George Washington: The American Cincinnatus A Script and Lesson Plan

Sarah Pica Cameron High School Cameron, Wisconsin

Objectives:

- Students will learn why George Washington is the "American Cincinnatus."
- Students will learn George Washington's importance during the Founding Era.

Lesson Procedures (This lesson should take two to three 48 minute class periods.)

- Students will have studied the War for Independence and will have read and discussed General Washington's resignation speech.
- Students will consider Five Essential Questions regarding for two paintings (handout #1) by studying two paintings and searching for additional information about these paintings on the Internet. When the Five Essential Questions have been completed, the class will discuss their finding.
- Students will read an article (handout #2) to learn more about the legend of Cincinnatus and discuss the reasons why Washington is hailed as the American Cincinnatus.
- The class will read "An Imaginary Gathering" and discuss what they learned about the importance of George Washington during the Founding Era.

Links to Classroom Materials

- 1. <u>Visuals</u>: Angelica Kauffmann's *The Return of Cincinnatus* with analysis chart and John Trumbull's *General George Washington Resigning His Commission* with analysis chart
- 2. <u>Essay</u>: Archer, Richard. The Spirit of Cincinnatus: George Washington and the Triumph of the Self.
- 3. <u>An Imaginary Gathering: A Script</u> A committee gathers in Alexandria, Virginia at Gadsby's Tavern to design a memorial to George Washington.



	The Return of Cincinnatus by Angelica Kauffmann
Who	
What	
Where	
When	
Why	



	General George Washington Resigning His Commission by John Trumbull
Who	
What	
Where	
When	
Why	

The Spirit of Cincinnatus: George Washington and the Triumph of the Self by

Richard Archer July	5, 2010

[He will be] the greatest man in the world.

--Great Britain's King George III, on hearing of Washington's retirement from the Continental Army

It was May of 1782. The Continental Army of the United States, under the command of General George Washington, had emerged victorious in the War for Independence. The once-mighty British army, under Lord Cornwallis, had surrendered. In the ensuing euphoria, Washington had become a demi-god, and plots to crown him as King of America were openly discussed, even among Washington's own men.

General Washington received a letter from Colonel Lewis Nicola, proposing that the Continental Army could easily make him King of the newborn nation. Washington's response -- so atypical of heroes and conquerors throughout history -- was one of "great surprise and astonishment". "Be assured, Sir," Washington insisted to Nicola, "no occurrence in the course of the War, has given me more painful sensations than your information of there being such ideas existing in the Army as you have expressed, and I must view with abhorrence, and reprehend with severety. I am much at a loss to conceive what part of my conduct could have given encouragement to an address which to me seems big with the greatest mischiefs that can befall my Country. If I am not deceived in the knowledge of myself, you could not have found a person to whom your schemes are more disagreeable ... Let me conjure you then, if you have any regard for your Country, concern for yourself or posterity, or respect for me, to banish these thoughts from your Mind, and never communicate, as from yourself, or any one else, a sentiment of the like Nature."

It is said that Nicola was so stung by Washington's rebuke that he wrote the General no less than three letters of apology.

George Washington is well known not just for being the Hero of the Revolution and America's first President, but also for what he **didn't** do. In 1783, Washington could have made himself King of America, but instead he resigned his commission as commander of the Continental Army; in 1797, he left the office of the Presidency even though he could easily have won a third term. He's become the American version of Cincinnatus, the Roman statesman who twice relinquished leadership of the Roman Empire to return to his farm.

It's become a quaint and puzzling story in our nihilistic age. Trying to see it through a cynical lens doesn't quite work. The typical bugaboos of human nature -- greed, power, pride -- just don't explain it. Why did George Washington do what he did? What was in the man's mind? What does it mean for us, and what can we learn from it? What does the American Cincinnatus have to say to us today?

In *His Excellency*, his heralded biography of Washington, Joseph J. Ellis underscores "the truly exceptional character" of Washington's act. "Oliver Cromwell had not surrendered power

after the English Revolution. Napoleon, Lenin, Mao, and Castro did not step aside to leave their respective revolutionary settlements to others in subsequent centuries. . . . Whereas Cromwell and later Napoleon made themselves synonymous with the revolution in order to justify the assumption of dictatorial power, Washington made himself synonymous with the American Revolution in order to declare that it was incompatible with dictatorial power." Ellis thus reminds us that Washington, in relinquishing power -- not just once, but twice -- was bucking an imperialist pattern that stretched back to the days of the Roman and English republics, and which, sadly, continues to this day.

Joseph Campbell might have called this pattern "ego imperialism," "trying to impose your idea on the universe." "That's what's got to go," Campbell insisted in *The Hero's Journey*. "Your ego is [only] your embodiment and your self is your potentiality and that's what you listen to when you listen for the voice of inspiration and the voice of 'What am I here for? What can I possibly make of myself?" The great task of the hero, Campbell tells us, is "not to eliminate ego, it's to turn ego and the judgment system of the moment into the servant of the self, not the dictator, but the vehicle for it to realize itself. It's a very nice balance, a very delicate one." It is also a lesson that every American citizen, of any station, would do well to heed.

And it was a lesson engraved in Washington's psyche by Masonic philosophy and ritual. Unfortunately, Ellis never mentions Washington's involvement in Freemasonry -- a lamentable omission, since Masonic beliefs provide deep insight into Washington's mind and heart. For example, in the *Crata Repoa*, an 18th-century work of Masonic philosophy, a ritual is described in which a king "meets [the initiate] graciously and offers the aspirant the royal crown of Egypt," as Masonic scholar Manly P. Hall recounts. "This pantomime suggests that part of the New Testament where Jesus, as the neophyte, is offered the kingdoms of the earth if he will give up his spiritual mission. ... The neophyte takes the crown and, throwing it upon the ground, tramples it under foot. This symbolizes the final conquest of pride, egotism, and the love of power. The initiate refuses the crown of the physical world because his kingdom is not of that world but of the hidden world of spirit."

Unfortunately, too many of us allow our egos unlimited rule. The tragic result... is a life within "a self-centered world, a world in which one will never find true courage, self-confidence, communal sense, or understanding of common values." This "ego imperialism" Washington saw, in his day, in the form of the "spirit of party." "The disorders and miseries which result," he warned us in his Farewell Address of 1797, "gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an individual. And, sooner or later, the chief of some prevailing faction, more able or more fortunate than his competitors, turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of public liberty."

If rule by the ego is "tyranny", then "individuation" is "independence," in which all parts of our psyche function in integrated unity, free from venal, divisive passions and motives. Washington could just as well have been speaking of this integration when he delivered his Farewell Address:

"The unity of government, which constitutes you one people, is also now dear to you. It is justly so; for it is a main pillar in the edifice of your real independence; the support of your tranquility at home, your peace abroad; of your safety; of your prosperity; of that very liberty which you so highly prize. . . . To the efficacy and permanency of your union a government of the whole is indispensable. No alliances, however strict, between the parts, can be an adequate substitute."

In The American Soul, Jacob Needleman urges us to read Washington's words as "referring to the need for both the nation and the individual self to turn within for strength, not to the egoistic impulses of one or another self-serving part of human nature, but to the inner self that represents the fountainhead of inner unity." However flawed and human George Washington may have been, his words and actions in stepping down as commander of the army and as Commander in Chief show us the importance of taming our venal, egoistic ambitions, passions and prejudices in the service of a greater good.

The Script

Sources Used in Script

Jean-Baptiste Donatien De Vimeur to George Washington, Newport, 12 February 1781

<u>Freemasonry: A Fraternity United. Facts About Freemasonry</u>, George Washington Masonic

Memorial Association

First in War, First in Peace, and First in the Hearts of His Countrymen, Hillary Hughes,

George Washington's Mount Vernon

An Assembly of Demigods: Word Portraits of the Delegates to the Constitutional Convention,

John P. Kaminski and Timothy D. Moore

Preble's Boys, Omeka RSS

Cincinnatus, Robert Hardy

Virginia's Grand Masters, 1778-2013, Robert Simpson

The Society of the Cincinnati, The Society of the Cincinnati

The Setting

In May 1802, a committee gathers in Alexandria, Virginia at Gadsby's Tavern to design a memorial to George Washington which will be located in Alexandria.

Roles

Moderator John Gadsby John Jay

Alexander Hamilton

Major General Henry Lee III

Lieutenant Etienne Villeneuve

Midshipman Lewis Warrington

Mary Miller

Abigail Adams

Colonel Lewis Nicola

Alexander McRae

John Gadsby: Good evening my distinguished guests, welcome to Gadsby's Tavern. Please make yourselves comfortable and partake freely in enjoying the refreshments. I am honored to be your host and I am at your service. I will now turn these proceedings over to your moderator.

Moderator: Thank you, Mr. Gadsby. We are honored to enjoy your hospitality in this charming tavern. We are indeed fortunate my friends that General Washington was the man to lead our revolutionary army, preside over the Constitutional Convention, and be our first President.

Committee Members: Hear, hear! Huzzah Washington! Etc.

John Gadsby: If you would all do me the honor, I would like to propose a toast to General Washington and this committee. It is going to be a challenging endeavor to do this man justice in a proposed memorial to his legacy. How could we adequately immortalize his service to our new nation? May the spirit of General Washington and the benevolence of God guide our earnest efforts. Cheers.

Committee Members: Cheers!

Moderator: I would like to take a few moments to introduce our esteemed committee members whose purpose is to create a memorial in our beloved hero's honor.

Mr. John Jay, Governor of New York

Major General Alexander Hamilton, President General of the Society of the Cincinnati Major General Henry Lee III

Midshipman Lewis Warrington, Grandson of Comte de Rochambeau, representing the Comte

Mrs. Abigail Adams, representing former President John Adams

Mrs. Mary Miller

Mr. Alexander McRae, Grand Master of Virginia Freemasons

Colonel Lewis Nicola

Lieutenant Etienne Villeneuve, representing the Marquis de Lafayette Thank you esteemed committee members. Now for the business at hand. Let's generate and discuss some ideas. Mr. Gadsby generously volunteered to take notes. Thank you, Sir.

John Gadsby: It is my pleasure.

Alexander Hamilton: The memorial should be named *George Washington: American Cincinnatus* with Major General Lee's quote, "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

Henry Lee: I would be honored if my words were a part of this memorial. I had the pleasure and honor of serving with the General during the war and we were great friends until his death.

Moderator: Yes, I remember your eulogy of the General that you addressed to Congress. Very touching indeed. General, you were fortunate to have known him as a soldier as well as a retired citizen.

Henry Lee: Indeed, as I stated in his eulogy, "He was second to none in the humble and endearing scenes of private life; pious, just, humane, temperate and sincere; uniform, dignified and commanding, his example was as edifying to all around him, as were the effects of that example lasting." It would be fitting to have him represented as a farmer and a soldier.

John Jay: Where exactly will this memorial be placed?

Alexander McRae: The Alexandria Lodge of the Virginia Freemasons are sponsoring and dedicating a space on the grounds of General Washington's townhouse in this city for his memorial.

John Jay: Wonderful. I suggest that the day we have the ceremonial dedication of the memorial should include a service at the General's Christ Episcopal Church. It is only a few blocks from the townhouse.

Moderator: Mr. McRae, thank you for representing the Freemasons. I know the General was very proud to be part of such an esteemed fraternity.

Alexander McRae: Yes, he very involved in the Freemasons. We wanted him to be Grand Master, but he was leading the Continental Army at the time and respectfully declined. The General exemplified what it is to be a Freemason. To become a member, one must be upright, moral and honest in character, as well as have the quest to improve oneself as one improves his community. This is Washington.

Henry Lee: Yes, the General truly represented Freemasonry and he inspired military, government, and civilian leaders to uphold its virtues.

Moderator: Grand Master McRae, will you please remind us of the virtues of Freemasonry so we can remember how the General exemplified these virtues?

Alexander McRae: Freemasons have a reverence for God and demonstrate love for their fellow man. Freemasons are kind in the home, honest in business, and courteous toward others. They are dependable at work, compassionate for the unfortunate, and resistant to evil. Freemasons help the weak, they show concern for good government, and support public education. This is Washington.

Moderator: Indeed, indeed.

Alexander McRae: Perhaps our memorial should include a Freemason symbol?

Lewis Nicola: Yes, perhaps, but it is important that the memorial illustrates his belief in the power of the people by his relinquishing positions of power more than once. Washington's love of his country and his commitment to the principles of the revolution and the republic personifies the legend of Cincinnatus.

Moderator: Yes, I agree. Please continue, Sir.

Lewis Nicola: General Washington could have been King of America at the end of the war. There were many people who would have supported this, including many of his officers. But this

honorable man of the republic would have nothing to do with such a suggestion. I learned this the hard way.

Moderator: Yes, I have heard the General was insulted by one of your letters. Please share with us the story.

Lewis Nicola: I had sent the General a letter. I meant to flatter him by illustrating how much his men honored and respected him. Unfortunately, Washington was angry and insulted by my words.

Abigail Adams: Oh dear, I would never want to be in the General's disfavor. What did you do to earn his disdain?

Lewis Nicola: I told the General that there were people who would support him being a king and that the Continental Army could easily make him King if he so desired. He was insulted because he believed I should have known by his character and actions that he would never intrigue to such a destruction of the principles of the revolution. I will regret sending this letter for the rest of my life.

Abigail Adams: Please don't be so hard on yourself. I am sure the General forgave you; he had such a kind and generous heart.

Lewis Nicola: Yes, he did forgive me, but I will never forget his response. I will take these words to my grave: "Be assured, Sir, no occurrence in the course of the War, has given me more painful sensations than your information of there being such ideas existing in the Army as you have expressed, and I must view with abhorrence, and reprehend with severity. I am much at a loss to conceive what part of my conduct could have given encouragement to an address which to me seems big with the greatest mischiefs that can befall my Country. If I am not deceived in the knowledge of myself, you could not have found a person to whom your schemes are more disagreeable ... Let me conjure you then, if you have any regard for your Country, concern for yourself or posterity, or respect for me, to banish these thoughts from your Mind, and never communicate, as from yourself, or any one else, a sentiment of the like Nature."

Abigail Adams: If you feel the need to redeem yourself, you should endeavor to uphold the virtues of Washington by serving your community, honoring the new republic, and upholding the principles of the revolution.

Lewis Nicola: I was so embarrassed and ashamed that I wrote the General three apology letters. I expressed my sadness at displeasing him, and wholeheartedly professed that nothing had ever affected me so greatly as his disappointment in my behavior. I will take your advice to heart, dear lady, and strive to ensure the General's legacy.

John Jay: Perhaps, then, we should somehow include in the memorial a demonstration of Washington refusing to be King. We could have a panel of images: one showing him turning his sword over to Congress when he resigned his military commission, one of him stepping on a crown, and one of him leaving the Presidency to retire at Mt. Vernon.

Alexander Hamilton: That is a good idea since it will also connect to the Cincinnatus comparison of Washington giving up power twice to preserve the republic. We could include Cincinnatus symbols in the panels' images. One of these symbols should be the Society of the Cincinnati Eagle.

Moderator: Yes, Washington was the first President General of the Society of the Cincinnati whose mission is to preserve the memory of the patriotic sacrifices made to win our independence. You, Sir, are now the President General of that prestigious organization as demonstrated by the Diamond Eagle badge that adorns your lapel.

Alexander Hamilton: When the beloved General died, I was honored to be named the next President General of the Society. The great lady Martha Washington gave me this magnificent Diamond Eagle badge to be passed on to all future President Generals of the Society. This lovely jewel was a gift to the General from the French Naval Officers who served with him in the war.

Lewis Warrington: Excuse me, General Hamilton, may I please intercept here a moment? Since you have brought up the French, I feel it appropriate to interject here.

Alexander Hamilton: Certainly, Sir, please proceed.

Lewis Warrington: Thank you for accepting me as a part of this committee. I have been stationed at Norfolk, and I am about to deploy on the *President* to the Mediterranean to fight the Barbary Pirates. My Grandfather Comte de Rochambeau heard about this committee and asked if I could be involved on his behalf.

Moderator: We are glad you could join us. Please give our regards to Comte de Rochambeau.

Lewis Warrington: My grandfather has always spoken highly of General Washington and held him in great admiration and esteem. The Comte will proudly provide funding for your memorial of the great General Washington.

John Jay: That is mighty generous. Be sure to convey our gratitude to your honorable grandfather.

John Gadsby: Viva La France! Long live Rochambeau!

Lewis Warrington: Let's raise a glass to the Comte.

Committee Members: Hear, hear, cheers, etc.

Lewis Warrington: One of my favorite stories passed down from my grandfather to my father to me is when Grandfather and his officers hosted a celebration of his Excellency's birthday even though the great general couldn't attend. These two great leaders had a mutual respect and affection for each other.

Moderator: Thank you, Midshipman Warrington and Godspeed on your naval deployment.

Etienne Villeneuve: Excuse me, esteemed committee members, but I am also here on behalf of a French officer. The Marquis de Lafayette sends his regards. Unfortunately, he cannot leave France at this time.

Moderator: Welcome, Sir, it is our pleasure to share this important task with a representative of the Marquis.

John Gadsby: Hear, hear, viva La France! Long live Lafayette!

Etienne Villeneuve: Please permit me the honor of reading the Marquis's affirmations of the General's greatness.

Abigail Adams: The honor would be ours, Sir. Please share the Marquis's remarks.

Etienne Villeneuve: His Excellency's genius, greatness, and nobility of his manners appealed to the hearts and veneration of the American and French armies. I was impressed with his bravery and willingness to lead his men in battle, but I was also afraid that he would be wounded or even killed. If that would have happened, there was no one who could take his place and the army and the cause would have most likely failed. I beseeched him on several occasions to be more cautious, that he was indispensible, but my efforts were in vain.

Alexander Hamilton: Yes, I remember many times he could have been lost to us.

Etienne Villeneuve: The Marquis proclaims he was the Savior of his Country, the Benefactor of Mankind, the Protecting Angel of Liberty, the pride of America, and the Admiration of the two Hemispheres.

Henry Lee: Yes, yes, I would agree with all of those titles.

Etienne Villeneuve: The Marquis loved the General like a father and they remained intimate friends until the General's death. There is a guest bedroomed named after the Marquis at Mount Vernon. I have never seen the Marquis so distraught as the day he heard of the General's death. The Marquis would approve of the suggested memorial ideas.

Moderator: Thank you, Sir, for honoring us and please send our loving regards to the Marquis. I propose a toast to our French comrades in arms, Marquis de Lafayette and the Comte de Rochambeau. Cheers!

Committee Members: Hip, hip, hurray, huzzah, huzzah, etc.

Alexander Hamilton: I propose another piece of the memorial be a large granite slab engraved with the story of Cincinnatus to illustrate the similar actions of the General. I have composed suggested text for the memorial.

Moderator: Please read to us the text, Sir.

Alexander Hamilton: Retired Roman General Cincinnatus was working in his farm field when he was requested by a group of Senators to lead an army to defend Rome against an invasion. The Senate gave him the power of dictatorship. He left his plow, took up the sword and defeated the invaders. Cincinnatus then turned over his sword and returned to his plow and farm. Like Cincinnatus, Washington left retirement at Mount Vernon to lead an army. He could have become dictator after winning the war; instead, he turned over his sword to Congress and went back to his farm. Both leaders refused to be dictator, believing in the principles of the republic. Cincinnatus and Washington both put public service above personal gain.

Moderator: So, you envision this text engraved on a granite slab along with the proposed panels?

Alexander Hamilton: Yes, along with the panels and the granite slab, there could also be a grand marble statue with the General dressed as a Roman Cincinnatus with the symbols of the plow and sword.

Mary Miller: I am sorry, but we have missed something. The General had the hearts of his soldiers. Without his leadership and compassion, we never would have won our independence. My son and many young men sacrificed their lives in the war and their voices need to be heard.

Moderator: Yes, dear lady, you are right. The General had the hearts of his soldiers. Please tell us about your son.

Mary Miller: My son was wounded and dying at Valley Forge. He wrote to me about how the General often visited him and other wounded soldiers. He would sit and listen to the men and ask about their homes and families. He was kind and soft-spoken. My son thought the world of him.

Alexander Hamilton: Yes, the General was always concerned about his men and often petitioned on their behalf. I could tell that the suffering and sacrifices of his men deeply troubled him.

Mary Miller: When my son died at Valley Forge, the General himself wrote to me commending my son's bravery. His words were a great comfort to my family and me. This is why I want to serve on this committee. I want to help honor this great man.

Henry Lee: Ma'am, we honor and appreciate your son's noble sacrifice. We will do all we can to be sure he did not die in vain and that this new nation birthed from his blood and the sacrifice of all our glorious soldiers and patriots will endure.

Abigail Adams: With all due respect, the proposals for panels, a marble statue, and a granite slab seem a bit grand in memorial to the General. We are trying to include too much, it is a challenging endeavor to attempt to represent everything Washington did for our nation as well as demonstrate all his outstanding qualities as a leader and citizen of the republic.

Henry Lee: I agree, dear lady, knowing the General as intimately as I have, I feel he would prefer something less grand, something more simple would be appropriate.

Abigail Adams: My husband was very impressed with the General when he accepted command of the Continental Army and refused to accept pay. I would like to share with you some of my husband's comments about General Washington. He wrote to me shortly after the General's congressional appointment to lead the American Army. Mr. Adams said the General was modest, brave, virtuous, amiable, and generous. He considered him one of the most important characters in the world and that the liberties of America depend upon him in a great degree. He most certainly was correct in his judgment of character.

Lewis Nicola: Indeed, Mrs. Adams. We should keep the memorial simple—something that is as dignified as Washington himself. Remember, he wanted nothing to do with being a king, something simple would be more representative of his republican virtues.

Moderator: Does anyone on the committee object to the idea of a simple memorial? Any suggestions?

Abigail Adams: I like General Hamilton's initial suggestion that the memorial should be named *George Washington: American Cincinnatus* with Major General Lee's quote, "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

Alexander Hamilton: I have no objection to a simple memorial here in Alexandria. Perhaps I will attempt to create a more elaborate memorial to the General back home in New York City.

Moderator: That is a wonderful idea, General Hamilton.

Committee Members: Yes, yes, wonderful, etc.

Abigail Adams: I envision a white marble bust sculpture atop a four-foot high Roman column. The title *George Washington: American Cincinnatus* will be engraved on the pedestal along with General Lee's quote, "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

Mary Miller: I love it, dear lady, I approve wholeheartedly.

John Jay: I approve as well. General Hamilton, I will assist you in your Washington memorial efforts when we get back to New York.

Moderator: Shall we take a vote on Mrs. Adams's memorial suggestion?

Lewis Warrington: I motion the committee proceeds with Mrs. Adams's proposal.

Alexander McRae: I second the motion.

Moderator: All those in favor, say Aye

Committee Members: Aye

Moderator: Opposed? The Aye's have it. The committee will proceed in creating a memorial to George Washington that will be a white marble bust sculpture atop a four-foot high Roman column. The title *George Washington: American Cincinnatus* will be engraved on the pedestal along with General Lee's quote, "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

Henry Lee: I propose we meet again tomorrow over a mid-day meal to iron-out the details of getting this memorial underway.

Etienne Villeneuve: I second the motion.

Moderator: All those in favor, say Aye.

Committee Members: Aye!

Moderator: Opposed? The Aye's have it. Mr. Gadsby, would you do us the honor of hosting a meeting again tomorrow?

John Gadsby: Thank you Committee Members. I am sure the General will be pleased with our proposed memorial. I would be honored to host our meeting tomorrow. Let's reconvene at noon in this room. Please stay as long as you like this evening and enjoy more refreshments.

Alexander Hamilton: I would like to end our meeting with a toast. Raise a glass to George Washington, our host Mr. Gadsby, our friends from France, and the efforts of this committee. Long live the memory of George Washington, and viva La France! Cheers!

Committee Members: Cheers!