

# MANNERS & MORES OF WASHINGTON'S AMERICA

**LEVEL:**

Middle School

**TIMEFRAME:**

Approximately two class sessions

**OBJECTIVES:**

Students will classify and categorize the concerns addressed by the Rules.

Students will learn about George Washington and many other 18<sup>th</sup> century youths.

Students will reflect on current behavioral norms.

Students will analyze what expectations govern their own behavior.

**STANDARDS:**

- Reading and Writing Literacy in History/Social Studies
- Colonial America
- Civic Values and Social Norms
- Speaking and Listening

**PROCEDURE:**

1. Distribute the excerpt of *Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior* (included in PDF). Have the class select and circle a few to read and discuss aloud. Review and define the following categories and have students classify the selected Rules under the appropriate category using the Classification Template (included in PDF) as an example:
  - Core ethical values
  - Ways of showing respect
  - Rules of decorum (helping you avoid embarrassment or offense to company)
  - Rules reflecting and upholding the social hierarchy.
2. For each category, have students discuss which rules they chose and whether their classmates agree with their choices. Then have students asterisk those rules that they believe would have *no* place in a contemporary list and circle those they feel have *enduring* or *continuing* value.
3. Next, ask individual students or pairs to write their own list of ten Rules that reflect the most important “do’s” and “do not’s” of our contemporary society. Have the students share the Rules with the class and discuss how the manners and mores of Washington’s time have changed, or not changed, today.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION  
MANNERS & MORES OF WASHINGTON'S AMERICA

It is highly doubtful that the list of “110 Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation” that George Washington hand-copied sometime before the age of sixteen -- and that is sometimes sold today as George Washington’s “etiquette book” -- actually comprises his own personal list of decorum rules. There is a good chance that the list was a school curriculum staple of a sort that would not have been uncommon in his day, and that copying it may well have been nothing more than a way of practicing penmanship. But whether it was his personal list or a standard “recipe” of general rules for civil behavior that many children learned, the Rules can provide a window into the ethics and manners of Washington’s times.

1st Every Action done in Company, ought to be with Some Sign of Respect, to those that are Present.

2d When in Company, put not your Hands to any Part of the Body, not usually Discovered.

3d Shew Nothing to your Freind that may affright him.

4th In the Presence of Others Sing not to yourself with a humming Noise, nor Drum with your Fingers or Feet.

5th If You Cough, Sneeze, Sigh, or Yawn, do it not Loud but Privately; and Speak not in your Yawning, but put Your handkercheif or Hand before your face and turn aside.

6th Sleep not when others Speak, Sit not when others stand, Speak not when you Should hold your Peace, walk not on when others Stop.

7th Put not off your Cloths in the presence of Others, nor go out your Chamber half Drest.

8th At Play and at Fire its Good manners to Give Place to the last Commer, and affect not to Speak Louder than Ordinary.

9th Spit not in the Fire, nor Stoop low before it neither Put your Hands into the Flames to warm them, nor Set your Feet upon the Fire especially if there be meat before it.

10th When you Sit down, Keep your Feet firm and Even, without putting one on the other or Crossing them.

11th Shift not yourself in the Sight of others nor Gnaw your nails.

12th Shake not the head, Feet, or Legs rowl not the Eys lift not one eyebrow higher than the other wry not the mouth, and bedew no mans face with your Spittle, by approaching too near him when you Speak.

13th Kill no Vermin as Fleas, lice ticks &c in the Sight of Others, if you See any filth or thick Spittle put your foot Dexteriously upon it if it be upon the Cloths of your Companions, Put it off privately, and if it be upon your own Cloths return Thanks to him who puts it off.

14th Turn not your Back to others especially in Speaking, Jog not the Table or Desk on which Another reads or writes, lean not upon any one.

15th Keep your Nails clean and Short, also your Hands and Teeth Clean yet without Shewing any great Concern for them.

16th Do not Puff up the Cheeks, Loll not out the tongue rub the Hands, or beard, thrust out the lips, or bite them or keep the Lips too open or too Close.

17th Be no Flatterer, neither Play with any that delights not to be Play'd Withal.

18th Read no Letters, Books, or Papers in Company but when there is a Necessity for the doing of it you must ask leave: come not near the Books or Writings of Another so as to read them unless desired or give your opinion of them unask'd also look not nigh when another is writing a Letter.

19th let your Countenance be pleasant but in Serious Matters Somewhat grave.

20th The Gestures of the Body must be Suited to the discourse you are upon.

21st: Reproach none for the Infirmitates of Nature, nor Delight to Put them that have in mind thereof.

22d Shew not yourself glad at the Misfortune of another though he were your enemy.

23d When you see a Crime punished, you may be inwardly Pleased; but always shew Pity to the Suffering Offender.

24th Do not laugh too loud or too much at any Publick Spectacle.

CLASSIFICATION TEMPLATE: WASHINGTON'S *RULES OF CIVILITY*  
MANNERS & MORES OF WASHINGTON'S AMERICA

<b>Core Ethical Values</b>	<b>Ways of Showing Respect</b>	<b>Rules of Decorum</b>	<b>Rules Reflecting &amp; Upholding the Social Hierarchy</b>
<b>#22</b> "Shew not yourself glad at the misfortune of another though he were your enemy."	<b>#4</b> "In the presence of others sing not to yourself with a humming noise, nor drum your fingers or feet."	<b>#15</b> "Keep your nails clean and short, also your hands and teeth clean, yet without shewing any great concern for them."	<b>#28</b> "If any one come to speak to you while you are sitting stand up tho he be your inferior, and when you present seats let it be to every one according to his degree."