



THE SEARCH FOR GEORGE WASHINGTON

— STUDY GUIDE —

MOUNT VERNON
Discover the Real George Washington



The History Channel® Presents:

SAVE OUR HISTORY®:

THE SEARCH FOR GEORGE WASHINGTON

AN ORIGINAL DOCUMENTARY

He may be the most iconic figure in American history – as the nation’s first president, George Washington is considered by many to be the “father” of the United States. But in many ways, Washington remains shrouded in myth, his actual life often overshadowed by distorted images and tales. *Save Our History: The Search for George Washington* chronicles a contemporary effort to recover a more authentic view of our foremost statesman. On location at Washington’s home at Mount Vernon, this program follows the work of a team of historians, anthropologists, scientists, artists and craftsmen assembled from four continents to accomplish one goal – to re-create an exact image of this legendary founding father.

Save Our History: The Search for George Washington details the efforts of the team at Mount Vernon to discover Washington’s true identity and create an accurate depiction of what he looked like at different stages of his life. In the fall of 2006, a new museum and visitors’ center opened in Mount Vernon, highlighting a fresh and updated perspective on his life and work. Taking center stage at the museum are three life-sized figures of Washington: the 57-year-old taking the oath of office as president, the 45-year-old commanding general and the 19-year-old surveyor. There has never been a serious attempt to accurately depict Washington’s life until now. This documentary features exclusive interviews with historians, explanations of special computer modeling techniques, and original busts of Washington from the 1700s to show how his image has changed over time. The film provides an excellent forum for discussions of how the new technology combined with archival research can bring fresh understanding and insight into the study of the past.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Save Our History: The Search for George Washington would be useful for high school and middle school classes on United States History, Military History, European History, and Colonial History. This documentary fulfills the following guidelines as outlined by the National Council for History Education: (1) Values, Beliefs, Political Ideas and Institutions; (2) Human Interaction with the Environment; (3) Patterns of Social and Political Interaction; and (4) Comparative History of Major Developments.

VOCABULARY

Using the dictionary at www.merriamwebster.com, an Internet resource such as www.history.com, or an encyclopedia, students should define or explain the significance of the following terms:

agony
approbation
arcane

commissioned
demur
expeditious

obfuscate
providence
waistcoat

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the core mission of the team assembled in this documentary? What skills and methods do you think were most important and helpful in accomplishing their goals?
2. When you think of George Washington, what images and adjectives come to mind? What does it mean for a historical figure to become an “icon”? Do you think Washington falls into this category?
3. What is PRISM? How do you think this kind of technology has changed historical interpretation?
4. Why do you think historians at Mount Vernon decided not to exhume Washington’s body? What do you think might have been some of the consequences if they had decided to pursue this option?
5. What types of hurdles did the team have to overcome in order to accurately re-create the model of Washington at each of the three stages they depicted?
6. Describe some of Washington’s defining physical characteristics as discussed in this documentary. What was unique about Washington’s physique? Why do you think people are so curious about the features and likenesses of leaders from the past?
7. What is kept at the Morgan Library in New York City under tight security? How did this object help re-create the 57-year-old Washington?
8. Based on what you learned from this documentary, what do you think were the most significant turning points in Washington’s life and career?
9. Describe the process through which the computer models generated from research became re-creations of Washington. Which steps in this process were independent of computer technology, and which were dependent upon them?
10. How did this documentary change your understanding of Washington’s life, image, and likeness? How do you think the technology used at Mount Vernon could be applied to other historical research projects?

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

WHAT WOULD GEORGE THINK?

The goals of the Mount Vernon project were to uncover a more accurate image of George Washington’s physical likeness. Washington’s identity, as we know, consists of not just his physical shape but also his intellect, personality, and approach to leadership. For this activity, write a letter from Washington’s perspective responding to these efforts to discover his image and likeness.

YOUR OWN WASHINGTON

George Washington has been called “America’s Renaissance Man.” What does this term mean? Before and after his presidency, Washington took on many different roles, contributing in both short- and long-term ways to the development of the United States. On a poster board, sketch a scene from George Washington’s life that you think is of particular significance. After you have finished, write a one-page synopsis explaining why you think your scene depicts an important contribution by Washington and its context within his life and career. Present your ideas to the class after both the sketch and paper are completed.

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES (CONT.)

IN SEARCH OF HISTORY

The innovative PRISM technology has opened up new doors for historians, allowing them to model and envision historical figures in fresh ways. Imagine that you were going to conduct a similar project dedicated to depicting another historical figure. Which person from history would you choose, and why? Deliver a short report to your class or group explaining your choice and rationale for the historical figure you have chosen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOOKS

Ellis, Joseph. *His Excellency: George Washington* (Knopf, 2004).

Garrett, Wendell (ed). *George Washington's Mount Vernon* (Monacelli, 1991).

Heilbroner, Joan. *Meet George Washington* (Random House Books for Young Readers, 2001).

Washington, George and Dorothy Twohig. *George Washington's Diaries: An Abridgement* (University of Virginia Press, 1999).

WEBSITES

Official website of George Washington's Mount Vernon estate and gardens:

www.mountvernon.org

A tour of George Washington's home on **The History Channel**®:

www.historychannel.com/classroom/workshop

The Morgan Library:

www.morganlibrary.org

Official website of PRISM:

www.prism.asu.edu