

THE DEATH OF MARTHA WASHINGTON

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 sent the souls he made
To seek them bodies here.

DIED—At Mount Vernon, on
the 22^d 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.

THE 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. _____

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? _____

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? _____

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? _____

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. _____

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

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. _____

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