

# WHAT MAKES A GENERAL?

**LEVEL:**

High School

**TIME:**

Approximately three class sessions

**OBJECTIVES:**

- Students will discuss the leadership characteristics that made Washington an effective leader.
- Students will analyze primary source documents and images to understand the relationship between Washington and his Revolutionary War generals.
- Students will research a Revolutionary War military leader using primary sources and decide whether the general displayed leadership characteristics.

**STANDARDS:**

- Reading and Writing Literacy in History/Social Studies
- Speaking and Listening
- American Revolution and the Founding of a New Nation
- Research Skills

**BACKGROUND:**

There were 81 major and brigadier generals serving under General George Washington during the Revolutionary War. This diverse group of men came from all 13 colonies and 10 foreign lands and represented over a dozen professions. Washington skillfully led these individuals—some of whom were imposed upon him, some of whom he chose, and others who were fresh from Europe—to victory against the British, whose military forces ranked among the most powerful and disciplined in the world. His ability to place great responsibility in the hands of those with the outstanding talent proved to be one of his most important leadership skills.

**PROCEDURE:**

1. Tell students that they will be exploring Washington’s military leadership and the characteristics that made him a great leader during the American Revolution. As a class, discuss the concept of leadership and the characteristics exhibited by George Washington that made him such an effective leader. List these characteristics on the board.
2. Distribute copies of *General Orders, December 25, 1776* (included in PDF). These were given just prior to the Battle of Trenton.

Additional information on the Battle of Trenton can be found in the Digital Encyclopedia of George Washington:

<http://www.mountvernon.org/digital-encyclopedia/article/battle-of-trenton/>

As a class, discuss the historical significance of this battle and the role that Henry Knox played in the victory at Trenton. Ask students what their reaction would be if they had received these detailed orders from Gen. Washington. Which leadership characteristics did Henry Knox display during the battle?

3. Distribute copies of the *Correspondence of General George Washington and Major General Charles Lee after the Battle of Monmouth* (included in PDF).

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Additional information on the Battle of Monmouth can be found in the Digital Encyclopedia of George Washington:

<http://www.mountvernon.org/digital-encyclopedia/article/battle-of-monmouth/>

Instruct students, either individually or in small groups, to piece together what happened at the Battle of Monmouth and decide if Major General Lee's explanation to General Washington to for his conduct during the battle is sufficient. Ask students to consider what leadership characteristic Major General Lee and General Washington displayed in their correspondence after the Battle of Monmouth.

Distribute copies of *Excerpt: Memoir of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge (1858)* (included in the ZIP file download). Tallmadge died in 1835 at the age of 81; his *Memoir* was published in 1858. This excerpt is his account of General Washington's farewell to his officers at Fraunces Tavern on December 4, 1783.

Additional information Washington Resigning his Commission can be found in the following 2.5 minute video:

[http://www.mountvernon.org/education/for-teachers/distance-learning-dvds-broadcasts/#g-28\\_m-98751032](http://www.mountvernon.org/education/for-teachers/distance-learning-dvds-broadcasts/#g-28_m-98751032)

As a class, discuss the emotional parting of Washington and his generals that Tallmadge recorded in this excerpt from his *Memoir*. What characteristics of leadership are displayed by Washington as he respectfully thanks the men he fought alongside through the Revolutionary War?

4. Assign each student a Revolutionary War military leader. Have each student research his/her assigned leader and create a short biography. Each biography should include the leadership characteristics that were or were not displayed by the officer. At least one primary document, such as a letter or journal excerpt, should be referenced by the students to support their views.

The following is a suggested list of Revolutionary War military leaders for students to research:

- Benedict Arnold
- Horatio Gates
- Nathanael Greene
- Israel Putnam
- Marquis de Lafayette
- Charles Lee
- Anthony Wayne
- Tadeusz Kosciuszko
- Alexander McDougall
- Daniel Morgan
- Philip John Schuyler
- Baron von Steuben
- Benjamin Tallmadge
- Henry Knox
- Artemis Ward
- Samuel Blachley Webb
- Benjamin Gould
- Otho Holland Williams

1 General Orders

2 [Bucks County, Pa., 25 December 1776]

3

4 Each Brigade to be furnish'd with two good Guides.

5 General Stevenss Brigade to form the advanced party & to have with them a detachment of  
6 the Artillery without Cannon provided with Spikes and Hammers to Spike up the enemies  
7 Cannon in case of necessity or to bring them off if it can be effected. the party to be provided with  
8 drag ropes for the purpose of dragging off the Cannon. General Stevens is to attack and force the  
9 enemies Guards and seize such posts as may prevent them from forming in the streets and in case  
10 they are annoy'd from the houses to set them on fire. The Brigades of Mercer & Lord Stirling  
11 under the Command of Major General Greene to support General Stevens, this is the second  
12 division or left wing of the Army and to march by the way of the Pennington Road.

13 St Clairs Glovers & Sargents Brigades under Major General Sullivan to march by the river  
14 road, this is the first division of the Army and to form the right wing.2 Lord Stirlings Brigade to  
15 form the reserve of the left wing and General St Clairs Brigade the reserve of the right wing.  
16 These reserves to form a second line in Conjunction or a second Line to each division as  
17 circumstances may require—Each Brigadier to make the Colonels acquainted with the posts of  
18 their respective Regiments in the Brigade and the Major Generals will inform them of the posts  
19 of their Brigades in the Line.

20 Four peices of artillery to march at the head of each Column, three peices at the head of the  
21 second Brigade of each Division and two peices with each of the Reserves. The troops to be  
22 assembled one Miles back of McKonkeys ferry and as soon as it begins to grow dark the troops  
23 to be March'd to McKonkeys ferry and embark onboard the boats in following order under the  
24 direction of Colonel Knox.

25 General Stevens Brigade with the detachment of Artillery men to embark first General  
26 Mercers next; Lord Stirlings next, Genl Fermoy's next who will march in the rear of the Second  
27 Division and file off from the Penington to the Princeton Road in such direction that he can with  
28 the greatest ease & safety secure the passes between Princeton & Trenton. the Guides will be the  
29 best judges of this. he is to take two peices of artille[r]y with him.

30 St Clair Glover & Sargents Brigades to embark in order. Immediately upon their debarkation  
31 the whole to form & march in Subdivisions from the Right.

32 The Commanding Officers of Regiments to observe that the Divisions be equal & that proper  
33 officers be appointed to each—a profound silence to be enjoyn'd & no man to quit his Ranks on  
34 the pain of Death—each Brigadier to appoint flanking parties—the reserve Brigades to appoint  
35 the rear Guards of the Columns—The heads of the Columns to be appointed to arrive at Trenton  
36 at five oClock.

37 Capt. Washington & Capt. Flahaven with a party of 40 men each to march before the  
38 Divisions & post themselves on the road about three miles from Trenton & make prisoners of all  
39 going in or coming out of Town.

40 General Stevens will appoint a Guard to form a chain of centries round the landing place at a  
41 sufficient distance from the river to permit the troops to form This Guard not to suffer any person  
42 to go in or come out—but to detain all persons who attempts either this Guard to join their  
43 Brigade when the troops are all over.

LESSON PLAN: WHAT MAKES A GENERAL?  
CORRESPONDENCE OF MAJOR GENERAL CHARLES LEE  
AND GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON AFTER THE BATTLE OF MONMOUTH

1 Camp English Town [N.J., c.30 June 1778]

2 Sir

3 From the knowledge I have of your Excys character—I must conclude that nothing but the  
4 misinformation of some very stupid, or misrepresentation of some very wicked person could have  
5 occasioned your making use of so very singular expressions as you did on my coming up to the  
6 ground where you had taken post—They implied that I was guilty either of disobedience of  
7 orders, of want of conduct, or want of courage. Your Excellency will therefore infinitely oblige  
8 me by letting me know on which of these three articles you ground your charge—that I may  
9 prepare for my justification which I have the happiness to be confident I can do to the army, to  
10 the Congress, to America, and to the world in general. Your excellency must give me leave to  
11 observe that neither yourself nor those about your person, could from your situation be in the  
12 least judges of the merits or demerits of our measures—And to speak with a becoming pride, I  
13 can assert that to these manouvers the success of the day was entirely owing—I can boldly say,  
14 that had we remained on the first ground, or had we advanced, or had the retreat been conducted  
15 in a manner different from what it was, this whole army and the interests of America would have  
16 risked being sacrificed. I ever had (and hope ever shall have the greatest respect and veneration  
17 for General Washington) I think him endowed with many great and good qualities, but in this  
18 instance I must pronounce that he has been guilty of an act of cruel injustice towards a man who  
19 certainly has some pretensions to the regard of every servant of this country—And I think Sir, I  
20 have a right to demand some reparation for the injury committed—and unless I can obtain it, I  
21 must in justice to myself, when this campaign is closed, [(]which I believe will close the war)  
22 retire from a service at the head of which is placed a man capable of offering such injuries. But at  
23 the same time in justice to you I must repeat that I from my soul believe, that it was not a motion  
24 of your own breast, but instigated by some of those dirty earwigs who will for ever insinuate  
25 themselves near persons in high office—for I really am convinced that when General  
26 Washington acts from himself no man in his army will have reason to complain of injustice or  
27 indecorum. I am, Sir, and hope I ever shall have reason to continue your most sincerely devoted  
28 humble servt Charles Lee.

29 Head Qrs English Town [N.J.] June 30th 1778

30 Sir.

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CORRESPONDENCE OF MAJOR GENERAL CHARLES LEE  
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1 I received your letter (dated thro' mistake the 1st of July)1 expressed as I conceive, in terms  
2 highly improper. I am not conscious of having made use of any very singular expressions at the  
3 time of my meeting you, as you intimate. What I recollect to have said, was dictated by duty and  
4 warranted by the occasion. As soon as circumstances will permit, you shall have an opportunity,  
5 either of justifying yourself to the army, to Congress, to America, and to the world in General; or  
6 of convincing them that you were guilty of a breach of orders and of misbehaviour before the  
7 enemy on the 28th Inst. in not attacking them as you had been directed and in making an  
8 unnecessary, disorderly, and shameful retreat. I am Sir your most obt servt

9  
Go: Washington

1       The time now drew near when the Commander-in-Chief intended to leave this part of the  
2 country for his beloved retreat at Mount Vernon. On Tuesday, the 4th of December, it was made  
3 known to the officers then in New York, that Gen. Washington intended to commence his  
4 journey on that day. At 12 o'clock the officers repaired to Francis' Tavern in Pearl Street where  
5 Gen. Washington had appointed to meet them and to take his final leave of them. We had been  
6 assembled but a few moments, when His Excellency entered the room. His emotion, too strong  
7 to be concealed, seemed to be reciprocated by every officer present. After partaking of a slight  
8 refreshment, in almost breathless silence, the General filled his glass with wine, and turning to  
9 the officers, he said: "With a heart full of love and gratitude, I now take leave of you. I most  
10 devoutly wish that your latter days may be as prosperous and happy as your former ones have  
11 been glorious and honorable."

12       After the officers had taken a glass of wine, Gen. Washington said: "I cannot come to each of  
13 you, but shall feel obliged if each of you will come and take me by the hand."

14       Gen. Knox being nearest to him, turned to the Commander-in Chief, who, suffused in tears,  
15 was incapable of utterance, but grasped his hand; when they embraced each other in silence. In  
16 the same affectionate manner every, officer in the room marched up to, kissed, and parted with  
17 his General-in-Chief. Such a scene of sorrow and weeping I had never before witnessed, and  
18 hope I may never be called upon to witness again. It was indeed too affecting to be of long  
19 continuance – for tears of deep sensibility filled every eye – and the heart seemed so full, that it  
20 was ready to burst from its wonted abode. Not a word was uttered to break the solemn silence  
21 that prevailed, or to interrupt the tenderness of the interesting scene. The *simple thought* that we  
22 were then about to part from the man who had conducted us through a long and bloody war, and  
23 under whose conduct the glory and independence of our country had been achieved, and that we  
24 should see his face no more in this world, seemed to me utterly insupportable. But the time of  
25 separation had come, and waiving his hand to his *grieving children* around him, he left the room,  
26 and passing through a corps of light infantry who were paraded to receive him, he walked  
27 silently on to Whitehall, where a barge was in waiting.