

Perceptions of the Founding Generation



Educator Guide & Lesson Plan inspired by *Guests of Honor from the Musée du Louvre: Jean-Antoine Houdon's Portraits of Americans in the Age of Enlightenment*



The Apotheosis of Franklin and Washington, About 1785, Unknown textile manufactory, English; roller printed cotton. Gift of Paul LeRoy Grigaut

Learning Target

Using Jean-Antoine Houdon's portraits of Benjamin Franklin and George Washington at the Detroit Institute of Arts, students will analyze different ways Franklin and Washington were perceived in the face of many challenges and conflicts during the American Revolutionary period.

Student Outcomes

Students will

- Discover the different ways in which early American iconic figures were perceived and celebrated in their own lifetimes at home and abroad, especially in the United States, France and England.
- Understand the multiple challenges facing Benjamin Franklin and George Washington as political and social figures of their time.
- Create a portrait of Benjamin Franklin or George Washington that reflects their personal values and accomplishments.
- Discover how portraiture can serve as a window into someone's identity.

Michigan State Social Studies Standards

Social Studies Process and Skills Standards: Grades 6-8

P1.3

Express social science ideas clearly in written, spoken, and graphic forms, including tables, line graphs, bar graphs, pie charts, maps, and images.

P3.4

Explain the challenges people have faced and actions they have taken to address issues at different times and places.

United States History and Geography

8 – U4.1

Challenges to an Emerging Nation – Analyze the challenges the new federal government faced and the role of political and social leaders in meeting those challenges.

8 – U4.1.1

Washington’s Farewell – Use President George Washington’s Farewell Address to analyze Washington’s perspective on the most significant challenges the new nation faced.

Common Core Standards Alignment

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2.B

Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2.C

Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2.D

Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2.F

Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

21st Century Learning Skills Connection

- Critical Thinking
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Creativity

Pre-visit Activities

Review the historical context of the American Revolution as presented in your curriculum. To prepare for the Houdon exhibition, divide the class into two groups, assigning one group to Benjamin Franklin, and the other group to George Washington. For homework, or as an in-class activity, students explore the life stories of their assigned figure using online resources, which can also be printed out (See Attachments).

Suggested Online Resources

Benjamin Franklin

- <http://www.pbs.org/benfranklin/index.html>

George Washington

- <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/>
- <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/resources/biography-of-george-washington/>

In class, students work in pairs, using their research to describe their assigned figure to their partner, who illustrates what they hear. Once each partner has had an opportunity to both describe their figure and to draw, debrief the activity using the questions below as a guide. Consider posting questions on the board, or printing them out on small pieces of paper for students to reference.

- What did your partner say or do that helped you understand their figure as a person?
- What was difficult about this activity?
- What did you choose to add to your description of your assigned figure? Why?
- What details about their life did you choose to leave out of your description? Why?
- What challenges did they face as political and social leaders?
- What did you find interesting or surprising about these figures?

Self-Guide

Instruct students to complete the graphic organizer entitled “Looking Closely” as they explore the Houdon exhibition.

In this activity, students make observations about multiple representations of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin and compare them.

Post-Visit Activities

Facilitate a class discussion that prompts students to reflect on their museum visit. Students should consider:

- How did your portrait of George Washington or Benjamin Franklin compare to the ones you saw in the museum? Explain.
- How were these men viewed by the artists that tried to recreate their likeness? What did you see that makes you say that?
- What can we learn about the Revolutionary War era from this exhibition?
- How did the Houdon exhibition push your thinking in new directions? What thoughts do you now have that you did not have before?
- One of the central ideas of the exhibition was that these men were both “Heroes” and “Complex.” What evidence did you see of this? Do you agree with this portrayal of Washington and Franklin? Explain.

Instruct students that they will complete a short writing assignment called a RAFT. A question is posed at the top. Students choose one option from each category before they begin the writing process. Depending on the depth of in-class study on the topics listed in the RAFT, students may need to conduct research for this assignment. Teachers can use the provided rubric to evaluate student writing, or create their own.