

# THE DEATH OF MARTHA WASHINGTON

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**LEVEL:**

High School

**TIMEFRAME:**

Approximately one class session

**OBJECTIVES:**

Students will analyze an obituary for Martha Washington.

Student will practice using historical thinking skills to answer questions using evidence from the document to support their conclusions.

**STANDARDS**

- Reading and Writing Literacy in History/Social Studies
- Reading Informational Texts
- Reading for Perspective
- Writing Skills
- Developing Research Skills

**BACKGROUND:**

Martha Washington passed away at Mount Vernon on May 22, 1802 at the age of 70 following an illness that lasted several weeks. At the time of her death she was surrounded by her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Newspapers around the country eulogized her as “the worthy partner of the worthiest of men.” This obituary appeared in the Augusta Herald, published in Georgia, on June 9, 1802.

**PROCEDURE:**

1. Display the obituary for the class to see (located on Page 2). Clarify any confusing print.
2. Hand out the worksheet entitled Part One: Contextualizing the Source. Have the students answer the questions about the source.
3. Hand out the worksheet entitled Part Two: Close Reading. Have the students work individually.
  - a. If students are struggling, it may be a good idea to encourage the students to work in pairs to better analyze the source.

Then down he lent the souls he made  
To seek them bodies here.

DIED—At Mount Vernon, on  
the 22<sup>d</sup> ultimo, Mrs. MARTHA  
WASHINGTON, widow of the  
late illustrious General GEORGE  
WASHINGTON.—To those amiable  
and christian virtues, which adorn  
the female character, she added dig-  
nity of manners, superiority of un-  
derstanding, a mind intelligent and  
elevated.——The silence of re-  
spectful grief is our best eulogy.

FOR SALE,

*A GREAT BARGAIN.*

**T**HE BREW HOUSE LOT and  
BUILDINGS thereon, it contains  
two acres of land and is the entire of

*Source: Martha Washington's Obituary from the Augusta Herald, Augusta, Georgia, June 9, 1802. (Mount Vernon Ladies' Association)*

**PART ONE: CONTEXTUALIZING THE SOURCE**

1. When was this source created? \_\_\_\_\_ Who created it? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Who is this document about? \_\_\_\_\_

3a. Is this a primary or secondary source? Explain your thinking. \_\_\_\_\_

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3b. What type of source is this? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Where was this source created? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Who was the intended audience of this source? \_\_\_\_\_

**PART TWO: CLOSE READING**

1. Why might the names Martha Washington and General George Washington on lines 2-5 be written in capital letters? Why did the author write the names this way? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Reread the *Background Information*. Using that information, what does the word *ultimo* on line 2 mean in the context of this document? How do you know? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. The Latin word *amicus* means friendly. How does knowing the meaning of this word help you to understand the meaning of the word *amiable* on line 5? \_\_\_\_\_

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4a. Do you notice anything unusual with the spelling of some of the words in the passage? If so, list the words here:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

4b. In the text, ○ each of the words that you wrote on the above list. Then, annotate in the text what you think the modern spelling would be.

5. Annotate and underline the characteristics used to describe Martha Washington in the above text. Which of these characteristics, do you think, is the most important? Explain your thinking. \_\_\_\_\_

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6. What does the author say would be the “best” eulogy for Martha Washington? \_\_\_\_\_

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7. What 3 words from the text are most important to understanding the author’s tone for the text? Explain your choices using evidence from the text. \_\_\_\_\_

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8. What was the author’s purpose for writing this document? \_\_\_\_\_

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