

George Mason: Unknown Founding Father and Champion of the Bill of Rights

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Goals of Project: The goals of studying George Mason are two-fold. First, George Mason was a founding father that few know about. Students should question the fact that history focused on the people who signed the Constitution and left out those that didn't. This gives students a chance to look at history from a different aspect and see that the Constitutional Convention was full of disagreement and compromise. Many men played a part in the creation of the Constitution yet only a few are recognized.

The second reason to study George Mason is because we do a founding father's study for eighth grade Social Studies. The students pick a founding father, research him and the culminating project is to dress up as their person and hold a Constitutional Convention where they answer specific questions, in character. They also write a mini-report on their founding father. I use George Mason to role model my expectations for them when they do their research and presentation. By me going first, I break the ice for them. They are clear on what they have to do and they see me taking a chance in character making it easier for them.

Primary Source List

The Constitution of the United States of America – the document that the founding fathers wrote is integral to the study of this unit.

The Articles of Confederation – An introductory document to help highlight the changes needed in the Constitution. It also helps to explain what some of the founding fathers were in disagreement over.

The Declaration of Independence – helps to support the study of the Constitution.

The Virginia Declaration of Rights – written mostly by George Mason, it highlights important pieces of the Constitution that were originally left out and later added with support from Thomas Jefferson.

The Federalist Papers and The Anti-Federalist Papers – helps students to understand some of the issues surrounding the writing of the Constitution.

Quotes of George Mason – analyze and interpret the man's words to help understand him better.

Gunston Hall – the home of George Mason housing many original pieces of furniture.

Quotes of Thomas Jefferson and George Washington – give insight in to their neighbor George Mason.

Mason Papers at the Library of Congress – source of quotes, insight.

Secondary Source List

Robert A. Rutland, ed., *The Papers of George Mason* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1970). Great source for specific quotes.

<http://www.gunstonhall.org> - website loaded with information! See Gunston Hall, and links to specific information. Almost as good as going there yourself.

Call to Freedom, Sterling Stuckey and Linda Kerrigan-Salvucci. Textbook used in class.

<http://www.historychannel.com>

<http://www.archives.gov/exhibits>

<http://www.gmu.edu> - George Mason University site with information about their namesake.

National Geographic Society

<http://www.loc.gov> - Library of Congress website

National Archives and Records Administration. The Founding Fathers Page. From Revolutions to Reconstruction Project.

Assorted pictures of George Mason

Video: *George Mason The Man*

Reproductions of outfits worn during the Constitutional Convention.

Central Questions:

- Who was George Mason?
- Why was he important as a founding father of our country?
- What is *The Virginia Declaration of Rights*?
- How did the *Virginia Declaration of Rights* influence the U.S. Constitution?
- What principles were most important to George Mason?

Challenge Questions:

- How can George Mason be anti-slavery and own slaves at the same time?
- George Mason did not sign the U.S. Constitution. How does this exemplify irony?
- Could the Mason plantation have survived without slavery?
- Does economics interfere with principles?
- Is it ok to give up what you believe in to achieve consensus?

- Is consensus and unanimous the same thing when it comes to decision-making?
- Do you have to be famous in history to have been important?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to discuss George Mason, who he was and why he was important in history.
- Students will be able to discuss the importance of The Bill of Rights, both the Virginia version and the U.S. Constitution.
- Students will be able to properly research and model their founding father based on the George Mason model.

Prior Knowledge:

In order for students to be able to understand and acquire knowledge from this unit, they must have a basic knowledge of the birth of the nation. They must know that the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution are important documents. Students should have research skills, be able to read and write, and know how to take notes while researching. They should understand that the founding fathers are the people responsible for the birth of the nation.

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Lesson #1

Class: 8th Grade U.S. History

Class Time: 50 minutes

Projected Outcome: Students will see the required research for their projects as it is role modeled through George Mason. Students will see how they will be expected to act during the reenactment of the Constitutional Convention. Students will learn important facts about George Mason such as why he didn't sign the U.S. Constitution, and why he wrote the Virginia Declaration of Rights.

Come into class dressed as George Mason. Follow the worksheets (see attached) verbally. Talk in first person as George Mason answering the questions on the worksheets. (25 minutes)

Show pictures of George Mason. Show statue of him at George Mason University (go to <http://www.gmu.edu> for picture). 5 minutes

Give a quote as George Mason and ask the class what I (he) meant by it. Quotes can be found at: <http://www.gunstonhall.org> (10 minutes)

Play the George Mason trivia game. <http://www.gunstonhall.org> (10 minutes)

Extra Credit option for Homework: Find a fact about George Mason that I didn't mention today. Write it down, where you found it, and you will get 5 points toward your next Social Studies test.

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Lesson #2

Class: 8th Grade U.S. History

Class Time: 50 minutes

Projected Outcome: Students will see the required research for their projects as it is role modeled through George Mason. Students will see how they will be expected to act during the reenactment of the Constitutional Convention. Students will learn important facts about George Mason such as why he didn't sign the U.S. Constitution, and why he wrote the Virginia Declaration of Rights.

Come into class dressed as George Mason. Sit down and pretend to put the finishing touches on the *Virginia Declaration of Rights*. Hand out the primary source document to the students. Have them read through in groups and try to interpret what it means. (15 minutes)

Discuss the document as George Mason and have students ask questions about the document. (15 minutes)

Show changes and then final copy of document. Elicit from students why they thought the document was changed. (15 minutes)

Introduce data based questions and explain that tomorrow in class we will have a data based activity. (5 minutes)

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Lesson #3

Class: 8th Grade U.S. History

Class Time: 50 minutes

Projected Outcome: Students will learn about data based questions and how to write a response to a data based question. .

The question given to students is: *George Mason Didn't Sign the U.S. Constitution. What were the primary reasons for this action?*

They will have access to the mobile laptop lab and I will have copies of documents such as The Virginia Bill of Rights (working copy to final), George Mason's notes, and historical facts about the man.

They will also have a structure for their writing on the board.
(see www.upstatehistory.org/services/DHP/DBQ.html).

The class is devoted to finding reasons and writing. Any writing not finished will be done for homework.

Assessment:

- Rubrics (see <http://www.rubistar.org> to create your own rubrics)
- Class participation: discussions, questions.
- Data Based Question writing
- Research and note taking
- Founding Father report
- Founding Father role play
- Quizzes
- Group work

Resources:

- Videos (DVD, cd, television and tape/cd players)
- Textbooks
- Costumes
- Computer lab
- Primary and Secondary sources

Accommodations:

- Visual cueing
- Use of overhead and whiteboard
- Use of hands-on materials
- Heterogeneous grouping
- Paraprofessional available
- Alpha Smarts for keyboarding notes

Reflection

Castleton State College was the setting for this year's Teaching American History course, The Enduring Legacy of the American Revolution: Liberty, Freedom and Equality. The course started in the summer of 2007 and continued throughout the year, culminating in April of 2008. The time structure of the course is a great benefit as the

students, myself included, can immerse ourselves in the topic while receiving feedback from our peers and group leader when we meet during the year. The meetings are balanced, interesting, and give everyone a chance to check in on each other to make sure we are comfortable creating our final projects.

The summer seminar had many interesting speakers and topics. The week started off with Willard Sterne Randall discussing his book, Our Founding Fathers: Revolutionary Minds, Enduring Visions. It was a good way to start the week and the course as the focus was on heroes of the 18th century who advanced liberty. It was here that I started thinking about specific people that I might want to study.

The next day, we had a presentation by Michael Dwyer, a teacher at Otter Valley Union High School, and former teacher of the year. His topic was iconography of revolution and the symbols that shaped American culture. Michael is an interesting presenter. He came prepared with a power point presentation using state of the art technology with a smart board, and some really helpful handouts. Thanks to Mike, I wanted to put a technology component in to my lesson.

On the third day, our presentation was by one of our colleagues, Kraig Hannum. Kraig is a teacher at Manchester Middle School. He spoke about a lesson that he had used called Walking in the Shoes of Our Forefathers: A Perspective. He was entertaining and knowledgeable. I truly related to what he was saying as we both teach middle school and understand the unique beings that inhabit 7th and 8th grade. Kraig reminded me that I have to be genuine to this age group when I start to plan my lesson.

The next day, we went to Hubbardton Battlefield. I hadn't been there in a long time. I used to teach in Castleton and the battlefield was an important part of our local history component. It is an amazing place but I sense such sadness whenever I go there. When the wind blows up on the hill, I can almost hear the moans and groans of the many wounded and dying soldiers that were left behind at this sight. We were fortunate to have a guide, Carl Fuller, who is invested in this place. He grew up on the battlefield and is truly a walking encyclopedia of the area and its events. He reminded me how important it is to bring the students to the history whenever possible.

The final day of the summer seminar was a road trip. With the help of docent Paul Andriscin, we spent over twelve hours traveling the route of the revolution. I was hesitant to go at first as I had hurt my back and didn't know if I could sit on a bus for the amount of time required for our trip. While, I did end up pretty stiff and sore, I found the trip more than worth the bit of pain I endured when I arrived home. We started at Washington's Headquarters in Newburgh, NY. I had never been to this site or to Newburgh. I grew up about 30 miles south of Newburgh and had always thought of the city as a bit dangerous. I was surprised to see the amount of diversity there. After being in Vermont, any ethnic group is diversity. The city seems to be a haven for many different people from a variety of places: Vietnamese, Spanish culture from all over, Chinese, Korean, Brazilian, I even saw some Russian influence. The headquarters was really beautiful, overlooking the Hudson. Sadly, right below it was a closed factory, a reminder of the days of robber barons and prosperity for Newburgh.

From the headquarters, we drove to Saratoga, bypassing the Knox Headquarters that was on our schedule as we were short on time. We had overstayed Newburgh because our guides were very detailed and enjoyed explaining intricately the details of the site to people they knew would appreciate the information. Saratoga is a massive site and we did most of our touring by bus, driving through the park. This was an amazing source of information and I enjoyed being at the site as Paul discussed the various details of the war. Later when I told my students about this trip, they asked me if we could do it too!

The seminar was more than field trips and guest speakers. Every day, with the exception of the final day, we spent time researching and developing our proposal for our project. I really appreciated this time as the process is complex and I had many questions along the way. Having access to experts and colleagues proved invaluable to my final decision on my project.

I had been thinking of the person I would want to study. I knew that this person needed to be an 18th century hero, technology would be part of the project, I needed to make it relevant to my 8th graders, and I wanted to incorporate some sort of field experience to make it relevant for them.

My decision to study George Mason had a personal perspective. My daughter had applied to and decided to enroll at George Mason University. My curiosity was piqued, who was this man? I had been teaching founding fathers for a few years and his name did not appear on the list. I am sad to admit, I had never heard of him, so I read the school information entitled, *George Mason, the Man*. I was shocked to learn of his major role in the founding of our country, his friendships with his neighbors, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, and his strong belief in a Bill of Rights for our Constitution, just like the one he had written for the Commonwealth of Virginia. I had my project!

I have greatly enjoyed getting to know George Mason. I researched and took my own advice, traveled on a field trip to the source, George Mason's homestead. I saw a beautiful place, got a much better perspective on the enigma he was, and greatly enjoyed talking to the historians on site. They were so happy and grateful that someone cared about this man. We shared theories and discussed possibilities. I know that this project is my favorite of any history project I have undertaken so far. I was able to tie in a personal aspect with something relevant to my students. Because of this, the project I developed was relevant, personal and interesting. The perfect recipe for 8th grade! The students loved it and I did too. One of my students said it best, "Can we go to Virginia and spend time with George Mason like you did?"

National History Standards (5-12)

Era 3

Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s)

Standard 2: The impact of the American Revolution on politics, economy, and society

Standard 3: The institutions and practices of government created during the Revolution and how they were revised between 1787 and 1815 to create the foundation of the American political system based on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights

Era 4

Expansion and Reform (1801-1861)

Standard 3: The extension, restriction, and reorganization of political democracy after 1800

Annotated Bibliography

Berkin, Carol. *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for Independence* New York: First Vintage Books Edition, February 2006.

Berkin explores the various aspects of women's contributions to the revolutionary movement. This author explores the different cultures of women and how their experiences varied. The American Revolution gave women the chance to step out of their traditional roles of wife, mother, and subservient female, and make a difference in the direction of the war. Sadly, they felt the need or the pressure to return to these roles at the end of the war. All was not lost, however, as women were finally recognized as needing to be educated and many schools for women were formed. Other rights, such as the right to vote and own property, would be delayed for many years. The author offers various insights to women of different cultures and how they handled the war, by far the most important part of the book.

Butterfield, Herbert. *The Whig Interpretation of History* New York – London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1965.

While an interesting concept, this book falls short of expectations. You might feel that you will receive another perspective, or a different aspect of this period in history, but you don't. Actually, everything you need to know about this book can be found out by reading the back cover.

Randall, Willard Sterne. *Alexander Hamilton* New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003.

This book is a great read. It takes us in to the life of a man many loved and many hated. We all know the basics of Alexander Hamilton, born on the Caribbean island of Nevis illegitimately, to dying in a duel with Aaron Burr. But did you know that as an apprentice at 13, he learned what would become the basis of the American finance system? This and many more interesting facts are found in this well researched and entertaining book. Alexander Hamilton the man is uncovered in few ways people have seen before. His arrogance, which covered his insecurities, his poor judgment, and weakness for women

Annotated Bibliography (continued)

Randall, Willard Sterne. *Alexander Hamilton* New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003. (Continued)

are just some of the topics covered. This book was useful in class as well. If your students (I would suggest 8th grade and up) are studying the founding fathers, this is an interesting addition to their research.

McCullough, David. *1776* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005.

The book is about far more than the American Revolution, it is about the people of America and how they faced the battle of their lives. It introduces the viewpoint of many different people going through the same thing. It even offers insight to George Washington and his feelings being a first time commander leading his troops into war. The detail is amazing. There are over 70 pages of source notes to corroborate the information. It was written to give even more background to a war and time that we still can learn more about. It is a great resource to use in class if studying the American Revolution and or the founding fathers. It is useful in helping to understand George Washington and why he did some of the things he did later in life, after the war. I did not need this information for my research but still found it informative.
