**I Give Him an 8 for Charisma: George Washington's Character
as a Factor in a Presidential Campaign (A Curriculum Unit)**

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The purpose of this unit is to have students explore and understand the character and achievements of George Washington. Students will use a historical computer simulation called "The Political Machine" to create a George Washington candidate (the simulation has some pre-set political figures, but it also allows students to create their own). After supplementary reading, students will assign and justify character values to their candidate, so that they can demonstrate the strengths of the historical George Washington. Character is an intangible quality, and the character of a candidate in the simulation is broken down into distinct traits (such as charisma, credibility, and military experience). Then, by running their Washington character through the election simulation, students will appreciate how character strengths and weaknesses come into play in current electoral politics.

The computer simulation "The Political Machine" came out in the fall of 2004, before the last presidential election and was well-reviewed in several publications, including *Time* magazine. The goal is to win the presidential election over the course of a 41-week "campaign." The simulation begins by allowing students to set outside conditions for the campaign (Economy, Domestic Status, World Status, and Difficulty Level). Since most students will play against the computer (the game does not allow third-party candidates, although it does permit multiplayer mode), the difficulty of success and the savviness of the computer's moves will be determined by these settings.
After setting these initial conditions, students can then choose candidates already created by the simulation (such as George W. Bush and John Kerry) or create their own. For this unit, students will use supplementary readings about George Washington to discern his character traits in order to create a Washington candidate. When students create their George Washington, they will have to address the following characteristics:
- Charisma
- Comeliness (physical attractiveness)
- Credibility
- Integrity
- Intelligence
- Media Bias (how much the press likes you)
- Military Experience
- Minority Appeal
- Religious Devotion
- Stamina (on the campaign trail)
- Fundraising Ability
- Money (initial funds the candidate begins with)

The computer begins with each trait set at 5, on a 1-9 scale, and while it may be tempting to give Washington lots of 9's, the computer allows the player to add only a total of 5

more points (although if a player reduces the rating of, say, Intelligence to a 4, then he or she has another point to add elsewhere). In other words, there are 13 character traits all beginning at a 5, with 5 more total points to add anywhere. So a player has 70 points (13 x 5 + 5) to allot to George Washington's character.

Normally, creating a new candidate is not an extensive procedure; the actual campaign is the focus of the game. But for this unit, creating George Washington is the crux. As a means of becoming acquainted with the character and achievements of Washington, students will do the following readings prior to beginning to create George:

Handouts
- "1776: Washington's War" (*Newsweek* article)
- "Education," "Religious Beliefs" (all from *George Washington: A Biographical Companion*)
- "A Man on Horseback" (Richard Brookhiser article)
- "The Mythologizing of George Washington" (Daniel Boorstin article)
- "Reflections on a Man…" (Peter Gibbon article)

Web readings
From www.pbs.org/georgewashington/collection :
- "Letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport"
- "Letter to the United Baptist Churches in Virginia"
- "Washington's Greatness"
- "Appearance and Reality"
- "Qualities of Mind and Character"

Students will be assigned these readings a week before beginning the simulation. On that day, they must bring in a paper with a paragraph (5-6 sentences) devoted to each characteristic, justifying their rating of that quality. Their justification must be based on the words and actions of the historical George Washington (or what others said about him). For example, if they give George a rating of 7 for Integrity or 3 for Religious Devotion, then their paragraph must provide examples or evidence to support such a rating. The class will spend a period, in small groups, sharing their ratings. While students will be allowed to change their ratings after these discussions, they will turn their papers in at the end of the period to be graded. In addition, students must also indicate in their paper whether George Washington would be running today as a Democrat or Republican; while there is no right answer, the key will be how they justify their reasoning.

The next day the students begin the computer simulation. They can run George against a candidate already in the computer or they could create another candidate (Alexander Hamilton? Thomas Jefferson? Abraham Lincoln?). Since the election takes place in 2004, there is something unusual about Washington giving a speech about Homeland Security; on the other hand, the simulation not does force him to take specific stances on every issue, such as abortion or gay rights. He may choose to create ads or

give speeches that address the war in Iraq (how would George feel about that?) or job creation, and issues of war and the economy were ones he had to address 220 years ago. Historians may cringe when students get into the realm of such speculation, but students enjoy it, and if they are asked to justify their choices, such critical thinking can be valuable. The structure of a campaign becomes a way of examining character.

The rest of the simulation involves the actual running of the campaign, which I won't get into here, except to say that each week, candidates must decide where to visit, what speeches to give, where to spend money, what sorts of ads to run, what media interviews to give, and what sort of operatives to hire (people to help your campaign or undermine your opponent's). Students develop an election strategy (for example, it may be fruitless for a Democrat to spend much time campaigning in the South) and constantly monitor their candidate's progress. The campaign should take two class periods.

So why explore Washington this way?

First, students will engage in interesting outside reading on Washington, but the reading will have a clear and direct purpose for them: to gather evidence to support their character ratings. Too often teachers give students history readings to do with no other function than as a springboard for discussion – which is fine, except that some students can finesse their way through a discussion without actually having engaged the readings. The paper requires students to use these readings to understand Washington's character, and the small-group discussion will help students work through their reasoning.

Second, the ratings themselves are not an isolated exercise, but have the ultimate effect of influencing his political campaign. Students will then make the connection between character and politics. In Washington's case the strength of his character was not crucial in running an electoral campaign, but it was a major reason he was the obvious choice to be the first president.

Third, students will note that character is sometimes as important as achievement in assessing an historical figure. In Washington's case, character was essential for holding the nation together and acting as a unifying force, particularly in the 1790's. One of the things that make Washington inaccessible to students is the veneer of studied aloofness. Students will be forced to look beyond that façade to see how and why Washington developed his approach to leadership. As his life opens up to students, his character will become clearer.