

Teacher's Guide for Cobblestone

January 2012: A Visit to Mount Vernon

By Debbie Vilardi

Debbie Vilardi is an author of poetry, lesson plans and works of fiction. She is seeking an agent and publisher for her historical fiction novel, "Flood", set during Hurricane Katrina.

Goal: to learn more about George Washington as a gentleman farmer and explore his home at Mount Vernon.

*Always have a parent or trusted adult help with web research.

Before Beginning: Define reenactor.

"A Few Words from George Washington" by Meg Chorlian (Pages 2-5)

Pre-Reading: List what you know about George Washington.

Vocabulary: self-sustaining

Comprehension:

1. George Washington states agriculture is important to our national well-being. Why might this be true?
2. What was the role of slaves at Mount Vernon?
3. What changed President Washington's views on slavery? Why didn't he follow up on those views while in office?
4. What does President Washington do to relax?
5. How many people visit Mount Vernon annually?

Writing Activities:

1. Do you agree with President Washington's decision not to fight slavery publicly? Why?
2. Washington's will freed his slaves. Why do you think he didn't free them during his lifetime? Do you agree with this decision?

Research Topics: Mount Vernon, George Washington, 18th century farm life, slavery, United States population growth

"Miss Cunningham Takes Charge" by Mary V. Thompson (Pages 6-7)

Vocabulary: desolation, distressed

Comprehension:

1. Who owns Mount Vernon?
2. What prompted Ann Cunningham to encourage women to help save Mount Vernon?
3. What is the goal of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union?
4. Why did so many people contribute to this cause?
5. Read "Sacred Ground" on page 7. How did the Ladies' Association prevent Mount Vernon from being damaged in the Civil War?

Math activity:

1. Use information in the article to determine the year Washington died?
2. How many years passed between Miss Cunningham receiving the letter from her mother and signing the purchase agreement? How old was Miss Cunningham when she signed the agreement?

Writing Activity: Read the advertisement on page 7. Discuss the language used to persuade people to contribute. Is it convincing? Why? Would you have sent money to the Association?

Research: Ann Pamela Cunningham, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union

"Growing Pains of a Great House" by Dennis J. Pogue (Pages 8-11)

Pre-reading: Study the line drawings and pictures associated with the article.

Vocabulary: Venetian style, cupola, pediments, beveled, verdigris, façade, piazza, rusticated

Comprehension:

1. Why didn't Washington hire an architect to plan the changes to Mount Vernon?
2. What prompted Washington to begin a second phase of rebuilding?
3. What features make the dining room impressive?
4. Why did Washington want to impress visitors?
5. What is the majority of the mansion constructed of?
6. Why does it look like stone?
7. What does the weathervane symbolize?

Math Activities:

1. What is the approximate area of the dining room?
2. What is the area of the piazza?

Art Skills: Create a line drawing of a house you would like to live in.

Research: 18th century architecture

"Buzzing with Activity" by Laura Simo (Pages 12-17)

Pre-Reading: Study the maps of the property on pages 12, 13, and 16.

Vocabulary: scullions, larder

Comprehension:

1. Why were kitchens usually separated from the main house?
2. Why was salt important before refrigeration?
3. How were paint colors created?
4. Name three of Washington's innovations in American farming.

Writing Skills:

1. Imagine you worked as an overseer at Mount Vernon. Write a diary entry telling what you accomplished in one day.
2. Pick three areas of Mount Vernon and describe why they are important to the estate.

"Farming on His Mind" by Nancy E. Hayward (Pages 18-20)

Vocabulary: surveyor, fallow, harrow, gristmill, distillery

Comprehension:

1. Why did Washington switch from tobacco to grain crops?
2. Why did he rotate his crops?
3. What were some of his farming innovations?
4. What other businesses did Washington maintain?

Math Activity:

1. What is the percent increase in the size of Mount Vernon during the 40 years George Washington owned the estate?
2. About how much money did each gallon of whiskey cost?

Research: Farming innovations

"Meet Silla and Slamin' Joe" by Nancy E. Hayward (Page 21)

Vocabulary: ditcher

Comprehension:

1. What rations did the slaves receive each year and each week?
2. How did they earn extra money?
3. What did Slamin' Joe do during the week?
4. What was used to help determine the size and layout of the slave cabin?
5. Were Silla and Slamin' Joe real?

Math Activity: What is the area of the slave cabin? Compare it to the areas of the piazza and dining room in the main house.

"More than a Mansion" by Andrew Matthews (Pages 23)

"Top 8 (+2) Objects to See at Mount Vernon (Pages 26-29)

Pre-reading: Read the quote at the top of page 22.

Comprehension:

1. Why were the Orientation Center and Museum added to Mount Vernon?
2. Consider the objects on pages 26-28. What do they tell you about George Washington's personality?

Research: Ford Orientation Center, Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center

"Lights! Camera! Action!" by Gail Cassidy and Nancy E. Hayward (Pages 31-33)

Comprehension:

1. How did the staff of Mount Vernon assist the Hollywood set designers?
2. What elements in the movie were real?
3. Why did the production company work at night?
4. What had to be considered to protect the mansion and grounds?
5. What new sites are open to the public because they appeared in the movie?

Research: Movie making at other historical sites.

"I Dig History" by Esther C. White (Pages 34-37)

Vocabulary: archaeologist, boxwoods, hypothesis, excavation

Comprehension:

1. What is historical archeology?
2. What are historical archeologists hoping to learn at Mount Vernon?
3. What features were found in the garden?
4. How much wider were the paths in 1799 than expected today?
5. What else did they learn about the garden structure of that time?
6. How did they learn about the African Americans who lived in The House for Families?
7. Why is a "midden" important?
8. Describe the work of the archeology lab.

Research: Archeology at historic sites,

"Rescuing World Landmarks" by Marcia Amidon Lusted, Ill. by Bryan Langdo (Page 40-41)

Research and Report: Select one of the world landmarks to research. Report your findings.

Activities for the Issue as a Whole: Reenactors play roles at Mount Vernon.

Drama: Research your local history and reenact important events.

Writing: Create an advertisement for the position of George Washington reenactor. Consider what the actor might need to look like and what he would need to know and be able to do.