

## ***Oliver Evans's Patent:*** **How Ingenuity Was Valued in Early America**

### Students will learn...

- How Washington praised ingenuity and reason as a cornerstone of his business and political endeavors
- Washington's role as a businessman

### You will need...

- Videos of how the Gristmill works: [basic, step by step](#), or a [detailed account](#)
- [The Magnificent Millworks of Oliver Evans picture](#)
- Gristmill and Patent Questions Worksheet
- Optional: [Mount Vernon's illustration of the Mill](#) Handout
- *Optional:* [Virtual tour of the Gristmill](#)

### *Opener: Images of George Washington*

- Ask your students to shout out some words that describe George Washington.
- Most likely, no one will say businessman or farmer. Explain to them that Washington saw himself first and foremost as a farmer and plantation owner.
- Ask them what they think he did to earn money. Answers include: working as a surveyor, selling tobacco (at first, but later abandoned), crops, flour, whiskey, fish, and eventually some land.
- Ask: Why isn't Washington better known as a farmer?

### *Task: Analyzing the Gristmill*

- Now ask them if they know some of the President's jobs. Elicit from them that

one of them is to sign patents.

Safeguarding the rights of authors and inventions was so important to the founding fathers that part of Article 1 of the Constitution provided Congress with the power to create a method of granting patents. Washington also saw the importance of creating a patent system. In 1790, during his first State of the Union, he called on Congress to establish a system.

- Show them the picture of Oliver Evans's mill. Tell them that this was the 3rd patent ever signed (1790), but do not tell them what it is.
- Reveal that it is a mill (you may need to explain to them what a mill is). Say Washington liked the invention so much that he installed it in his mill.
- Show a video of the Gristmill at work and/or a virtual tour of the Gristmill.
  - *Optional:* Show them the handout of Mount Vernon's illustration of the mill during the video so they can get the whole picture of how it works.
- In pairs or groups, have your students answer the Gristmill and Patent Questions Worksheet.

### *Closer: Reflections*

- Have your students look around the classroom and identify inventions that would have been patented. How do they reflect American values and needs today?
- Also point out to them how the people who hold a patent are not always the original inventors!

