

George Washington: Man and Myth

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INTRODUCTION

One of the things that struck me as I began teaching two years ago is the disconnect I often feel from my students. Though my education classes in college predicted as much and offered advice on how to “connect” with students, I did not foresee a problem. “I’m young; I’m hip,” I remember thinking. “After all, I am only ten years older than my students.” In fact, I remember worrying that I would be too connected with students and they would view me as a peer rather than a teacher. My worry about *that* issue was laid to rest the day one of my students guessed my age at thirty (I was twenty-two at the time).

But I have found that my education classes were correct in their prediction. Alas, I have felt and seen the disconnect in my classroom. To clarify, the disconnect is not present at all times. Rather, it manifests itself in small ways throughout the day. I find myself referencing things that happened before my students were born, or that happened when they were too young to remember. My first year of teaching, for example, I asked my students to name the war that occurred in the 1990’s; I won’t bother repeating their responses.

This disconnect is also prevalent when we study literature in my classroom. We cover mythology and the hero in my sixth grade class, and it always leaves quite an impression on me as to the students’ differing perspectives on what and who heroes are.

What is a hero? What does it take to earn the title? Judging from today’s media coverage on the subject, heroes are everywhere – from the men and women in uniform to Tom Brady of the New England Patriots. It is little wonder that children name sports heroes and Hollywood celebrities as their heroes, for they often confuse being famous for “doing something good.” Granted, students will alter their definitions for what makes a hero as they gain life experience, but this lesson is intended to accelerate the process. My goal is that in coming to know what makes a hero, students will come to understand that heroes are not very different from themselves.

UNIT OBJECTIVES

This unit has three primary objectives. First, the student will define and identify the mythical hero and the various stages of the hero’s journey as laid out by Joseph Campbell. Second, the student will read and view various portrayals and accounts of George Washington to grow acquainted with the ways in which Washington served the United States. Lastly, students will assess to what extent George Washington is portrayed as a mythical hero in popular culture.

I hope to increase students’ understanding and awareness of George Washington and his relevance to the cultural identity of the nation. I believe that in coming to know the services he provided, students will be better equipped to judge what makes a hero. Students will, therefore, gain pertinent knowledge about an important figure in our history while absorbing a model by which they can judge heroes of today.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

The lesson plans which follow are based on the sixth grade curriculum for the state of Texas. Lesson plans will focus on increasing student comprehension by establishing and adjusting purposes for reading such as reading to find out, to understand, to interpret, to enjoy, and to solve problems (10.b).

Lessons will encourage students to conduct successful research by forming and revising questions for investigations, including questions arising from readings, assignments, and units of study (13.a), to summarize and organize information from multiple sources by taking notes, outlining ideas, and making charts (13.e) and to draw conclusions from information gathered from multiple sources (13.g).

Lastly, students will analyze and critique visual images by interpreting and evaluating the various ways visual image makers such as illustrators, documentary filmmakers, and political cartoonists represent meanings (23.a), and evaluate how different media forms influence and inform (23.d).

SECTION 1: THE HERO

The word hero comes from the Greek word that means “to protect and to serve” (Vogler 35). The hero, at his core, is someone willing to sacrifice his own needs on behalf of others. Though heroes set themselves apart from the general society, they maintain their humanness as well.

There are four key elements to establishing the hero, and we have just touched on the first one. Audience identification is essential in that all heroes have qualities we relate to. Heroes should not be unnaturally “good,” but rather should possess a unique combination of contradictory impulses; in other words, they are like “us” (Vogler 36).

The second attribute of the hero is growth. The hero is generally the one in the story who learns or grows the most. A special type of hero is one called a catalyst hero – this is the hero whose strong character is set from the first page and thus causes change in others. A catalyst hero is generally less attractive to the audience, however, due to the fact that the audience cannot relate as well to his seeming perfection of moral character (Vogler 37).

The third attribute of the hero is action. The hero is usually the most active in the script (Vogler 37). It only makes sense that the hero, as the main character, should be the center of the action in a storyline.

Lastly, the hero must deal with death. The hero shows the audience how to deal with death (Vogler 38). True heroism comes when the hero offers his life up for his quest – whether he dies or not is inconsequential; what is important is that his intentions were pure of heart.

All mythical heroes follow a similar formula: they leave comfortable, ordinary surroundings to venture into a challenging, unfamiliar world on a quest. This quest can be an outward or inward journey, but what is essential is that it is universal. Some of the universal drives that propel the hero are as follows: to succeed, to survive, to be free, to be loved, to right wrongs, to get revenge, to seek self-expression (Vogler 36). The universal nature of the hero’s quest aids in our relation and identification with the hero.

The Hero’s Journey

The Hero’s Journey was first laid out by Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Christopher Vogler wrote an adaption of his work, updating the language and terminology used by Campbell, but remaining true to the original structure. I rely heavily on Vogler’s work for this paper because I find it to be straight forward and succinct – two essential qualities for the middle school teacher.

The following is a brief summary of the stages set up by Campbell and Vogler. It is important to note that the journey is a “skeletal framework” and needs to be built upon by the author, adding details and surprises. The order of the stages can change, and stages can be deleted or added to without losing the power of the mythic structure (Vogler 26).

The myth often begins among the backdrop of the Ordinary World so as to create a strong contrast with the rest of the story. This aids in audience identification, painting a picture of normalcy that many can relate to.

The Call to Adventure follows in which the hero is presented with a problem, challenge, or adventure to undertake. As mentioned earlier, this challenge can be either external or internal in nature.

Next follows the Refusal of the Call; the hero shows his humanness at this point in the story as fear and reluctance enter into the equation. The hero will turn down the adventure just as he is about to embark, again showing the audience his human side. To get past this point in the story, one of three things is needed: a change in circumstance, a further offense, or the encouragement of the mentor.

The Meeting with the Mentor prepares the hero for the unknown, giving advice, guidance or magical equipment.

The fifth stage is when the hero Crosses the Threshold, fully entering the special world (leaving the ordinary world) and facing the consequences of dealing with the problem or challenge.

Next the hero encounters Tests, Allies and Enemies; through these new challenges the hero begins to learn the rules of the special world.

During the Approach to the Inmost Cave the hero experiences the most dangerous spot in the special world. When the hero enters this fearful place, he crosses the second threshold and often pauses to collect thoughts and plans.

Eighth, the hero hits rock bottom in a direct confrontation with his greatest fear in the Ordeal. This is a “black moment” for the audience as suspense builds.

After defeating the enemy the hero takes his Reward. The reward may be knowledge, a special weapon etc.

In the Road Back the hero now faces the consequences of the confrontation and is pursued by the vengeful forces he has disturbed.

The Resurrection refers to the transformation the hero undergoes after a second life and death moment, after which he is able to return to the ordinary world reborn as a new being with new insights. The hero has now crossed the third threshold.

Lastly, the hero Returns with the Elixir, usually a treasure or lesson from the special world.

SECTION 2: GEORGE WASHINGTON

The Man

There is no question that George Washington was a true hero. Looking back upon the Greek root for “hero,” to protect and to serve, Washington certainly fulfilled this qualification. George Washington served his country throughout his entire life. As a young man, Washington fought the French in the Virginia militia. Washington came out of his retirement as a Virginia farmer and speculator in 1775 when he was chosen to command the Continental Army. Washington accepted no salary for his work, and his defeat of the British is truly what myths are made of. He

led a disorganized and ill-equipped group of boys and men to defeat the most powerful empire on the face of the Earth.

This was no easy task to be sure. One of Washington's primary challenges was maintaining his army. It is easy to understand why the British referred to Washington's army as a "rabble in arms" as they posed quite a contrast to the neat and orderly Redcoats. Washington's army had no uniforms and most had no military experience whatsoever. Officers were barely recognizable from the troops they led. Washington directed that generals, officers, and sergeants were each to wear special color ribbons to set them apart from the ranks.

Men came from every walk of life: farmers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and shoemakers. These men were resourceful by nature and accustomed to hard work, but it was no easy task to mold these men into true soldiers. Men would often wander off without asking leave, going home to tend crops or to see their wives and children. Most men could not understand the necessity for rules and order. They had, after all, voluntarily signed up and saw little problem with voluntarily leaving as well (McCullough 32-37).

Washington himself was an improbable hero. He was born in Virginia in 1732 and his father died when he was eleven. Due to these circumstances, Washington had very little formal education. He was privately tutored for only seven or eight years and had no training in Latin, Greek or law, as many of his contemporaries did. "The great teacher for Washington was experience," (McCullough 45). As a boy he copied down 110 *Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*. In this way Washington taught himself to write in a strong hand and perfected the art of expressing himself in a clear and forceful manner. He also perfected his manners, a trait which would come in very useful in his later roles in life. As to his military experience, Washington himself felt it was inadequate for the task of leading the entire Continental Army. Not only had Washington never led an army in battle, he had never commanded anything larger than a regiment (McCullough 45-49).

Improbabilities aside, we all know that Washington and his army were ultimately victorious in the Revolutionary War. There was no shortage of dark days, however. Historian David McCullough calls the winter months of 1775 "the darkest hour;" the very survival of the future nation hung in the balance. And yet it was in this darkest hour that Washington pulled out one of the most important victories of the Revolutionary War.

The morning of November 21, 1776, George Washington retreated from New York southward across New Jersey with, at most, 3,000 men. Their clothing was tattered; many were without shoes and instead wrapped rags around their bleeding feet (McCullough 247). Meanwhile thousands of civilians in New Jersey were declaring their loyalty to the British in exchange for a "free and general pardon" (McCullough 258). Thomas Paine, who had recently volunteered as a civilian aide to General Nathanael Greene, wrote:

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. (McCullough 251)

Washington took his army to the Pennsylvanian shore directly across from Trenton. Morale was low. Of Washington's 3,000 men, 2,000 men had refused to sign on again after their contract expired on December 1st and many more had deserted. Morale sunk even lower when it was learned General Lee was captured by the British on December 13th. But Washington's luck was about to change. General William Howe made the fateful decision to suspend British military operations until the spring and to move his army to northern New Jersey and New York. He left behind Colonel Rall and 1,500 Hessians in Trenton.

This was just what Washington and his beleaguered army needed. Washington had always intended to attempt an attack before settling in for the winter, and upon learning this intelligence, it only steeled his resolve to do so. The situation was dire. After other regiments joined Washington's position, he was left with 7,500 men and of these only 6,000 were possibly fit for duty (McCullough 263-270). On New Year's Day *all* enlistments would expire and even Washington conceded in a letter, "If this fails, I think the game is pretty near up" (McCullough 269).

Washington planned a three-prong surprise attack on Trenton to be carried out late on Christmas night and in the early morning hours of the 26th. Luck was on Washington's side as a nor'easter struck that night. Though conditions made it difficult for Washington and his men (indeed Washington's three-prong attack was reduced to one), the poor weather induced Rall to believe that he and his men were safe from attack. Therefore, even though Rall received two warnings of a Rebel attack, he did not prepare his Hessians for battle.

The storm severely limited Washington's forces and put the entire operation behind schedule, but Washington decided to push onwards. The Hessians were taken by surprise and the entire battle the morning of December 26th was over in forty-five minutes. Twenty-one Hessians had been killed (Rall himself), ninety were wounded and nine-hundred were taken prisoner. Only four Americans had been wounded and no American died in battle (McCullough 270-281).

Word spread quickly through newspaper accounts and word of mouth of Washington's daring night-crossing of the Delaware. Though the war was far from over – it would continue on until 1783 – these victories are seen as the turning point of the war. Americans seemed to realize for the first time that victory was possible (McCullough 283).

Washington, of course, always believed this. One of his greatest attributes was his perseverance and steadfast belief in both the American cause and the men he led. Washington learned from his mistakes, adapted his strategies and, above all else, never gave up (McCullough 293).

Another of Washington's great attributes was his constant awareness of and adherence to the responsibility he bore. Upon learning on December 27, 1776 that Congress authorized him the powers of a virtual dictator, Washington wrote:

Instead of thinking myself freed from all civil obligations by this mark of their confidence, I shall constantly bear in mind that as the sword was the last resort for the preservation of our liberties, so it ought to be the first thing laid aside when those liberties are firmly established. (McCullough 286)

And indeed this was done. After securing victory in 1783 Washington laid down his sword and returned to Mount Vernon to attempt his hand at retirement once more. This was not to be the case, as he was once again called on by the Congress to serve the nation as its first President. Though this was a great honor, it was no simple task. Washington had the challenge of "setting the tone" for this new office, and indeed was responsible for setting at least twenty-five precedents while in office (Maas 18-21).

Some of the precedents Washington created are second nature today. He initiated the practice of having a cabinet and of choosing members of the cabinet and the Supreme Court from various geographical regions of the country. Washington sought balance in the fledgling government.

Other precedents set by Washington don't strike one as particularly important, but they were decisions that had to be made all the same. One can only imagine the enormity of the task that faced the first president – seemingly small decisions took on greater importance and relevance. For example, Washington had to deal with the matter of how the president should interact with

the public. Washington chose to be accessible to the public, to an extent. He decided to have two socials per week: the first only for gentlemen and the second, Martha's tea, with both men and women. He later added a third social (a dinner). Washington also decided not to attend the funerals of private persons because he worried that it might be viewed as improper (Maas 21).

One of the most interesting precedents set by Washington was his choice for the executive title. Vice President John Adams and many senators proposed that the president should have the title "His Highness the President of the United States and Protector of the Rights of the Same" (Maas 19). Washington toned that suggestion down quite a bit and chose instead to be addressed as simply "the President."

Perhaps his greatest contribution to the office came when he relinquished it in 1797 after two terms in office. Though this single act, Washington secured the integrity of the office, bolstering the legitimacy of the new democratic system set up only a few years prior (Milkis 84).

The Myth

As of 2001, "Washington's surname has been appropriated for one American state, seven mountains, eight streams, ten lakes, 33 countries, nine American colleges, and 121 American towns" (Maas 12.) Of course, this is aside from the fact that his birthday is a national holiday and his representation appears on the dollar bill and the quarter (Maas 13). The 'mythification' of Washington poses an interesting paradox. Washington may be one of our most well known presidents, but most citizens do not know much about him.

Thanks in large part to Parson Weems, myths and legends abound about our first president. Parson Weems wrote a pamphlet biography of Washington in 1800 and it was his intention to "embellish" some of the details. Weems' goal in writing the biography was to use Washington as a means of teaching morality to the populace (Cunliffe 19).

The most popular myth Weems created was the story of George Washington and the cherry tree. As I am sure the reader is familiar with the tale, I will not bother narrating it in its entirety. The climax comes when young George is confronted by his father about the incident, and young George confesses, "Pa, I cannot tell a lie."

To illustrate just how pervasive this myth is in American culture, let me relate the following story. While on a flight home over spring break, I struck up a conversation with the man next to me and relayed to him my findings that the cherry tree story is pure fiction. This man was dumbfounded and extremely disappointed. (Virginia, there is no Santa Claus?) The man and I joked about it for a few minutes, but I knew that it had really gotten to him when, after ten minutes of silence, he again asked incredulously, "Really?"

Some lesser-known Weems' myths are the stories of Washington throwing a stone across the Rappahonock and of Washington praying at Valley Forge (Cunliffe 18). All three of the aforementioned myths are meant to teach us something about character. The cherry tree emphasizes Washington's honesty, the stone throwing incident his strength, and the prayerful Washington his piety. To Weems and other Victorian age moralizers, the end justifies the means. It was thought that a few exaggerated details and stories would not harm anyone or anything. Rather, these stories would only add to the mystique of the man and improve the moral character of the nation.

Unfortunately, these myths continue to muddle the public's perception of the true Washington. I seek to separate the man from the myth with this unit, giving students a better understanding of the true Washington. As the "Founding Father" of our nation, it is important to come to know Washington as both man *and* myth.

Washington in Art

Cartoon for Parson Weems' Fable: In 1939 Grant Wood created a memorable portrayal of the cherry tree incident. Parson Weems stands in the foreground, pulling back a curtain to reveal the scene of a young Washington (with the head of the adult president) confessing his 'crime' to his father. There are several interesting elements in this piece that one should take care not to overlook. First, a star is visible over the window of the room in which Washington resides. This may be an allusion to Washington serving as America's savior, as Wood points out that Washington has been "excessively deified" and that Washington's youth remains a mystery (Rasmussen 14). Another interesting element to the artwork is the curtain in the foreground. The fringe of the curtain resembles dangling cherries (Rasmussen 14). This playful element adds to the lighthearted feeling of the piece.

Washington Crossing the Delaware: Emanuel Leutze, living in his native Germany, painted one of the best-known images of Washington in 1851. The twenty foot-long canvas boasts life size figures of Washington and his men crossing the icy Delaware. Washington gallantly stands near the front of the small boat; one knee is poised assertively on the side of the vessel. Dawn's first light strikes Washington, illuminating his face and the American flag carried behind him. Of course, none of this is accurate. The crossing was really done in the dead of night, dawn did not arrive until four hours after Washington and his men had crossed. The uniforms and flag are inaccurate as is the boat, but it is no matter. The scene is striking and impressed itself upon American culture immediately (Rasmussen 132).

The Prayer at Valley Forge: John C. McRae's 1889 engraving portrays Washington praying before battle on one knee. There is no evidence that Washington prayed at this specific time (although it seems likely), but it is part of Parson Weems' fables about the man. This is clearly an image that has burned itself into America's consciousness; Ronald Reagan made reference to it in his second inaugural address (Rasmussen 136).

Washington as a Farmer at Mount Vernon: Junius Brutus Stearns's 1851 portrayal of Washington's farm is memorable in its simplistic exaggerations. Washington is not the central figure in this piece, as he stands to the left engaged in conversation with his overseer. The eyes are drawn instead to three slaves in the center of the piece taking a tranquil break from their work. The "mythical happiness" of the slaves is quite surprising to our present day eyes and attitudes. It is important to note, however, that this work was done on the eve of the Civil War and is obviously trying to promote slavery by tying its practice in with Washington (Rasmussen 193).

Commemoration of Washington / Apotheosis of Washington: Done in 1802 and 1830 respectively, these pieces portray a similar scene of Washington rising up to heaven in the arms of angels. In the latter, light radiates from Washington and clearly portrays him as a deity (Rasmussen 264).

CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that Washington is a true hero. I want students to understand and appreciate this fact. I also want students to develop discerning minds and to recognize that portrayals of Washington are sometimes skewed. It is important, therefore, to look at multiple sources in order to come to a clear understanding of any topic. Students must understand that sources may contain a bias so it is crucial to examine who is behind the source and what his or her motivations may be in bringing forth the information at hand. The following lessons are intended to help students recognize these facts.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson One

Time: 45 minutes

Materials: Markers, white paper, myth of Theseus (or a similar mythical hero) -- many accounts of the Theseus myth appear online.

Introduce the topic of today's class by asking students to name their heroes. Write these names on the board. Students may wish to briefly explain or justify their responses on the board.

Next distribute the myth of Theseus; students will first read this aloud as a class. After the first reading, students will be free to comment on their reactions to the myth. Several questions will prompt a class discussion of the topic: Do you consider Theseus a hero? If so, why? What specifically does Theseus do that earns him the title?

After a brief discussion of these topics, prompt students to generalize their thinking. What *makes* a hero? Refer back to the list on the board generated earlier by students. Are there common attributes that can be and associated with the hero? What do these heroes have in common?

Give students the definition of a hero: from the Greek, "to protect and to serve." Using this definition, how does Theseus fulfill his title as a hero? Give students the four attributes of the hero as stated earlier in the Unit Background Notes.

Distribute white paper and markers to students. Instruct students to read the myth of Theseus a second time to themselves and create a timeline of the major events of the myth as they go along. This timeline can be written or drawn, but must include at least seven major events from the story.

Lesson Two

Time: 45 minutes

Materials: Theseus myth, timelines (created yesterday by students) Handout One (chart with the stages of the mythical journey) – make this double-sided.

Have students examine their timelines from yesterday's class. Explain to students that mythical heroes go through a twelve-step journey. This journey can be thought of as a formula. In groups of four-five, students will attempt to guess and classify the stages a mythical hero must go through. Groups will write out their ideas on a large sheet of paper/whiteboard/chalkboard, etc. You may want to give students the first stage, the Ordinary World, to prompt them in this activity. Have students guess why most myths begin with a short description of the ordinary world. (Answer: It serves to contrast with the world the hero must encounter later in his journey.) Allow groups to work on this activity for approximately twenty minutes. When finished, groups will share their ideas with the class. Each group will share their "poster" with the class and explain their thinking behind each stage of the journey.

Next, explain the correct formula for the hero's journey as identified by Joseph Campbell and clarified by Volger. (See my unit notes). It is very important that students remember two key facts when dealing with the 12 stages:

- These stages can be inserted or deleted without distorting the power of the mythic structure.
- The journey can be an outward or an inward journey.

Distribute Handout One and have students fill in specific events from the Theseus myth next to the corresponding stages. If time runs out, finish for homework.

Lesson Three

Time: 45 minutes

Materials: Theseus myth, timeline, Handout 1, Parson Weems' story of Washington and the Cherry Tree (can be easily found on internet), *When Washington Crossed the Delaware* by Lynne Cheney.

Optional: You may also wish to introduce some of Weems' other writings about Washington, such as stories of Washington throwing a stone across the Rappahonock and of Washington praying at Valley Forge.

Have students pull out Handout 1 from yesterday's class. Does the Theseus myth fit into each of the stages of the hero's journey? (No, but it will fit into a majority of stages). Explain again to students that the myth does not need to fit perfectly into each stage, but that the stages form the basic framework for stories about mythical heroes.

Introduce topic of George Washington to students. Who is "the father of our nation?" Ask students what information or stories they have heard about George Washington. Write down student responses on overhead. Refer students to the notes on the hero from Day 1. Is George Washington a hero?

Distribute Parson Weems' account of Washington and the Cherry Tree story to students. Read aloud as a class. Is this story true? (Explain to students that the events portrayed in this story did not happen.) Why would someone write a story that is not true? Was Weems' goal to mislead the public? What can we learn from this story? (Refer to my unit notes for clarification of Weems' intentions). At this point you may wish to introduce Weems' other stories for further assessment.

Read *When Washington Crossed the Delaware*, by Lynne Cheney, to students. Have students take notes on the major events from the story. After the first reading, closely examine the illustrations with students. What words come to mind when examining each illustration? (Have a student write student response on the board).

Turn to the back of Handout 1 from yesterday: Have students fill in details from the two stories on Washington into the chart. How many stages of the hero's journey does Washington fit into?

Lesson Four

Time: 45 minutes

Materials: selection from *1776* by David McCullough, pages 273 - 281

Pass out the above-mentioned pages from *1776*. Explain to students that this information is coming from a book that was published in 2005 and has been thoroughly researched and documented and therefore should be without bias. Its author, David McCullough, is well respected and has twice received the Pulitzer Prize for other works, *Truman* and *John Adams*.

Read this selection aloud with students. The information should be familiar, as this is an account of Washington crossing the Delaware. After completing the reading, ask students their opinion of what they have read. What is their impression of Washington and his army? Have their opinions changed at all by reading this information? What have they learned?

Next, relate this information to that covered yesterday by Lynne Cheney's book. Though her book is intended for a different audience (children), has she successfully conveyed information about Washington? Was her book "true" to the actual events as told by McCullough? Did she change / add / delete important factual information? (On a whole, her work is very close to actual

accounts. Students may point out that the illustrations are construed – they perhaps glamorize Washington and the events of the day. We will discuss this topic in the next lesson).

Ask students to compare Parson Weems' accounts of Washington with Cheney's. How has history changed in its portrayal of Washington?

Lesson Five

Time: 45 minutes

Materials: Collect a few pieces of artwork of Washington from the Internet. I recommend the following:

- Cartoon for Parson Weems' Fable: Grant Wood, 1938.
- Washington Crossing the Delaware: Emanuel Leutze, 1851.
- The Prayer at Valley Forge: John C. McRae, 1889.
- Washington as a Farmer at Mount Vernon: Junius Brutus Stearns, 1851.
- Commemoration of Washington/Apotheosis of Washington: 1802/1830.

Examine the various pieces of artwork with students. (Refer to my earlier notes for further detail and brief analysis of these pieces). What words come to mind when looking at each painting? What is each painting attempting to teach us about Washington? If one had to classify each painting as a specific point in the mythical journey, how would one do so?

Extension Activity: Class debate – *Artists should only portray what is factually known about historical figures*. Format: Break class into two sections and allow five minutes for discussion among each of the two groups. Instruct each group to choose a student to present their best point to the entire class in a thirty-second opening speech. Debate will proceed with one comment alternating from each side. Allow a minimum of fifteen minutes for this activity.

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---. *The Mythic Image*. New York: MJF Books, 1974.

This text examines the myths from different cultures and the resulting artwork, tracing similarities between cultures.

The cherry tree myth is the most well-known and longest enduring legend about George Washington. In the original story, when Washington was six years old he received a hatchet as a gift and damaged his father's cherry tree. When his father discovered what he had done, he became angry and confronted him. Young George bravely said, "I cannot tell a lie; I did cut it with my hatchet." Washington's father embraced him and rejoiced that his son's honesty was worth more than a thousand trees.¹ As one Pennsylvanian observed, "The facts and anecdotes collected by the author are well calculated to exhibit the character of that illustrious man, and Christian hero." Weems knew what the public wanted to read, and as a result of his success he is considered one of the fathers of popular history. Few figures in American history are so difficult to assess as George Washington. From his first official assignment for Lieutenant-Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia in 1753 until his retirement from the Presidency in 1797, he occupied a central place in the affairs of his country, and for two long spells, in war and then in peace, he held its major office. He became a legend in his own life-time and a demi-god on his death, which occurred in December 1799. Within five days of his death, Henrietta Liston, the Scots-born wife of British Minister Robert Liston, was writing to her uncle in Glasgow that Was George Washington a religious man? Because there's a lot of lore about his profound faith. P: Right. He was a very moral man. He was a very virtuous man, and he watched carefully everything he did. But he certainly doesn't fit into our conception of a Christian evangelical or somebody who read his Bible every day and lived by a particular Christian theology. P: Woodward invented that term and used it for the first time in his attempt to debunk George Washington myths. SIEGEL: He went about describing Washington as completely useless, guided by the desire for fame and fortune and not sacrifice for his country, terribly negative view of this man. P: The 1920s were very cynical. There was a great sense of anger at Wall Street then, just as there is today.