and to tell, the qualities of your heart do render you still more valuable than anything you have done.” – Marquis de Lafayette
- N. “The General was born and educated near Fredericksburg on the Rappahannock. He must be a man of great abilities and a strong natural genius, as his master never taught him anything but writing and arithmetic. People come to see him here from all parts of the world; hardly a day passes without. But the General seldom makes his appearance before dinner, employing the morning to write his letters and superintend his farms, and allotting the afternoon to company. But even then he generally retires for two hours, between tea and supper, to his study to write.” – Robert Hunter, Jr.
- O. “No man, I believe, has influence with the President. He seeks information from all quarters, and judges more independently than any man I ever knew. It is of so much importance to the public that he should preserve this superiority, that I hope I shall never see the time that any man will have influence with him beyond the powers of reason and argument.” – John Adams
- P. On March 1, 1785, twenty-three such prominent planters founded the first American organization devoted to agricultural pursuits—the Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of Agriculture. In July of 1785, Samuel Powel—the Society's first president—wrote to Washington to announce his election as an honorary member. Washington was pleased to be included and carried on correspondence with a number of other members over the remainder of his life.

- Q. In June 1785, Washington signaled his intention to adopt a new and more rigorous approach to farming, seeking an English farmer to assume the management of his Mount Vernon plantation. Washington's desire for a capable farmer circulated through several hands in England and soon found its way to Arthur Young, a major figure in the agricultural reform movement in England. On January 7, 1786 Young wrote directly to Washington, offering to procure workers, materials, and farm animals as needed. The correspondence with Young soon expanded to include other prominent figures in English agricultural circles, including Dr. James Anderson and Sir John Sinclair. In 1797, Washington was even made an honorary member of the English Board of Agriculture.
- R. "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen, he was second to none in the humble and endearing scenes of private life; pious, just, humane, temperate, and sincere; uniform, dignified, and commanding; his example was as edifying to all around him, as were the effects of that example lasting." – Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee
- S. Rising above conflicts between individual states, Washington created an atmosphere that allowed Continental Convention members to reach the compromises necessary to create a bold, new government. He stayed relatively quiet, allowing the delegates to debate the foundation of the Constitution amongst themselves. While Washington held the belief that America should have a strong central government and a single executive leader, he did not allow his bias to sway the other delegates.
- T. "A Gentleman, of one of the first Fortunes, upon the Continent, leaving his delicious Retirement, his Family and Friends, Sacrificing his Ease, and hazarding all in the Cause of his Country. His Views are noble and disinterested. He declared when he accepted the mighty Trust, that he would lay before Us, an exact account of his Expences, and not accept a shilling for Pay" – John Adams
- U. "My most ardent and incessant Wishes attend you, that you may still rise superior to every Difficulty, and that your great & virtuous Ex[e]rtions on Behalf of your Country, may be crowned with that Success..." – John Hancock
- V. "In every Stage of the arduous Conflict, what trying Scene have you not passed through! What Hardships have you not endured! What Dangers have, you not encountered! May Heaven reward your unremitted Exertions! May you long live, beloved by a grateful Country, & partaking largely in the Enjoyment of those inestimable Blessings, which you have been so eminently instrumental in securing for us." – Sam Adams

## Sites for Quotes/Statements

(Accessed July 19, 2021)

- A. "Abigail Adams to John Adams, 16 July . 1775" Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0162>
- B. "To Thomas Jefferson from James Monroe, 12 July 1788" Founders Online, National Archives <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-13-02-0256>
- C. "Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, 21 May 1786," Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-07-02-0060>
- D. "Address to the Continental Congress, 16 June 1775," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-01-02-0001>
- E. "Marquis de Lafayette to Adrienne Lafayette, 6 January 1778," The Marquis de Lafayette Collection, Cleveland State University Library Special Collections, Reel 23, Folder 202, Christine Valadon, translator
- F. "From John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 11 November 1807," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-5216>
- G. "From John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 11 November 1807," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-5216>
- H. Center for the Study of the American Constitution: George Washington <https://csac.history.wisc.edu/multimedia/founders-on-the-founders/george-washington/>
- I. Center for the Study of the American Constitution: George Washington <https://csac.history.wisc.edu/multimedia/founders-on-the-founders/george-washington/>
- J. "Thomas Jefferson to Walter Jones, 2 January 1814," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-07-02-0052>.
- K. "Thomas Jefferson to Walter Jones, 2 January 1814," Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-07-02-0052>
- L. "Thomas Jefferson to Walter Jones, 2 January 1814," Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-07-02-0052>.
- M. "To George Washington from Marie-Joseph-Paul-Yves-Roch-Gilbert du Motier, marquis de Lafayette, 22 July 1783," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-11615>
- N. Center for the Study of the American Constitution: George Washington <https://csac.history.wisc.edu/multimedia/founders-on-the-founders/george-washington/>
- O. Center for the Study of the American Constitution: George Washington <https://csac.history.wisc.edu/multimedia/founders-on-the-founders/george-washington/>
- P. George Washington and Agriculture <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/george-washington-and-agriculture/>
- Q. George Washington and Agriculture <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/george-washington-and-agriculture/>
- R. "[Diary entry: 24 April 1799]." Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/01-06-02-0008-0004-0024>
- S. Presiding Over the Convention: The Indispensable Man <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/constitutional-convention/convention-president/>

- T. “Address to the Continental Congress, 16 June 1775,” Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-01-02-0001>
  - U. “To George Washington from John Hancock, 8 September 1776,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-06-02-0204>
  - V. “To George Washington from Samuel Adams, Sr.,” 11 July 1783 <https://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/default.xqy?keys=FOEA-print-01-02-02-5585>
- AA. Letter from Alexander Hamilton, Concerning the Public Conduct & Character of John Adams, Esq. President of the United States, 24 October 1800
- <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-25-02-0110-0002>



**Quotes: Language has been modified from original**

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- B. Be sure his influence carried this government; I have boundless confidence in him and I do not have any reason to believe he will ever give me any reason to doubt him. - James Monroe
- C. He is polite with dignity, polite without stuffiness, distant without arrogance, serious without harshness; modest, wise, and good. – Abigail Adams
- D. No harum-scarum, ranting, swearing fellow, but serious, steady, and calm. His modesty will convince him to take every step with the best advice to be found in the Army. – Connecticut Congressman Eliphalet Dyer
- E. Wherever he is, he is surrounded by flatterers and secret enemies. He knows I am a trustworthy friend that he can confide in and who will always tell him the truth. Not a day goes by without his talking to me at length or writing long letters to me. And he is willing to have conversations with me about almost everything. – Marquis de Lafayette
- F. Washington had the gift of silence. I believe this is one of the most precious talents. – John Adams
- G. Whenever he lost his temper, as he sometimes did, people who either loved or respected him kept this weakness from being shown to the world. – John Adams
- H. General Washington has astonished his closest friends with his exceptional talents for the leading the army. His excitement, his activity, and his politeness have captured the hearts of the public and his friends. He seems to be one of those heroes that comes around once in three or four hundred years to save a nation from ruin. If you do not know him, you should like to hear that he has such military status in his manner that you would pick him to be a general and a soldier out of a group of ten thousand people. – Benjamin Rush
- I. There is a story that must be told. His Excellency, after reading the first paragraph, paused briefly, took out his glasses, and asked the audience to wait patiently while he put them on. He reminded them that he had grown gray while he was serving his country, and now was growing blind. There was something so natural, so honest, in those statemen. It seemed to be the most sincere words anyone had ever heard; they forced its way to the heart, and there were tears in most of the soldiers' eyes. The General, having finished, left the gathering of soldiers. – Samuel Shaw
- J. He did not fear anything, always remaining calm in the face of any danger. Perhaps the strongest feature in his character was judgment, never acting until every circumstance, every consideration, was thoroughly thought through; not acting if he was unsure, but, once he had made a decision, he went with purpose, whatever obstacles were against him. – Thomas Jefferson

- K. His goodness and honesty were pure and his sense of justice was unshakable. He did not allow any self-interests, friendships or enemies change his decisions. He was, in every sense of the words, a wise, a good, and a great man. – Thomas Jefferson
- L. His character was fine and his physical appearance was what everyone hopes for. His stance was relaxed, upright and noble; the best horseman of his age, and the most graceful figure that could be seen on horseback. – Thomas Jefferson
- M. Your actions have been highly praised throughout all Europe, and your returning to be a private citizen is called the finishing stroke to an unparalleled character. If it is possible, you become even more loved than before. Everything that is Great, and everything that is Good has never been found in one man before. There has never been one man that a soldier, statesman, patriot, and philosopher could each admire. I am proud of you, my dear General, your Glory makes me feel as if it was my own—and while the world is in awe of you, I am pleased to think, and to tell, the qualities of your heart makes you even more valuable than anything you have done. – Marquis de Lafayette
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- O. No man, I believe, can influence the President. He asks for information from all areas, and thinks independently more than any man I ever knew. It is so important to the public that he should keep this superiority, that I hope I will never see the time that any man will be able to influence with him without giving valid reasons and arguments. – John Adams
- P. On March 1, 1785, twenty-three very important planters established the first American organization devoted to agricultural pursuits—the Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of Agriculture. In July of 1785, Samuel Powel—the Society's first president—wrote to Washington to announce his election as an honorary member. Washington was pleased to be included and stayed in contact with a number of other members over the remainder of his life.
- Q. In June 1785, Washington decided to start a new and more rigorous approach to farming. He began looking for an English farmer to take over the management of his Mount Vernon plantation. Arthur Young, a major leader in the agricultural reform movement in England, heard that Washington was looking for a farm manager. On January 7, 1786 Young wrote directly to Washington, offering to locate and hire workers, materials, and farm animals as needed. The communications with Young soon grew to include other important figures in English agricultural circles, including Dr. James Anderson and Sir John Sinclair. In 1797, Washington was even made an honorary member of the English Board of Agriculture.

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- S. Rising above conflicts between individual states, Washington created an atmosphere that allowed Constitutional Convention members to reach the compromises necessary to create a bold, new government. He stayed relatively quiet, allowing the delegates to debate the foundation of the Constitution amongst themselves. While Washington held the belief that America should have a strong central government and a single executive leader, he did not allow his opinion to sway the other delegates.
- T. A gentleman of one of the first fortunes in the country, he left his lovely retirement, his family and friends, and sacrificed his relaxation, giving it all up for the cause of his country. His views are noble and impartial. He declared when he accepted the office of commander in chief that he would give Congress an exact amount of his expenses and not accept any money for his service. – John Adams
- U. My strongest wishes come to you, that you may still be superior to every difficulty, and that your great & virtuous action on behalf of your Country, may be crowned with that success. – John Hancock
- V. In every stage of the difficult conflict, what difficult scenes have you not passed through! What hardships have you have endured! What dangers you have encountered! May Heaven reward your hardships! May you long live, beloved by a grateful country, & greatly enjoy the tremendous Blessings, which you have been extremely instrumental in securing for us. – Sam Adams

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- C. "Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, 21 May 1786," Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-07-02-0060>
- D. "Address to the Continental Congress, 16 June 1775," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-01-02-0001>
- E. "Marquis de Lafayette to Adrienne Lafayette, 6 January 1778," The Marquis de Lafayette Collection, Cleveland State University Library Special Collections, Reel 23, Folder 202, Christine Valadon, translator
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- L. "Thomas Jefferson to Walter Jones, 2 January 1814," Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-07-02-0052>.
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- Q. George Washington and Agriculture <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/george-washington-and-agriculture/>
- R. "[Diary entry: 24 April 1799]." Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/01-06-02-0008-0004-0024>
- S. Presiding Over the Convention: The Indispensable Man <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/constitutional-convention/convention-president/>

- T. “Address to the Continental Congress, 16 June 1775,” Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-01-02-0001>
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