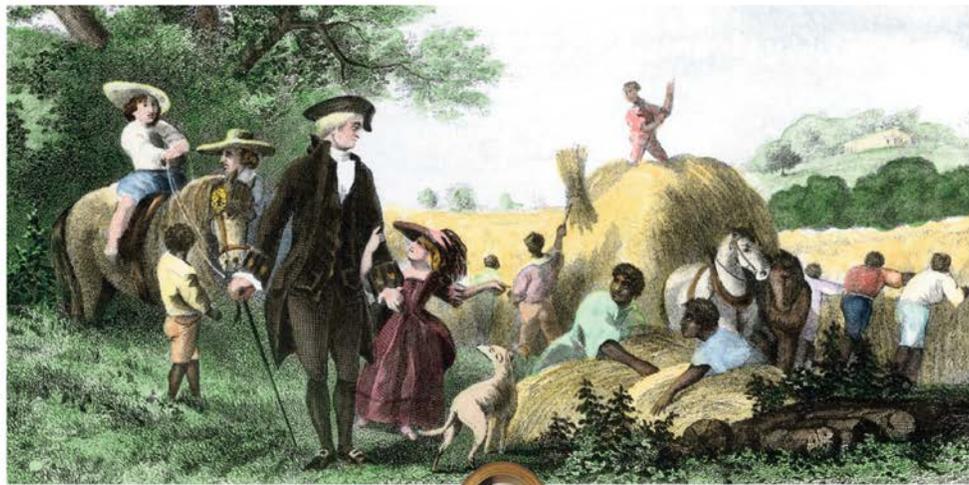


NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

COMMON CORE ALIGNMENTS AND CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

MASTER GEORGE'S PEOPLE



GEORGE WASHINGTON,  HIS SLAVES, AND HIS
REVOLUTIONARY TRANSFORMATION

BY MARFÉ FERGUSON DELANO WITH MOUNT VERNON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LORI EPSTEIN





ACTIVITIES & DISCUSSION

• Activity 1: Before Reading

Master George's People is a beautifully designed book. Take a moment with your students to browse through the pages.

R.I.6.7

Notice the variety of illustrations used—from paintings, portraits, and sketches from the period to paintings made later to recent photographs of re-enactments of life at Mount Vernon. Ask your students to talk about the different ways each of these kinds of illustrations contributes to their understanding the life of George Washington and his enslaved workers.

R.I.6.1

- Read the quotes taken from letters to and from George Washington that open chapters 1 to 5, and the excerpt from his last will and testament that opens

chapter 6. These are primary source material. As your students read *Master George's People*, have them find other examples of primary source material. Discuss with them the value of primary sources in piecing together historical events and how they help to establish the authenticity of the book.

R.I.6.7

Take a good look at the distinctive type used on the cover and for each chapter title. How does this type and color contribute to the sense of another time?

R.I.6.7

Examine the endpapers. What documents are they? Why do your students think these documents are cited in the book?

Activity 2: Support a Quotation

R.I.6.3

“First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen” is a phrase Henry Lee III used to pay tribute to George Washington in a eulogy. (Lee was a cavalry officer in the Continental Army and later Governor of Virginia and a U.S. Congressman.)

As your students read *Master George's People*, have them keep a running record of the ways George Washington fits this description. They should cite specific actions, roles he played and ways he showed his dedication to the new nation.

Activity 3: Slave Labor

Whether at Ferry Farm, George Washington's childhood home, or later at Mount Vernon, Washington relied on slave labor to get the work of the farm done. Your students will learn a great deal about the lives of slaves in this book. Chapter 1 focuses on the lives of slave children.

R.I.6.1, R.I.6.8

George Washington grew up with slaves. Slave labor was an accepted part of the world he lived in. How did this fact shape Washington's attitude toward the slave children who lived at Mount Vernon? What did he say? What did he do?

Activity 4: Washington's Life & Character

R.L.6.1

Chapter 2, “Building a Plantation,” offers readers a look at important events in George Washington's life as well as insight into his character.

After the Revolutionary War, Washington's French ally the Marquis de Lafayette visited him at Mount Vernon, a scene portrayed in the painting shown on the opposite page.

[FROM PAGE 44 OF MASTER GEORGE'S PEOPLE]



The first page of George Washington's Last Will and Testament, in which he freed his slaves. He wrote every word of its 29 pages with his own hand.

[FROM PAGE 52 OF MASTER GEORGE'S PEOPLE]



- Washington had a variety of jobs. Ask your class what they were and what skills and talents are needed for each. Create a class grid for students to contribute to, like this one:



GEORGE WASHINGTON'S JOBS

Job Title	Skills/Talents Needed
Surveyor	Precision, math skills

When the chart is complete, have the class discuss what Washington’s strengths and talents were.

Chapter 2 also discusses the many different jobs held by slaves at Mount Vernon. Ask your students to create a class grid for this as well, naming the job (i.e., carpenter or weaver) and the skills and talents needed for that.

R.L.6.1
How did Washington go about achieving his ambition “to turn Mount Vernon into a top-notch plantation, become very rich and make a name for himself in Virginia’s powerful upper class”? [page 17]

R.L.6.1
What did George Washington expect from his slaves in terms of quality and quantity of work? How did his slaves’ attitude toward work differ from his? [pages 33–36]

R.L.6.1
How did Washington acquire new slaves?

Activity 5: Slave Families

The issue of breaking up slave families is raised several times in the book.

- “One time he even helped organize a lottery to raffle off human beings....Several of the people being raffled off were children. Some of them were being separated from their parents.” [page 20]

Founding Fathers Thomas Jefferson (top), George Mason (middle), and James Madison (bottom) all claimed to hate slavery, but none of them took steps to free their own slaves.

[FROM PAGE 50 OF MASTER GEORGE'S PEOPLE]



W.6.9

Have each of your students take on the role of advocate for keeping enslaved families together. Have them write a one-paragraph essay persuading Washington not to participate in such a scheme. How might students appeal to Washington's humanity and talk about how history might one day judge him?

Chapter 3, "Private Lives" begins with a sentence from a letter Lund Washington sent to George on March 4, 1778:

"Your mother has wrote to me to send Silla down to her—which I shall do—but am very sorry to part her from Jack. He cries and begs, saying he had rather be hanged than separated." [page 24]

Here students learn that family separation not only involved parents and children, but also husbands and wives. We also learn that "family ties were as important to the enslaved individuals at Mount Vernon as they are to us today." [page 25]

R.L.6.2

How did George Washington's attitude toward separating slave families change in the mid 1770s? What actions did he take that show this change? Students should be specific.

Interpreters at Mount Vernon leave their work while the sun is still in the sky, a choice denied to slaves. In the years following the Revolution, some of Washington's enslaved people stopped hiding their feelings about their bondage. No matter how well he treated them, they still craved freedom. In 1798 Washington lamented that his "people" were "growing more and more insolent and difficult to govern."

[FROM PAGE 46 OF MASTER GEORGE'S PEOPLE]



The opening quote for Chapter 6, “Liberty at Last” is an excerpt from George Washington’s last will and testament. A replica of this document appears as the closing endpapers of the book, written in Washington’s handwriting. In his will, Washington freed his slaves (123 people) on Mount Vernon. He could not free his wife’s slaves (153 people) because he did not own them. What instructions did he stipulate as part of his emancipation of his slaves?

A 19th-century print depicts an idyllic view of George Washington and his African-American slaves at Mount Vernon, but the reality was more complex. The two white children probably represent Washington’s step-grandchildren, Nelly and Washy Custis.

[FROM FROM FRONT COVER BOOK JACKET OF MASTER GEORGE’S PEOPLE]



Activity 6: Slave Resistance

“Between 1759 and 1799, at least 47 enslaved men and women ran away from Mount Vernon.” [page 34]

R.L.6.1

Running away was one way slaves resisted slavery. What other ways did slaves have to resist their situation? What were Washington’s responses to these actions? How did he feel about slave resistance? Do your students think that these slave activities played a role in Washington’s change of mind with regard to slavery? Why or why not?

Activity 7: Washington’s Change of Heart

R.L.6.3, R.L.6.4

In Chapter 5, your students will discover some of the factors that may have led to George Washington’s turn around in thinking about slavery.

Divide your class into groups, and assign each group one of the following to research and present their findings in a report:

What was the role of black soldiers in the Continental Army?
 How did General Washington react to this initially and then later on?

R.L.6.9

What was Washington's response to Phillis Wheatley's work?
 What was the significance of their meeting? Students should read some of her work and present it to the class. Her poems can be found at the following website:

<http://www.poemhunter.com/phillis-wheatley/>

R.I.6.7

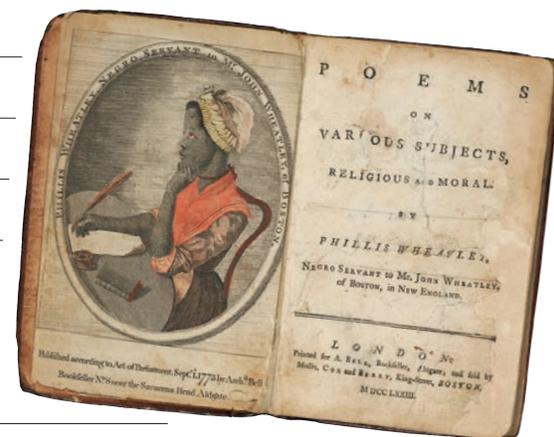
At the beginning of the American Revolutionary War, slavery was legal in all of the 13 colonies. During the Revolution, many of the states began the process of abolishing slavery. This group should prepare a chart to share with the class. Your students can research on the Internet each of the original colonies to find out when slavery was abolished. A sample chart is below:

SLAVERY IN THE THIRTEEN ORIGINAL COLONIES

State	Year Slavery was Abolished	Important People Involved	Additional Information
New Hampshire			
Massachusetts			
Connecticut			
Rhode Island			
New York			
New Jersey			
Pennsylvania			
Maryland			
Delaware			
Virginia			
North Carolina			
South Carolina			
Georgia			

A portrait of Phillis Wheatley appears opposite the title page in this collection of her poems published in 1773. Born in Africa, shipped to America, and sold into slavery as a child, Wheatley was the first African American to publish a book of poems. During the Revolution she sent General George Washington a poem that deeply impressed him.

[FROM PAGE 43 OF MASTER GEORGE'S PEOPLE]



[Vermont was not an original colony. As an independent republic, it abolished slavery in 1776. It became the 14th state in 1791. Although it wasn't a state in 1776, it is often listed as the first state to abolish slavery.]



Sitting in the doorway of an outbuilding at Mount Vernon, a male slave takes a break from work in this painting by Eastman Johnson, a 19th-century artist known for his portrayals of African-American slave life.

[FROM PAGE 20 OF MASTER GEORGE'S PEOPLE]



Activity 8: Washington's Conflict

R.L.6.1, R.L.6.3

After the Revolution and while he was President, Washington continued to have conflicting views on slavery. He relied on slavery to support his wealthy lifestyle, but he was increasingly aware that slavery was unjust. He refused to speak out in public about slavery. Yet privately he professed that slavery should be eliminated. Students should report on why he felt so conflicted, and on how, if at all, he resolved this conflict.

Activity 9: Giving Slaves a Voice

W.6.3

Between the chapters of *Master George's People*, your students can read biographical briefs of several slaves who were owned by George Washington. Using those sketches and information about slave life and culture found throughout the book, they should be able to put together interviews with the six subjects and give them a voice.

Divide your students into six media teams, each to produce a short TV-news-like interview program with the six slaves profiled in the "side bars" in each chapter. Brainstorm with them questions they would like to ask. Students should take the roles of interviewer and slave/subject. After the interviews are completed what conclusions do your students come to?

Activity 10: Debating Washington’s Position on Slavery

S.L.6.1

Read the final paragraph on page 52 in which Marfé Ferguson Delano presents her opinion of George Washington’s handling of the question of slavery. Does your class agree with her assessment? Using various decision points in the book, your students should hold a debate. One side should argue that Washington had no other choice to make with regard to owning slaves until the end of his life; the other should show how he could have freed his slaves and spoken out against the institution of slavery earlier.

Activity 11: The Concept of a Hero

S.L.6.1

When the class has finished reading *Master George’s People*, they should discuss their views on George Washington as both a slave owner and the “father of our country” Ask them to think about heroes being complicated, being human, having flaws. Have your students consider the idea that heroes are never perfect people. But we admire them because they reach beyond their flaws to make exceptional contributions to humanity. So we can still recognize the heroism that inspired Washington to risk his life to lead the country to victory over the British, his wise leadership as our first president, but also acknowledge that when it came to slavery he continued to hold slaves even though he knew it was wrong.

Activity 12: Mount Vernon Virtual Tour

R.L.6.7

Much of *Master George’s People* takes place at Mount Vernon, George Washington’s plantation in Virginia. Take a virtual tour of Mount Vernon at:

<http://www.mountvernon.org/visit-his-estate/virtual-tour-flash>

MAY WE SUGGEST?

If you’ve enjoyed a great classroom experience with *Master George’s People*, you might want to study slavery at another point in American history with the powerful biography: *Stolen into Slavery: The True Story of Solomon Northup, Free Black Man* by Judith Bloom Fradin and Dennis Brindel Fradin published by National Geographic and Margaret Blair’s *Liberty or Death*.



In this engraving from about 1785, General George Washington stands outside a military camp tent with the Declaration of Independence in his hand. The black man with the horse may represent Washington’s slave William Lee, his steady companion throughout the Revolutionary War.

[FROM PAGE 47 OF MASTER GEORGE’S PEOPLE]



COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

- **RL.6.1**
Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- RL.6.3**
Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.
- RL.6.4**
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.
- RL.6.7**
Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening to or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text, including contrasting what they "see" and "hear" when reading the text to what they perceive when they listen or watch.
- R.L.6.9**
Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics.
- RI.6.1**
Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

More than half of Mount Vernon's enslaved field workers were women, and they did some of the hardest and dirtiest chores. In their limited leisure time, slaves tended to their own small garden patches near their quarters, a scene reenacted in the picture below.

[FROM PAGE 21 OF MASTER GEORGE'S PEOPLE]



RI.6.3

Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).

RI.6.7

Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

RI.6.8

Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

W.6.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

W.6.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

SL.6.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

SL.6.2

Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

This guide was created by Clifford Wohl, Educational Consultant

Bottom, center: *Two young interpreters play with clay marbles while another hops over their game at a log cabin built to replicate the field hands' quarters on Washington's outlying farms.*

[FROM PAGE 28 OF MASTER GEORGE'S PEOPLE]



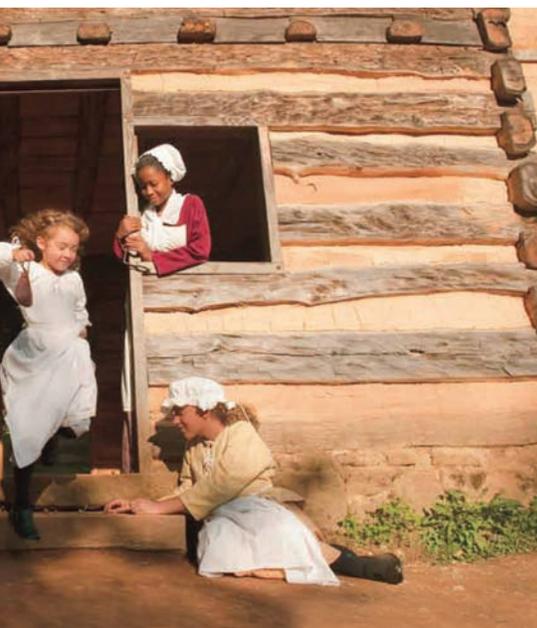
Bottom, right: *As slaves might have done in colonial times, an interpreter casts a net into the Potomac River in hopes of snagging a fresh fish for dinner.*

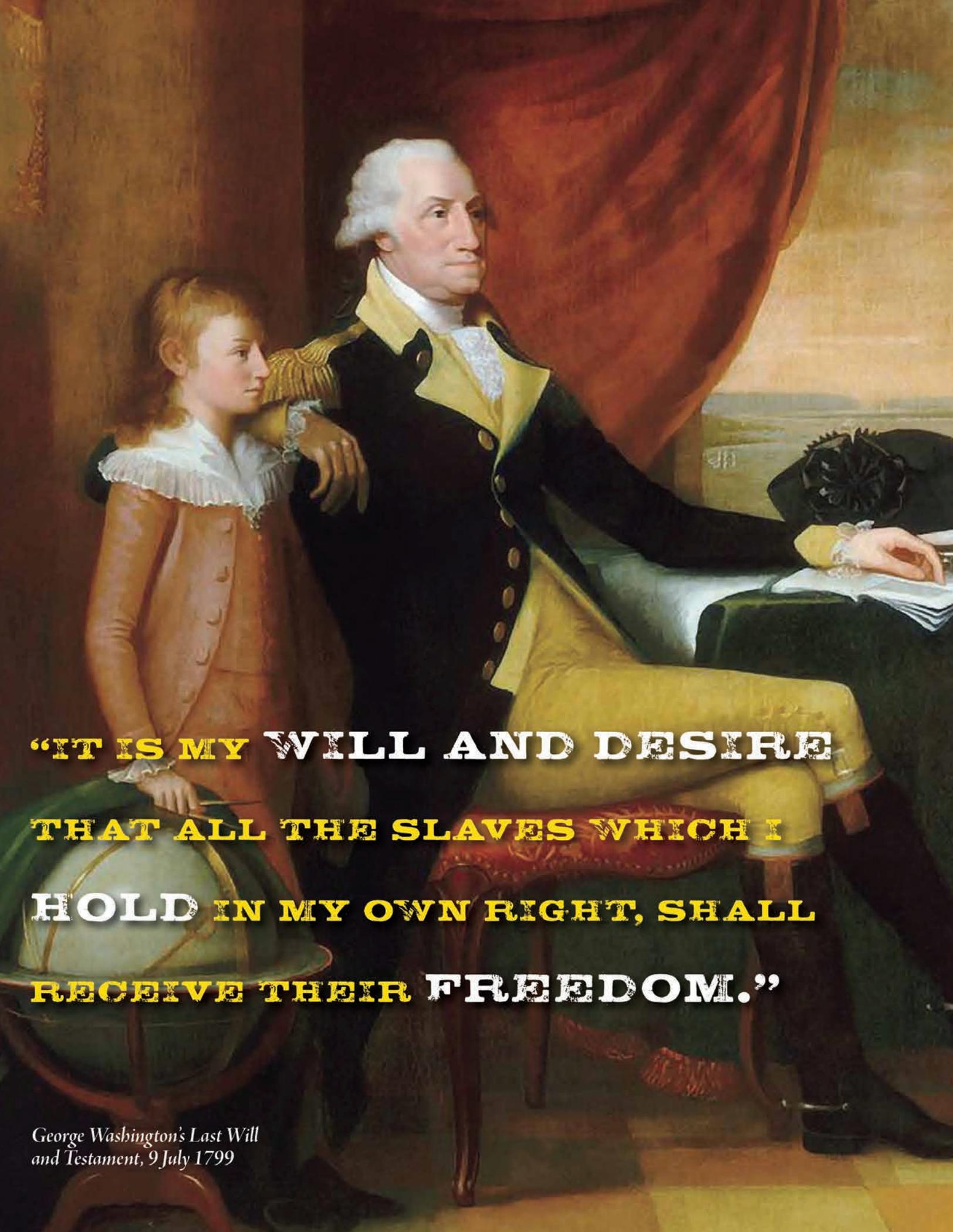
[FROM PAGES 36-37 OF MASTER GEORGE'S PEOPLE]



Back cover: *George Washington, shown with his wife's grandson, George Washington Parke Custis (Washy).*

[FROM PAGE 38 OF MASTER GEORGE'S PEOPLE]





**“IT IS MY WILL AND DESIRE
THAT ALL THE SLAVES WHICH I
HOLD IN MY OWN RIGHT, SHALL
RECEIVE THEIR FREEDOM.”**

*George Washington's Last Will
and Testament, 9 July 1799*