Washington, the Indispensable Man Study Guide

Washington, the Indispensable Man by James Thomas Flexner

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Plot Summary

Washington, the Indispensable Man by James Thomas Flexner is a nonfiction account of George Washington's life from his birth in 1732 until his death in 1799. Born of notable British lineage, Washington adopts the principles of American independence and becomes the leader of the Revolutionary Army and ultimately the first President of the United States. While most of the expected events and information are present, the book also sheds light on some of Washington's personal habits, loves, and feelings to provide a fuller picture of Washington the man and not just Washington the icon.

Not born into wealth, Washington learns early that hard work will be his way out of his situation. The hope of attending school in England is quashed with the death of his father when Washington, the oldest of five children from his father's second marriage, becomes the emotional crutch of a domineering mother. Washington manages to escape into rugged adventures in unexplored territories, where he gains military prowess and knowledge of primitive fighting. Washington soon becomes a surveyor and buys property in Virginia, securing some financial security for himself.

Washington dallies in first love with a flirtation with Sally Fairfax, the wife of a neighboring Englishman, but Washington ultimately marries Martha Dandridge Custis, a wealthy widow. Washington now has sufficient funds to purchase a major estate, Mount Vernon, and settles into the domestic life of a planter.

Duty calls when Washington is named head of the Continental Army to lead the new American states in the battle for independence against Great Britain. Although never fully convinced of his own capabilities, Washington's strategic mind and surprise tactics eventually win the war. Washington also wins the hearts of his soldiers because of his empathy for their conditions during bleak periods in the war. This admiration reaches across military lines to the general public and Washington is voted in as first President of the United States.

Constantly torn between duty to his country and his longing to work the lands of Mount Vernon, Washington never shirks responsibility in either area, although the years away from Mount Vernon take their toll on the estate. When returning home after eight years as President, Washington finds Mount Vernon in disrepair and his coffers in a sorry state. Plagued by setbacks that will take years to reverse; Washington begins the repairs and sells off some of his unsettled lands in the Ohio and Northwest Territories to keep the estate solvent.

This book presents a full view of George Washington as a son, husband, and stepfather as well as the Revolutionary War hero and national icon so typically portrayed in other books.

A Powerful Apprenticeship, A Clumsy Entrance on the World Stage and Love and Massacre

A Powerful Apprenticeship, A Clumsy Entrance on the World Stage and Love and Massacre Summary and Analysis

Washington, the Indispensable Man by James Thomas Flexner is a nonfiction account of George Washington's life from his birth in 1732 until his death in 1799. Born of British lineage, Washington adopts the principles of American independence and becomes the leader of the Revolutionary Army and ultimately the first President of the United States. While most of the expected events and information are present, the book also sheds light on some of Washington's personal habits, loves, and feelings to provide a fuller picture of Washington the man and not just Washington the icon.

Contrary to popular belief, George Washington is not born to English nobility, nor does he live a privileged life in America in his youth. In fact, Washington's most prominent relative, John Washington, was an unscrupulous sea trader with ruthless business practices. Washington's own father, Augustine, also exhibits questionable business ethics and is challenged frequently in court. Augustine marries two times and produces two sons from the first marriage and five children from the second. George is the oldest of the five children from the latter marriage.

George is born on February 11, 1732, near Pope's Creek, Virginia. The Washington family moves to a farmhouse forty miles up the Potomac River on a bluff which will later be called Mount Vernon. At the age of six, George moves with his family to a farm near the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg, where George will spend the balance of his childhood years.

Augustine Washington dies when George is an eleven-year-old, squelching George's dreams of being educated in England. George's mother, Mary Ball Washington, comes to rely heavily on George, who is her oldest son, while George turns to his half-brother, Lawrence for fatherly advice. George's love for military arts is enhanced when he is befriended by the William Fairfax family living at nearby Belvoir mansion. William Fairfax is the cousin of the Lord of the Fairfax clan in Virginia, and George learns firsthand about British aristocracy during Lord Fairfax's visits. Lord Fairfax's plans to enlist George into the British navy are thwarted by George's clinging mother, who refuses to allow George to leave her.

As a teenager, George learns the practical art of surveying, a vocation which indulges young George's love of adventure and nature and also allows him to make a living.

During this time George contracts smallpox while caring for his half-brother, Lawrence, who is stricken with the illness. After George's death, George seeks and wins the position of Adjutant General of Virginia, left vacant by Lawrence. Although he has no viable military training, George takes on the responsibility of training the young men of Virginia for battle.

George's first military trial comes during his push to eradicate the French from the Ohio Valley and secure the area for the British during the years of 1753 and 1754. Even though George is young and virtually unskilled, he is chosen to lead a small group because of his surveying and wilderness prowess. George's mission to learn the activities of the French army meets with many hardships, and George encounters the French in battle in July of 1754. The French allow Washington and his troop to return home once George signs a document releasing the French from any culpability for the altercation. Ultimately, Washington's actions are vilified in Europe, but Virginians hail young George as a hero. The Virginia military does not allow George's regiment into the regular British regiment in preparation for war with the French. It is also declared that no provincial will be allowed an officer's commission, a fact which prompts George to resign from the Virginia army.

Upon his return to Virginia, George rents the Mount Vernon property from Lawrence's widow and vows to become a planter. During this time, George becomes further infatuated with Sally Fairfax, wife of George's friend, George Fairfax. Washington had met Sally when she came to Belvoir as Fairfax's bride at the age of eighteen, two years Washington's senior. Correspondence between George and Sally constitutes a mild flirtation, but one which is never indulged seriously on Sally's part.

In the spring of 1755, the British army arrives in Virginia under the command of Major General Edward Braddock, whose intentions are to enlist George as navigator through the wilderness. Once more, George's mother intervenes and prevents George from taking the military assignment. Although George did not enter the field with Braddock, he did serve as a volunteer aide at Braddock's headquarters.

Before long though, George is in the field helping the regular army to navigate the same path to the Ohio Valley which George had blazed two years earlier. On July 9, 1755, the British army is attacked and nearly annihilated by Indians fighting for the French. During battle, Braddock denies Washington's requests to enter into the wood and engage the enemy, leaving the red-coated British soldiers vibrant targets on the road. By the time the battle is over, most of the soldiers and officers lie dead and dying, including Braddock. George returns to Mount Vernon, having escaped injury in the battle.

The author writes this nonfiction book about George Washington in a documentary style, highlighting the major points in Washington's life while interjecting some information that rounds out Washington as a complete person, not just a one-dimensional historical figure. The author does use some figurative literary techniques to break up the narrative so that it has some dimension and makes it easier to read. For example, the author states that the Ohio Valley is filled with five hundred miles of an "Indian-haunted forest", a metaphor meaning that the forest is a frightening place

because of the unpredictability of Indian presence and attacks. This is a more dramatic way of saying that the soldiers were apprehensive while traveling through the forest. The author also uses the technique of similes when he writes, "the ice-covered wilderness glowed like a hall of mirrors". A simile makes a comparison between two otherwise unlike objects by connecting them with the words "like" or "as".

The author also points out the irony and the foreshadowing of Washington's signing of a peace document on July 4, 1754, ending the altercation with the French in the Ohio Valley. A little over twenty years later, Washington will sign another important document on July 4: the Declaration of Independence.

Desperation and Disillusionment, George Washington's First War and A Virginia Businessman

Desperation and Disillusionment, George Washington's First War and A Virginia Businessman Summary and Analysis

George gains accolades in Virginia for his performance with Braddock, but the British are not so impressed with the young militiaman. The British move out of the area and George recruits locals to help protect colonists against raiding Indians. George appeals to the recently installed Lord Loudoun, the British officer who is to assume command of the American forces, but Loudoun dispenses only tactics and strategy, not support.

George falls into a desolate period when he cannot raise enough recruits, he contracts tuberculosis, and Sally Fairfax refuses to return his communications with her. War is finally declared between the French and English on American soil, and George is called into service once more for his prowess in the wilderness areas. Once the area of Virginia is secured, George returns home to Mount Vernon, secure in the fact that his military career is over.

While the French and British battle in other parts of the country, George ruminates over his successes and failures, content not to simply represent his militiamen in the Virginia Assembly.

While building his reputation as a planter and businessman, George marries the widow, Martha Dandridge Custis, whose fortune well supplements the Mount Vernon estate. Martha's pleasing manner and quiet disposition is comforting to the highly energized George, whose view of women stems from his temperamental mother. Martha is two years older than George and has two living children, Jack and Patsy, on whom George dotes. George and Martha have no children of their own, and when Patsy dies from epilepsy at age twelve, Martha completely immerses herself in Jack.

The infusion of Custis money into the Mount Vernon coffers elevates George from simple planter to wealthy landowner, yet the newly acquired Washington lifestyle of overspending will leave George forever behind in his accounts. George revels in improvements throughout the estate, whether for agricultural or pleasure, and introduces new methodologies, plantings, and foods.

The inhabitants of the Mount Vernon estate, whom George considers all to be his family, include nieces and nephews, artisans, overseers, and slaves. The variety of people living on the estate allows Mount Vernon to become a self sustaining village, producing

its own meat, vegetables, grains, metal, leather, and other products. The most profitable is tobacco, which is also sold across the ocean in England. Eventually George's reliance on tobacco as a cash crop dwindles to zero as George realizes how the crop exhausts the soil and the dependence on good weather for a good crop as well as the diminishing price paid by British buyers.

In this section, George earns more military experience, however humbling, yet gains something of even greater value: the respect of his political peers and the men he represents. George's willingness to stand up for the rights of those under his command or representation earns George undying faithfulness under the most difficult of circumstances. The author continues to fill in George's character as one of integrity and honor to supplement George's physical stamina and presence. It is this man, strong of body and temperament who appeals to Martha Custis, who becomes not only George's wife but his most steadying influence.

The author also wants the reader to know that George feels the need to pull away from the British, both in the military and in the purchase of goods, to foreshadow the imminent revolution from England, which will involve George in a pivotal way.

Washington in His Landscapes, A New Call to Arms and A Virginian in Yankee-Land

Washington in His Landscapes, A New Call to Arms and A Virginian in Yankee-Land Summary and Analysis

George revels in the life of a planter, including the country lifestyle of games and hunting foxes, and invests much time in the breeding of horses and hound dogs. George and Martha also become consummate hosts to thousands of guests in the years leading up to the revolution. During this time, George also becomes executor and substitute father of the families of nearby dying neighbors and earns much respect from those in the area who appreciate George's integrity in all matters.

Although George considers himself to be of strong English heritage, George also inherently understands that the American people cannot remain under the domination of the British. George would prefer that any conflict would pass him by and that future generations would address the situation, but that is not to be the case when the issue of taxation rears its ugly head in the mid 1760s. The members of the British Parliament declare that the American colonists should be taxed because the colonists benefit from some British expenditures. The colonists, however, disagree, because Americans are not represented in Parliament. They feel that the colonials do not owe tax payments to the British.

George is shocked to hear that American colonists have thrown a shipment of British tea into the bay in Boston in their outrage. This act will be known as the Boston Tea Party, and comes to represent the pivotal point of colonial rebellion. George attends the Continental Congress in September and October of 1774, and is both energized and disheartened by the overwhelming assent to disobey British rule. By the end of the second Continental Congress in May of 1775, George understands fully that the colonists must fight, even though it means the end to George's bucolic lifestyle at Mount Vernon, at least for a little while. George is named the head of the Continental Army in June of 1775, even though George feels himself unprepared for the position.

George reluctantly informs Martha of his new role, and the couple unites in their focus to help the revolutionary effort. George enlists the help of four professional men to advise him in his overwhelming venture: Charles Lee, a recent British immigrant with a reputation for military genius; Horatio Gates, another British military officer; Joseph Reed, an attorney; and Thomas Mifflin, a merchant. On June 23, 1775, George travels from Philadelphia to New York to meet his troops, although in his mind, George believes

that the war will not be won on battlefields but in the minds of people who will either declare loyalty to England or stand firm in opposition to British rule.

On his way to New York, George learns of the colonial victory of Bunker Hill in Boston. From this battle, George understands that the British way of fighting in rows is not conducive to victory against colonists, who erect fortifications from the landscape with which they are intimately familiar. When George finally reaches his army's camp, he is overwhelmed by the lack of discipline and basic health and hygiene measures. The commander in chief will also discover that supplies and soldiers are in woefully low supply for a proper defense against the powerful British army. George's disdain for the life and people in the Northeast reaches Congress members in New England, and in spite of his irascibility, George is not relieved of his duty.

In this section, the author paints a picture of the human side of George Washington by including some excerpts of his writings. This material shows George's passionate feelings about liberty, his deep love for his family and home, and his conflict over his British heritage and the burgeoning call for American freedom from English rule. The author also shows that George had a sense of humor when he writes about the woes associated with eradicating worms growing on tobacco: "I say how will this be reconciled to that anguished care and vigilance which is so essentially necessary at a time when our growing prosperity—meaning the tobacco—is assailed by every villainous worm that has had an existence since the days of Noah (how unkind it was of Noah, now I have mentioned his name, to suffer such a brood of vermin to get a berth in the ark), but perhaps you may be as well off as we are—that is have no tobacco for them to eat, and there, I think, we nicked the dogs, as I think to do you if you expect any more", p. 51.

An Early Triumph, The Continental Army on Trial and Depths

An Early Triumph, The Continental Army on Trial and Depths Summary and Analysis

Buoyed by optimism, Washington predicts that the war will be over in a few months; however, the British army blockaded in Boston Harbor is a formidable opponent, forcing the Continental Army into a harsh winter without the proper clothes or shelter. To make matters worse, the current Continental soldiers' enlistment ends at the end of the year, forcing Washington into heavy recruitment during the bleak winter months. Before long, Washington learns of George III's intention to hire German or Russian soldiers to supplement the British troops in Massachusetts.

Fueled by renewed patriotic enthusiasm from the words of Thomas Paine's rhetoric in Common Sense, Washington rallies his troops for a nighttime attack on the British troops in Boston Harbor. However, the British commander in chief calls for retreat of his soldiers because British reinforcements have not yet arrived to replenish those lost in the Battle of Bunker Hill. Although not an actual military win, the Continental Army claims its first victory and the British Army soon evacuates Boston Harbor.

Washington further strengthens his hold on New York City, thinking that this ideal naval area will be the next stopping point for the British fleet. While waiting for the British to appear, Washington travels to Philadelphia to appeal to Congress for more army recruits and better fortification of the northern army near Canada, making New York and New England vulnerable to British invasion. Congress pays little heed to Washington as they argue the fundamental value of independence. When Washington returns to his troops on July 6, 1776, he receives a copy of the Declaration of Independence drafted by the Continental Congress.

By this time, the British navy is ensconced on Staten Island in New York, its numbers having been fortified by the Hessian troops hired by King George III. In August, the British advance as far as Brooklyn Heights on Long Island. Washington remains in New York City, leaving control of the battle to Major General John Sullivan. The rookie soldiers under Sullivan's command either flee or panic under attack until Washington arrives in time to maintain some semblance of calm. Despite the upheaval among the American soldiers, the British retreat, hoping to make fools of the Americans and brand them as ridiculous rebels among what the British assume is the majority of Americans who are still loyal to the Crown.

Eventually the British gain control of the Long Island shore across from Manhattan, which they attack on September 15. As Washington approaches the site of the battle, he encounters massive fleeing of the American soldiers whom even his impassioned retorts cannot stop. Washington rides toward the enemy and is saved by his aides just

short of being captured or killed. The next day Washington is able to rally his quivering troops and drive the British further back, signifying the first victory for the American army.

Washington takes no comfort in this victory due to the cowardly behavior of his soldiers the day before, and implores Congress to issue three-year military tours of duty instead of the one-year plan currently in place. Washington argues that training and loyalty can barely be completed in one year when the soldiers take their leave and Washington faces the problem all over again. This initiative will cost more money, which the financially beleaguered Congress is reticent to provide. The bigger issue is more of a political one however, as Congress argues the long term implications of states versus a united nation. Most members believe that the states should be kept intact after the war and that men kept away from their homes for three years are in the danger of losing loyalty to their home states. Ultimately, Congress agrees to the three-year inductions but demands that representatives from each state must be made officers in Washington's army.

Washington's army is pushed further south into New Jersey across the Hudson River from New York. Washington learns of the deceit of some of his officers who have motives to replace Washington whose command is perceived as incompetent. The incident passes, harming only Washington's ego. The American army is driven further back into New Jersey. In early December 1776, Washington's army crosses the freezing Delaware River into Pennsylvania for temporary respite.

It is interesting to note that the author assumes a writing style similar to that of Washington's. The language is rather formal but there are instances of informality and humor. For example, when writing about Washington's fortifications of New York shorelines, the author delineates each one with much detail in long sentences and then interjects, "So far, so good". This adds a modern informality which helps the reader understand the action of the plot. Washington himself uses figurative language when he writes, "whole provinces are still feeding themselves upon the dainty food of reconciliation" (p. 78). Clearly, the people in the provinces are not eating reconciliation, but Washington wants to dramatically make the point in this metaphor that the people are still indulging in futile and ultimately unsatisfying thoughts and discussions about reconciliation with England.

Heights, The Loss of Philadelphia and The Conway Cabal

Heights, The Loss of Philadelphia and The Conway Cabal Summary and Analysis

Washington plans to attack the nearest British army installment located in Trenton, New Jersey. Washington knows that the Hessian soldiers populating the British encampment will be celebrating Christmas Day with food and drinking, so Washington moves his troops across the Delaware River into New Jersey in the darkness of Christmas night. Marching the nine miles to Trenton in the early hours of the next morning, the American army surprises and defeats the Hessians sleeping off their Christmas revelry. Washington gains not only significant captured supplies but also newfound pride in his troops.

Washington is able to convince about half his soldiers to stay with him at the end of 1776, and is encouraged by the resourceful, patriotic men who remain. This new army is also more motivated and is able to move quickly and think independently, which are huge attributes at this point in the war. Washington's troops attack the British in the village of Princeton on January 3, 1777, managing to rout the English soldiers and allowing Washington to concentrate on returning to New York to safeguard the important harbors located there.

Washington, however, decides to install his troops at Morristown, New Jersey, located halfway between Philadelphia and New York, to wait out the winter. During this time, Washington is visited by arriving French military officers offering their services to the American cause. Among these men are Colonel Louis le Beque Duportail who helped reengineer the construction of military ramparts, Brigadier General Thomas Conway, and the Marquis de Lafayette. Washington becomes particularly fond of the zealous Lafayette, and the two men develop a warm father-son type relationship.

By summer, the British army has been reinforced with fresh troops and moves into New Jersey, their sights set on capturing Philadelphia. After several encounters and skirmishes with Washington's troops, the British, under the command of General Howe, are able to overtake Philadelphia. News spreads of another Washington defeat. Unable to recapture Philadelphia, Washington resigns himself to huge disappointment and cries of failure and decides to winter his troops at Valley Forge.

When Washington's soldiers arrive at Valley Forge prior to Christmas 1777, they are starving, exhausted and without proper clothing. Shelter is Washington's first priority, and he issues specific orders for the building of huts, housing twelve men in each. Lack of food and increasing disease take their toll on the army, and Washington's pleas to Congress are met with indifference. Congress is more concerned about Washington's inability to defeat the British, and initiatives to remove Washington from command rear

their heads. The most famous initiative along this line is led by the Irish-born Frenchman, Brigadier General Thomas Conway.

Conway is serving in the American army in order to attain a higher military rank upon returning home to France. Conway's ambitions are stifled by Washington, who does not see fit to promote Conway, who harbors bitter resentment toward Washington. When Congress threatens to go over Washington's head and promote Conway, Washington threatens to resign. Another one of Washington's former trusted advisors, Thomas Mifflin, resents the dire circumstances in which he finds himself as quartermaster for the ragtag Continental Army and initiates his own move to have Washington removed from command. Washington supporters learn of these deceptions and rally to Washington's cause, eventually rousting the troublemakers.

During this period of time, Washington experiences the height of popularity as well as the depths of disfavor. The victory at Trenton comes at a time when the forecast for the American army is bleak and patriots throughout the states still question the viability of independence. Victory does not come easily or quickly though, and the revolution stretches the patience and the budget of the Continental Congress, who are approached by men like Conway and Mifflin with plans to ease the burden by relieving Washington of his command. Throughout it all, though, Washington perseveres and gains an even deeper respect by his supporters and proves himself to be a man of character, integrity and resolve.

"The threat that he might be eliminated made Americans visualize the leadership without him. Supposing he were replaced by the noisy controversialist Gates, who fostered and was fostered by a radical clique in Congress? That would clearly be, whatever the military result, a disaster for national unity: faction would rise to fight faction. And if not Gates, who else? The answer was that there was no one else. Washington was recognized as the indispensable man" (p. 116).

The Road Turns Upward, Hope Abroad and Bankruptcy at Home and Enter a French Army

The Road Turns Upward, Hope Abroad and Bankruptcy at Home and Enter a French Army Summary and Analysis

Conditions improve for the soldiers at Valley Forge in February 1778 when food supplies improve and shelter in huts becomes more serviceable than living in tents. Eventually the men adapt to their stringent surroundings and are able to bond through the shared hardships. The army's focus transitions from survival to improvement with the arrival of Lieutenant General Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin Baron von Steuben, who trains the men in military drills.

In May, Washington learns that France formally recognizes American independence from England, prompting Washington to believe that war between England and France is imminent. Washington believes that if this is true, England's defeat will also end the American Revolution and Washington may soon return home to Mount Vernon. Unfortunately, this is not to be the case as Washington engages with the British at the Battle of Monmouth on June 28, 1778. Although the battle was a standoff, the Continental Army claims the victory due to the stealthy escape of the British during the night following the day's fighting.

Washington's army sees no battle action during the winter of 1778-79, and Washington spends much time with the Congress in Philadelphia, again attempting to secure funds for provisions for his beleaguered troops. Washington finds that both the Congress and his own personal accounts teeter on the verge of bankruptcy, so the focus for the army becomes one of further frugality. Washington ends 1779 with a note of cautious optimism.

During the winter of 1779-80, Washington's pleas for provisions are met by the order that each state must send food and supplies to its own soldiers in the army. Some states comply with abundance but others do not, creating a chasm of want among the troops. Living in constant fear of mutiny, Washington refuses to give in to despair or panic and rises above the difficulties.

Each year during the winter encampments when the fighting ceases, Martha Washington travels to spend the time with her husband, who finds Martha's presence extraordinarily pleasant and a respite from his military misery. During this winter, quarters for Mrs. Washington and her attendants are grim, but Mrs. Washington vows to make the visit as pleasant as possible in order to bolster her husband's sinking mood.

In July of 1780, five thousand French soldiers arrive in America to bolster the Continental Army's efforts against the British. It is set forth by the French that the French commander in chief, the Count de Rochambeau, is to obey Washington, much to Rochambeau's chagrin. Rochambeau finds the American people and way of life distasteful and considers Washington inexperienced and lacking strategy. Rochambeau refuses to fully support Washington and the two men find themselves at odds even though they are on the same side of the war.

This section introduces the reader to Martha Washington as the critical core of Washington's life. During Martha's visits to camp, she attempts to set the temporary quarters as close to the couple's Mount Vernon home as possible, allowing Washington a feeling of comfort and hope for the life for which he longs. Martha's attempts to emulate Virginia plantation life are in stark contrast to the scenario of soldiers braving unthinkable conditions during these winter visits. Dinner parties, parlor games, and other social outings place Washington in a position unfamiliar to the reader to this point. It is also interesting to note Washington's fondness for female companionship and outright flirting, although Washington never oversteps the bounds of propriety. The author's interjection of this material at this point in the book provides some relief from the tedium of the narratives concerning battles, hardships and deprivation.

Treason, Virginia Endangered, Yorktown and A Gulf of Civil Horror

Treason, Virginia Endangered, Yorktown and A Gulf of Civil Horror Summary and Analysis

One of Washington's most admired officers is Benedict Arnold, well known for his military prowess and great skill at leading men. Wounded in battle in Canada, Arnold is unfit for active duty, so Washington appoints Arnold as military commandant of Philadelphia after the British evacuation of that city. Arnold becomes enamored of a young woman named Peggy Shippen, whom Washington had known when Peggy was a girl. Peggy is lovely and wealthy and has her pick of beaus, especially one named John Andre, a British adjutant general. Peggy's Tory status dims for Arnold, who revels in Peggy's high lifestyle and social status.

News of Arnold's deepening relationship with Peggy alerts local patriots, who assume that Arnold, who has no wealth of his own, must be siding with British Loyalists and receiving money for information in order to live in the high manner Arnold does now. Eventually Arnold is court-martialed and Washington delivers the necessary but half-hearted reprimand to his old friend: "The Commander in Chief would have been much happier in an occasion of bestowing commendations on an officer who has rendered such distinguished services to his country" (p. 142).

Unfortunately, Arnold's private fury and grievances with the Congress and past colleagues fuel Arnold to enter into a treasonous relationship with Peggy's old beau, John Andre, who agrees to pay Arnold for military secrets if Arnold is able to take over command of West Point. At Arnold's request, Washington does appoint Arnold to the West Point command. Two months after the appointment, Washington arrives at the Arnold home for a social call and finds Peggy hysterical and Arnold missing.

Washington soon receives papers confirming Arnold's plans in assisting the British in their efforts to capture West Point. Andre, who is also involved in the scheme, is apprehended, but Arnold manages to escape to a British warship. Andre is hanged for his crime and Peggy is sent back to her family in Philadelphia. British officers hope to encourage other American officers to follow in Arnold's footsteps, and several troops within Washington's army stage mutinies due to insufficient food, arms, clothing, and payment.

To add to Washington's misery, for the first time during the war, his beloved state of Virginia comes under control of the British General Cornwallis. Washington, torn between his fear for his home state and his duty to the army, remains in Pennsylvania with his troops where he is able to defend more vulnerable points. Washington soon receives help from the French navy and defeats the British at Yorktown, Virginia,

culminating in the surrender of Cornwallis and the acquisition of British artillery and arms.

It is now 1781 and Washington is in Virginia hoping for a few weeks of vacation. Unfortunately, family tragedy prevents any type of rest when Washington's stepson, John Parke Custis, dies from an illness contracted in camp during a brief stint as a volunteer aide to Washington. Martha is inconsolable and Washington takes her to Philadelphia to escape the gloom of mourning.

While in Philadelphia, Washington again approaches the Congress on behalf of his soldiers who desperately need provisions and payment. Once again, Washington must tell his officers that there are insufficient funds for their requirements and works ardently to dissuade the men from taking violent actions against the Congress. Citizens and businessmen who have funded or provided goods are also not being paid and want the army to play the part of a political wedge in a plan. The plan, once peace comes, is to prevent the soldiers from returning to their home states until a plan for repayment of debts has been determined and approved. This would provide army might if necessary and also thwart the economies of each state desperate for their men to return.

Alexander Hamilton implores Washington to commit to the plan. After much personal turmoil, Washington declines any participation, realizing that his command may be in jeopardy. Washington learns that many of his soldiers do not agree with his decision and calls a meeting, wherein the soldiers are remain fixed in their opinions during Washington's impassioned speech. It is only a touching gesture of profound loyalty that ultimately sways the resolute men: "The officers leaned forward, their hearts contracting with anxiety. Washington pulled from his pocket something only his intimates had seen him wear: a pair of eyeglasses. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country.' This homely act and simple statement did what all Washington's arguments had failed to do. The hardened soldiers wept. Washington had saved the United States from tyranny and civil discord" (pp. 174-75).

It is during this time that Washington's character is seriously tested not only professionally but personally. The betrayal of his friend, Benedict Arnold, is a wound from which Washington finds difficulty in recovering, not only because the treason would be tragic for the country but because Washington cannot imagine betrayal of any sort. It is completely against his nature. This crisis is coupled with the death of his stepson for whom Washington feels no profound grief because his stepson was lazy, opportunistic, and unwilling to enter into military service until awed by some French officers. Washington, however, must enter into mourning at a time when he himself desperately needs some time off. With no respite from these personal tragedies, Washington resolutely staves off a major political crisis for the country and proves that his loyalty to his country is steadfast, and never relents in his vision and purpose.

Goodbye to War, Pleasures at Home and Canals and Conventions

Goodbye to War, Pleasures at Home and Canals and Conventions Summary and Analysis

In April of 1783 the war with Great Britain is over, yet Washington remains with a small troop stationed in New York until the final armistice is signed. Washington bids his officers a tearful goodbye and departs for Mount Vernon where he arrives on Christmas Eve of 1783.

Although Washington had dreamed for many years of the peace and tranquility of Mount Vernon, the actuality of the stillness is disconcerting for the General whose enemy these days is a nagging melancholy. Washington throws himself into farming and managing the estate as well as creative endeavors such as interior design, landscape architecture, and social host. During this time, Mount Vernon receives a steady stream of visitors as a result of invitations extended by the accommodating Washington.

Washington also extends Mount Vernon by purchasing adjoining land extending ten miles down the Potomac River. The estate now encompasses five separate farms, and Washington enjoys his daily morning rides to survey all the seasonal activities. Never too elite to get his hands dirty, Washington also delights in the development of crop experimentation and animal husbandry.

Despite all his plans and past successes, Washington learns that Mount Vernon is losing money, not only from bad debts to the Continental Congress but also to the care of the growing population on the estate as well as the continuing entertaining. Thomas Jefferson reminds Washington of a pre-Revolutionary War plan to develop a canal system on the Potomac, which would generate necessary revenue. Washington masterfully completes the initiative, called the Potomac Canal Company, and works diligently on opening up other waterways for commerce.

In 1787, Washington is asked to attend a convention in Philadelphia to represent Virginia in determining a constitution for the United States. Washington suffers great ill health when he is torn between a strong reluctance to return to public life and his sense of duty to the country he helped to found. Ultimately, Washington assents, if for no other reason than to show the world that a people's government does not have to be an act of anarchism.

Ironically, the peace that Washington has longed for creates a great inner disturbance within Washington, whose thoughts of death are more prevalent now than they ever were during the time at war. Washington is at odds with himself in trying to assimilate into his old life at Mount Vernon and become the simple planter he was before the war. However, Washington is the most famous man in America now and his life will never

return to the way it was before. Although he takes some time for pleasurable socializing, Washington's strategic mind is always on alert, and he develops new projects and methods of improvement, whether on his own estate or for the good of the citizens of the state. Washington's positive public persona carries much weight, and his colleagues' attempts to capitalize on it are thwarted. It becomes clear very soon that Washington's character will thrust him once again into a very public life.

The Constitution of the United States, Hysteria and Responsibility and A Second Constitutional Convention

The Constitution of the United States, Hysteria and Responsibility and A Second Constitutional Convention Summary and Analysis

Washington's health is immediately restored when he reaches Philadelphia in May of 1787 to begin work at the Constitutional Convention. Washington and the other fifty-four delegates follow models developed by English and French political theorists and determine that the new government should have an executive and a judiciary branch to act as a method of checks and balances upon the other. One of the major challenges is determining systems that will be unanimously accepted by all thirteen states, and Washington inserts himself in business and social settings in order to diplomatically win the necessary support. It will be ten more months before ratification is achieved, but Washington revels in the process of achieving victory by enlightened reason and civility.

Secretly, Washington wishes to return to public life and hopes to be elected President of the United States for reasons obvious and not so public. Washington's personal financial picture is bleak and being elected President, even though he would not accept a salary, would at least provide for Washington and his family during this difficult time. Fortunately for Washington, and the country, Washington is elected President on February 4, 1789, and leaves Mount Vernon for New York on April 14, 1789.

John Adams is voted in as Vice President, and because there is no precedent yet set for their behavior, they begin the business of working the government. Before long, Washington's cabinet members are in place and the new government seems secure. This sense of solidity is shattered for Washington with the news of the death of his mother, but by the close of 1789, Washington is content that the new Constitution and Federal government are working to benefit the people of this new country.

At last, Washington is in his glory again in service to the public. Although he tried hard to believe that he could return to his agricultural life in Virginia, Washington has tasted national glory and now needs that same level of mental stimulation not afforded him in a bucolic farming lifestyle. Washington's true calling and need for a public life are so strong that he is ill for much of the time he is at home in Mount Vernon until he resurfaces again in Philadelphia at the Constitutional Convention. The author provides some passages from letters as well as some insight into Washington's true skills and gifts of strategic thinking and diplomacy, which allow him to push through the motions he feels necessary for the country. Clearly Washington is a driven man with much ambition, but in this author's portrayal, Washington is never overbearing or obnoxious

and always speaks from a position of integrity. The author also provides the other sides of Washington's life, such as the tendency toward melancholy, the creativity, the inability to live within his means, and his string of illnesses. It is interesting to note the contrast of the public image versus the private man and the human characteristics and frailties of an iconic American figure.

The Social Man, Infighting Foreshadowed, The Great Schism Opens and Europeans and Indians

The Social Man, Infighting Foreshadowed, The Great Schism Opens and Europeans and Indians Summary and Analysis

Washington's social life as President is much more formalized and restricted than his gregarious nature would like, but he settles into the rhythm of scheduled events. Of all the events, Washington prefers Martha's tea parties, where he can interact with the notable ladies of the city. All the dinners and parties hosted by the Washington's are met with approval, and people covet invitations. During this time, Washington is able to travel to some of the areas of the country he had not seen during the war and delights in the differences in the geography and the people he encounters.

In 1790, with the onset of the second session of Congress, seeds are sown for a long term rivalry between Alexander Hamilton, Secretary of the Treasury, and Thomas Jefferson, Secretary of State. At the root of the strained relationship are Hamilton's initiatives to move the new country from an agrarian-based economy to capitalism. Each of the men secretly lobbies for their respective causes to Washington, who lives for years with no knowledge of the bitter feud between the two cabinet members.

Although the dire news of the French Revolution reaches Washington, Washington's greatest trials in the area of foreign affairs come from Britain, Spain, and the Indians in the western territories. Already a significant threat on their own, the Indians became even more powerful when allied with the British and the Spanish to further the causes of those two countries in territories in America. Of primary concern to the warring countries are the rivers and ports in Louisiana and the northern territories bordering Canada. The struggle to control the waterways is critical for trade and commerce superiority.

Washington establishes a special military force headed by General Anthony Wayne to help squelch the Indian rebellions and protect the western settlers in the Ohio territory and beyond.

The author masterfully chronicles the important events of Washington's life, and the book is filled with important facts and data. In order to break up the monotony of factual information, the author uses some literary techniques such as metaphors and similes to make for more colorful reading. For example, the author writes, "Morris was brilliant: the actual wording of the Constitution came from his pen" (p. 255). While words did not literally spill from the man's pen, the author chooses to use this phrasing as a more interesting way of saying that Morris was brilliant and wrote the Constitution. Another

example occurs when the author writes, "Silence sank again until the ladies withdrew" (p. 228). Obviously, silence cannot sink, but the author uses personification to attribute a human action to an inanimate concept to tell the reader that the room grew very quiet.

Desire to Escape, No Exit, Bad Omens and Earthquake Faults

Desire to Escape, No Exit, Bad Omens and Earthquake Faults Summary and Analysis

In the spring of 1791, Washington takes a trip into the Southern states and finds that people are generally satisfied with the new government. The following year is an election year and Washington announces to his friends that he will not seek another term. This decision is not based on unwillingness to serve, but rather the fear of being thought too much like a monarchy if Washington were to stay in office until his death. Washington also fears his own diminishing personal health and mental capabilities and shares those fears with his closest friends and colleagues.

During this time, Washington designates the site of the new Federal city, now known as Washington DC, near the Potomac and appoints a town planner, Pierre Charles L'Enfant. Thomas Jefferson is in Europe when the decision is made and considers the move a personal affront due to Jefferson's strong affinity for architecture and planning. Jefferson silently rejoices when L'Enfant is removed from his position for refusal to incorporate suggestions.

Jefferson tires of the mechanics of the new government and the infighting with Alexander Hamilton and announces his plans to retire. Washington feels that the retirement, coupled with his own, will be a devastating blow to the executive branch of the government and attempts to dissuade Jefferson.

During this period, informal polls indicate that the people want Washington to remain in office. This sentiment is reflected in a letter written by Washington's popular female friend, Eliza Powel, the wife of one of Philadelphia's wealthiest merchants. Eliza plays to Washington's integrity and her knowledge that Washington will not want to see the young government collapse, which it will surely upon his departure.

Washington makes no declarations to Congress to indicate his unwillingness to serve again and is voted in for a second term on February 13, 1793.

The French Revolution sets off strong pro-French sentiments in America, and Washington is afraid that the people will demand engagement in a conflict in Europe, the first since the establishment of the United States. To Washington's delight, Jefferson does not retire in order to ride out this stormy period. Washington is inaugurated for the second time on March 4, 1793, with much less pomp and circumstance than that accorded his first inauguration.

Washington's second term as President is rocked by a war between Britain and France, and Washington begs for neutrality of the United States. American pro-French

sentiments collide with this passivity, which will inherently favor the British who have a more powerful naval force. Washington struggles with this issue of aiding the French with more naval support which will, in turn, create strong strictures on American ships from the British on the open seas.

Washington is growing older and tires of the mechanics of running the government, preferring instead to return to Mount Vernon where he thinks he could re-gain some quiet and be reinvigorated. The author provides a symbolic passage where Washington takes some time at Mount Vernon in 1792, yet his typical pursuits there do not bring as much joy as before. In this instance, a deer fence has broken on the estate and Washington notes that these deer run in the woods with the wild deer and are just as afraid of the hounds: "Washington got rid of his hounds. Instead of leaning eagerly forward as he rode shouting to the chase, he sat quietly on his porch awaiting the shy appearance of the gentlest of forest creatures" (p. 269). This symbolizes not only Washington's aging process and need for peace but also his position on the conflicts raging in Europe where Washington hesitates to take an aggressive stance, preferring instead to bask in the glory of the hard-won American independence. This simple act of removing the hounds probably indicates Washington's state of mind at this time more fully than the pages and pages of documents recording his stated positions.

A French Bombshell, Trouble All Around, A Tragic Departure and Opposite Hands Across the Ocean

A French Bombshell, Trouble All Around, A Tragic Departure and Opposite Hands Across the Ocean Summary and Analysis

On April 22, 1793, Washington issues a Neutrality Proclamation declaring America's neutral position in the war between France and England and promising legal action against any US citizen discovered to have helped either country. Both Jefferson and Hamilton publish papers on opposing sides of the Proclamation, and ultimately France sends a new ambassador, Edmond Charles Genet. Instead of reporting to Washington in Philadelphia, Genet lands in Charleston, South Carolina, where he revels in parties and lobbies for US support for France. Genet defies the Neutrality Proclamation by raising a militia of private ships as well as other support of US citizens. Washington's diplomatic requests that Genet cease his activities go unheeded, and Genet is ultimately removed from his ambassador position; however, Genet is allowed to remain in the United States instead of returning to France where he would have been executed.

Jefferson, well known for his pro-French sentiments, again tenders his resignation as Secretary of State, but Washington convinces Jefferson to remain until the end of 1793.

In the summer of 1793 the city of Philadelphia is stricken with Yellow Fever and the government is essentially closed off from the rest of the country. Washington conducts business from Mount Vernon temporarily but soon returns to Philadelphia to avoid rumors that he has abandoned the city and the government. Thomas Jefferson remains adamant about his resignation, and Washington struggles to find a suitable replacement, settling on Attorney General Edmund Randolph. Washington, seemingly aging rapidly, is almost paralyzed with the loss of Jefferson, his longtime colleague and fellow Virginian.

Washington and Randolph are soon tested when Britain issues a secret decree known as the Provision Order, allowing British ships to seize goods on any American ship or any American ship sailing for a French port. American soldiers are taken prisoners and forced to choose between becoming British soldiers or rotting in prison. This hostile act spurns many anti-British proclamations in Congress, including a halt to commerce with the British. Alexander Hamilton and his followers plan to negotiate with the British, but Washington stops Hamilton's initiative, Hamilton is urged to resign, and Washington appoints Chief Justice John Jay to determine a new treaty with the British.

Washington's advancing years and weariness with politics is reflected well in this excerpt from a letter written to a British philanthropist: "If, instead of the provocations to war, bloodshed and desolation (oftentimes unjustly given) the strife of nations and of individuals was to excel each other in acts of philanthropy, industry and economy, in encouraging useful arts and manufactures, promoting thereby the comfort and happiness of our fellow men; and in exchanging on liberal terms the products of one country and clime for those of another, how much happier would mankind be! But providence, for purposes beyond the reach of mortal scan, has suffered the restless and malignant passions of man, the ambitious and sordid views of those who direct them, to keep the affairs of this world in a continual state of disquietude; and will, it is feared, place the prospects of peace far off, and the promised millennium at an awful distance from our day" (p. 307). It is clear that Washington wishes that nations could live in peace and that the men who govern those nations could put their energies and talents to higher purposes. As a military man, Washington is able to launch initiatives important to a cause, but once won, wearies of unrest and underlying currents which cause unending emotional turmoil.

The Whiskey Rebellion, The Democratic Societies, A Disastrous Document and Tragedy with a Friend

The Whiskey Rebellion, The Democratic Societies, A Disastrous Document and Tragedy with a Friend Summary and Analysis

In June of 1794, while recovering from a horseback accident, Washington receives notice that Kentucky is prepared to go to war with Spain over the rights to Louisiana and opening the Mississippi River to commerce. Washington dispatches John Jay on a diplomatic mission to Spain to resolve this crisis while another crisis brews. Backwoods distillers in Pennsylvania revolt over having to pay taxes on the whiskey they brew. Pennsylvania is unable to manage the uprising itself, so Washington organizes a special army with the purpose of squelching what is now known as The Whiskey Rebellion. The Whiskey Army prevails and US citizens now understand that issues of major conflict are better resolved by discussion and negotiation rather than force.

One of the main reasons for the Whiskey Rebellion is the establishment of a separate government entity called The Democratic Societies, hostile to any sort of rules or government with a hint of the monarchial. Washington's squelching of these organizations lays the foundation for the modern day Republican and Democrat parties as opposed to the self-created offshoots of The Democratic Societies which threaten unity and cohesion.

While in Europe, John Jay is able to document the Jay Treaty, which solidifies commerce between England and the United States while averting war between the two countries. Most of the Congress approved the adoption of the treaty, with the exception of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, who fear that the renewed relationships would provide opportunities for monarchists.

In 1795, Washington bears for the second time the betrayal of another friend and colleague. Secretary of State Edmund Randolph does not approve of The Jay Treaty and is discovered to be outwardly hostile to the United States. A letter written by the French ambassador and intercepted by the British navy is delivered to Washington, who reads of Randolph's disdain for not only the treaty but also of the supposed hostility of America toward France. Randolph resigns his position when Washington demands that Randolph read the letter in front of Washington and the cabinet.

It is interesting to note that Washington must address state secession from the Union during this period while most Americans think that Abraham Lincoln was the first to address this issue during the Civil War, nearly one hundred years later. The people in

Kentucky and Pennsylvania have very strong motives for their intentions and would have taken action on their own in the times before the Revolution. However, the issue of states' rights versus the best actions for the countries is a critical lesson to be learned. Although it pains him to have to do it, Washington organizes an army to squelch any states' rebellions for the greater good of the country. It is ironic, however, that the spirit of rights and justice that drove the route to independence for the country must now be quieted for the good of that same country.

Downhill, Washington's Farewell Address, The End of the Presidency and Home Again

Downhill, Washington's Farewell Address, The End of the Presidency and Home Again Summary and Analysis

For the first time in his life, Washington feels anger and impatience from the American people whose concerns have always been foremost to the leader. The ratification of the Jay Treaty, the Randolph scandal, and Washington's failing personal finances are fodder for the restless public. Even Washington's ill-fitting false teeth are the subject of jokes and ridicule. Washington, in typical form, does not retaliate and bides his time hoping that events will take an upswing so that public perception will change favorably and Washington can leave a unified nation not laboring under any ill will or discontent.

In May of 1796, the cabinet believes that Washington will retire and the possible candidates to replace him are Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. Washington's advancing age and failing health cannot allow Washington to retain the office, so Washington enlists the help of Alexander Hamilton to write his farewell speech to the nation, which Washington delivers on September 17, 1796.

As if by some divine intervention, many of the problems that have plagued Washington's presidency of late begin to disappear and relations with both England and France are amicable. Washington makes his final public appearance when addressing Congress on December 7, 1796. Although a sentimental favorite, Washington feels compelled to leave office so as not to give the perception that a President remains in office until his death as do royal monarchs. However, even after John Adams is inaugurated, the people still hold the former President foremost in their hearts.

Washington sells many of the furnishings of the Presidential Mansion to Adams, although Washington takes most of the artwork home to Mount Vernon. A consummate art collector, Washington had commissioned many works thought to be ahead of their time based on current art studies.

Upon returning home, Washington finds Mount Vernon in desperate need of repair and spends many months updating and fixing the crumbling estate. Washington also continues his early morning rides around the estate to inspect farmland that is now exhausted and non-productive. After a string of losses of overseers over the years, Washington finds himself in a very hands-on situation in order to reverse the decline of his beloved Mount Vernon.

In this section, the author provides more details of Washington's private life, including his sexuality and financial situation. The author even provides detail on Washington's famous ill-fitting false teeth, saying, "Washington did wear clumsy dentures. Only one of his own teeth was in his mouth in 1789 when he presided over the capital in New York. That tooth soon vanished. Washington wore terrifying-looking contraptions, made of substances like hippopotamus ivory. The upper and lower jaws, that were hinged together at the back of the mouth, opened and closed with the assistance of springs. He himself complained that they distorted his lips. However, as he could command the best dentists, he was probably no more disfigured than was then common among the elderly and prosperous" (p. 339). Normally considered private topics, it is interesting to find information on these topics, yet the author's purpose is to provide as well-rounded a picture as possible of Washington the man, not Washington the icon.

Mental Confusion, Politics at Sunset, Washington and Slavery and Death of a Hero

Mental Confusion, Politics at Sunset, Washington and Slavery and Death of a Hero Summary and Analysis

Removed now from the office he has held for eight years, Washington tries valiantly to distance himself from politics but is drawn in again when news of negative writings about Washington surface to threaten Washington's relationship with Jefferson. As it turns out, the letters are not written by Jefferson and people wonder at Washington's rush to judgment on the matter. To complicate things, the French are unhappy with John Adams and demand a special expedition and concessions to maintain a positive relationship with America. The incident comes to be known as the XYZ affair, for the three anonymous French representatives making demands on America.

Adams, without notifying Washington, names Washington commander in chief of the army, a move surprisingly not upsetting to the ex-President. In a series of mixed communications between Washington, Hamilton, Adams, and other cabinet members, the issue of Washington's selection of generals takes on unrealistic proportions and Washington's state of mind is questioned by those involved.

Washington sets out for Philadelphia on November 5, 1798 to build his new army, and hand picks those who will serve under him, especially avoiding those with pro-French sensibilities. Washington seems most involved with the construction of a new uniform of his own ornate design. Hoping to wear the new style at many important occasions, Washington is frustrated by the length of time required to craft the uniform. Unfortunately, it takes many months for completion and Washington does not live to wear the uniform he anticipated with such relish.

Washington, like all the Southern members of the government, faces the dilemma of slavery, the basis of the agrarian economy in the Southern states. Unlike many of the other slave owners, Washington treats his slaves with kindness and intends to free them upon Martha Washington's death. Until that time, it is Washington's intent that the black workers be hired on his farms. In addition, the lack of slave sales means a significant drop in income, a move that creates great financial hardship for the Mount Vernon accounts.

Each time Washington returns to Mount Vernon he is struck with melancholy and a preoccupation with death that does not seem to visit him while serving in the army. In 1799, Washington has returned to Mount Vernon for good and he returns to management of the estate. On December 12, 1799, Washington gets caught in a storm while riding around his property and refuses to take any medications for a sore throat

and hoarse voice. Early the next morning, physicians are called and Washington is bled four times according to the medical practices of the day. Washington never rallies and dies shortly before midnight on December 13, 1799.

Probably one of the most important topics still in question about many of the Founding Fathers of America, including Washington, is the issue of slavery. The economy of the Southern states is an agrarian one, demanding field labor, and the usage of slaves has allowed the farmers and planters to maintain great profitability. Ironically, the Declaration of Independence drafted by these men declares that all men are created equal. The gap between the document and the lack of enforcement related to slaves is a critical one which still is hotly debated today. Washington does not immediately free his slaves after the Declaration, but he does make provisions for their being paid for work and for ultimate freedom after the death of his wife. Although far from perfect, Washington's actions can be held up as working toward the spirit of the Declaration even though the abolition of slavery on his estate is too radical a move at this time.

Characters

George Washington

George Washington is an enterprising young man born to English lineage but with no accompanying wealth in Virginia in 1732. George is the oldest of the five children born to his father and his second wife. The death of George's father instills a new sense of resourcefulness in the already inventive George, who carves a military career out of adventures in the unsettled Ohio and Northwest Territories. Although he receives no formal training, George works as a surveyor and ultimately earns a fine reputation for military prowess. These skills will be called into use at the onset of the American Revolution when George is named the leader of the Continental Army. An unlikely candidate, George himself is surprised at the nomination but accepts out of a sense of duty to his country. Fierce loyalty to the new country and the countrymen drives George to excellence in spite of his relative lack of experience. George is not an overwhelmingly successful military leader but he manages to come through when it counts and ultimately the Continental Army prevails over the British Army in the fight for independence. The integrity and strong character which has served George throughout his military career now launches him into political life when he is voted in as the first President of the United States. Throughout his life, George is torn between serving his country and living a family life at Mount Vernon, but public life prevails. George has precious few months at home before he dies at the end of 1799 at his beloved Mount Vernon.

Martha Dandridge Custis Washington

Martha Dandridge Custis Washington is George Washington's wife. Martha had been widowed in 1757 and she comes to the marriage with George in January of 1759 with two children and a very healthy bank account. Although George and Martha have no children together, George raises Martha's children, Jackie and Patsy, as his own. Martha delights in managing the household at Mount Vernon and reluctantly leaves each winter to join George during the years when he is in winter quarters with his army. Never complaining, Martha adapts camp life to emulate life at Mount Vernon so that George will have some semblance of home during the hardships of war, especially those of Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Martha understands the pull of the duty to one's country, and when George is elected President, Martha is not pleased at yet another change in their lives, but dutifully follows George to become the wife of the President of the United States. In this account, Martha is known more for her domestic skills and not being particularly interested in national or foreign affairs, preferring instead to recreate the entertaining and social activities for which she was so well known in Virginia. Faithful to the end, Martha is at George's bedside when he dies in December of 1799.

Mary Ball Washington

Mary Ball Washington is George Washington's mother who clings to George after the death of Augustine Washington because George is her oldest son.

Sally Fairfax

Sally Fairfax is the wife of Washington's friend, George Fairfax, and an unrequited first real love for George Washington. Although Sally is a few years George's senior, the couple engages in verbal flirtations made in the comfortable atmosphere at Belvoir, the Fairfax estate in Virginia. George is smitten with Sally's sophistication and wit and even writes to Sally when away at war during the French and Indian confrontations. Sally never fully engages in any untoward behavior or entices George into a situation from which he cannot extricate himself or that might prove embarrassing for both of them. Although there is no physical consummation of the affair, Sally plays an important role in George's life as a direct contrast to his mother, the most important female figure in George's life to this point. Sally will also stand in stark contrast to Martha Washington, George's wife, who is more dowdy, uncontroversial, and conventional. Even toward the end of his life when George is retired at Mount Vernon, his one wish is that Sally, now a widow, should return to Belvoir so that the two can re-establish their friendship. The fact that Sally never returns must have been a source of regret and longing for the aging George, wishing to rekindle some aspect of love and youthfulness.

Major General Edward Braddock

Major General Edward Braddock is the British officer who arrives in Virginia in early 1755 and who encourages young George Washington into military service.

Augustine Washington

Augustine Washington is George Washington's father who dies when George is eleven years old.

John Parke Custis (Jackie)

John Parke Custis, called Jackie, is George Washington's stepson due to George's marriage to Martha Dandridge Custis, widow of Daniel Parke Custis.

Martha Parke Custis (Patsy)

Martha Parke Custis, called Patsy, is George Washington's stepdaughter due to George's marriage to Martha Dandridge Custis, widow of Daniel Parke Custis.

Major General Charles Lee

Major General Charles Lee is a former British officer and recent immigrant to America. Washington taps Lee to be one of four advisors when Washington is named Commander in Chief of the Continental Army.

Major General Horatio Gates

Major General Horatio Gates is a former British officer and recent immigrant to America. George taps Gates to be one of four advisors when George is named Commander in Chief of the Continental Army.

Joseph Reed

Joseph Reed is a lawyer tapped by George to be one of four advisors when George is named Commander in Chief of the Continental Army.

Thomas Mifflin

Thomas Mifflin is a merchant and businessman chosen by George to be one of four advisors when George is named Commander in Chief of the Continental Army. Mifflin later becomes disenchanted with his position when procurement of goods is especially difficult and launches an initiative to unseat Washington.

John Adams

John Adams is the chief of the Massachusetts delegation who lobbies to have Washington named head of the Continental Army in 1775 and later becomes Washington's Vice President.

Brigadier General Thomas Conway

Brigadier General Thomas Conway is an Irish-born French soldier who volunteers to help lead Washington's army and who launches a secret plot to remove Washington when Washington blocks Conway's ploys for promotion.

Marquis de Lafayette

The Marquis de Lafayette is the French officer who serves under Washington's command and becomes a confidante and treasured friend during the American Revolution.

Lieutenant General Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin

Lieutenant General Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin Baron von Steuben trains the Valley Forge soldiers in military drills to improve their battle presence and efficiency.

Benedict Arnold

General Benedict Arnold is one of Washington's favorite colleagues but the one who inflicts personal and professional pain on Washington with his treason against the United States.

Peggy Shippen

Peggy Shippen is a beautiful and wealthy young woman who wins the heart of Benedict Arnold who engages in treason with Peggy's former beau, John Andre.

Major John Andre

John Andre is an adjutant general to the British army who unsuccessfully woos Philadelphia beauty Peggy Shippen but succeeds in engaging Peggy's husband, Benedict Arnold into a treasonous plot against the United States.

General Charles Cornwallis

General Cornwallis leads the British troops in the Battle of Yorktown and ultimately surrenders there in October of 1781.

Alexander Hamilton

Alexander Hamilton is a former aide to Washington and considered to be a trusted colleague of the general.

Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson serves as the Governor of Virginia during the Revolutionary War and is a trusted friend of Washington, a fellow Virginian.

Tobias Lear

Tobias Lear is Washington's personal secretary whose relationship with Washington will last from 1784 until Washington's death in 1799.

General Anthony Wayne

General Anthony Wayne is a Revolutionary War soldier later tapped by Washington to lead a military initiative to control the Indian wars in the Ohio Territory.

Eliza Powel

Eliza Powel is the wife of Samuel Powel, a wealthy Philadelphia businessman, who is Washington's favorite female friend for her wit, intelligence, and candor.

Edmond Charles Genet

Edmond Charles Genet is the French ambassador to the United States during the time of the French Revolution. Genet's attempts to garner support for France in the US ultimately have Genet removed from office.

Edmund Randolph

Edmund Randolph is Attorney General of the United States whom Washington selects to succeed Thomas Jefferson as Secretary of State and whom ultimately betrays Washington.

Objects/Places

Pope's Creek, Virginia

Pope's Creek, Virginia, is the location of George Washington's birthplace.

The Rappahannock River

The Rappahannock River flows through eastern Virginia near the childhood home of George Washington.

Fredericksburg, Virginia

Fredericksburg, Virginia is located on the Rappahannock River and is the location of George Washington's boyhood home.

Belvoir Mansion

Belvoir Mansion is the home of the British Fairfax family which befriends the young George Washington.

The Ohio Valley

Washington is commissioned to lead a small expedition to gain intelligence on the French army in the Ohio Valley during 1753 and 1754.

"the shot heard round the world"

"The shot heard round the world" is the phrase which denotes the beginning of the American Revolution against the British when the two armies engage in battle at Concord, Massachusetts.

Bunker Hill

Bunker Hill is the Boston area site of the Battle of Bunker Hill during a siege on the city on June 17, 1775.

Common Sense

Common Sense, written by Thomas Paine, is a set of manuscripts outlining the arguments against the colonies being ruled by Great Britain.

Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence is the document drafted by the Continental Congress declaring the freedom of the thirteen colonies from British rule.

The Battle of Princeton

The Battle of Princeton was fought on January 3, 1777, resulting in a victory for the Continental Army.

Trenton, New Jersey

Trenton, New Jersey is the location of the Battle of Trenton, in which Washington's troops surprised the Hessian troops on the morning of December 26, 1776, resulting in a much-needed victory for the Continental Army.

Valley Forge

Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, is the location of Washington's army quarters during the winter of 1777-1778. Lack of food and adequate supplies makes this a particularly desperate time for the army and represents one of the lowest periods during Washington's command.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, serves as the capital of the American Revolution and the meeting location of the Continental Congress.

West Point

West Point is an important military position in New York, which becomes the center of controversy during Benedict Arnold's treasonous activities.

Yorktown, Virginia

Yorktown, Virginia is the site of the battle against the British and ultimate surrender of General Cornwallis.

The French Revolution

The French Revolution is the period from 1789-99 when the people of France overthrow the French monarchy in a bloody upheaval.

Neutrality Proclamation

The Neutrality Proclamation, issued by Washington in April of 1793, declares the neutral position of the United States during the war between France and England.

Themes

Duty

From a young age, Washington feels a sense of duty to his home and family, especially to his mother who comes to rely heavily on Washington after her husband's death. Caring for the family's land and heritage is paramount to the young man, who soon learns that this will be the driving force of his life: taking care of a country and the people who inhabit it. As a fledgling soldier, Washington is loyal to his mission and to the people who serve with him, staying the course when other young men may have run when faced with the horrors of primitive warfare. Washington carries these same qualities with him when called to serve on a bigger scale during the Revolutionary War, and his thoughts and actions are never about himself; rather, they focus on the soldiers he commands and the bigger picture of the war's purpose. Each time he is called to serve, despite his disdain for public life, Washington does his patriotic duty and works purposefully, whether as soldier or politician. This same sense of duty lives in all the men who worked so diligently for independence during this time. Although there were varying levels of commitment and visibility, each of these men risked their homes and lives to do what they considered their duty. It is also important not to forget the women of this time period, especially the wives of the Founding Fathers, who not only gave up their husbands for extended periods but also managed households, farms, and families in the face of grave danger.

Love

There are many variations of love exhibited by Washington during his lifetime. The most obvious is his marriage to Martha Washington, which lasted from their wedding in 1759 until George's death in 1799. George is clearly devoted to the steadfast Martha and raises her two children as if they were his own. There is clearly a deep respect between the two, yet it is implied in the book that George's one true, abiding love is for Sally Fairfax, the wife of a neighbor in rural Virginia. Although never consummated, the relationship with Sally delights the young George as typical of any first love. Although there is no indication of inappropriate behavior during his marriage to Martha, it is clear that the thought of Sally Fairfax never fully leaves Washington. Toward the end of his life, Washington asks Sally, now a widow, to return to her old home near Mount Vernon, but Sally does not return, leaving Washington even more melancholy.

On a different level, Washington feels a passionate love for his country and the people who live and fight for independence. Although different from romantic love, this love touches the depths of Washington's character and drives most of the actions of his life, at times forsaking other loves for this primary force.

Inventiveness

Although history remembers Thomas Jefferson as being the most creative of the American presidents, Washington was a man of great creative talents as well. Beginning with a career in surveying, Washington displayed skill in drafting and visual presentation. At home, Washington prided himself on his architectural skills exemplified by the building of his estate, Mount Vernon. Washington did not stop at structural elements though, and even dabbled in the interior design of the rooms as well as some functional pieces which aided in entertaining. Always looking to improve methods and outcomes, Washington structured the farms and plantings at Mount Vernon for greatest yield and also developed tools to facilitate chores. Washington's bent for creativity also comes into play in his public life as he becomes an avid art collector, considered to be well ahead of his time in his tastes and inclinations. Washington was also very creative in his military years when hardships forced the general to be more resourceful when provisions for his troops prove inadequate. The naming of special foraging parties and methods saved the army when others might have given up. Washington's fighting style is also creative as he relied on the element of surprise attacks in order to gain military advantage. Throughout all his life, Washington had the mark of creative genius, never being satisfied with the current situation, and worked tirelessly for improvements in all aspects both personal and professional.

Style

Perspective

Because the book is nonfiction, the narrative is delivered in the third person point of view. This means that the author does not participate in any way in the dialogue or action and is essentially delivering facts in a compelling way as opposed to inventing characters with personalities and emotions. The important people in this book are all real historical figures, so the author cannot create their motives or actions; these have already been defined by the people themselves as they lived. The author draws his information from historical documents, papers, and letters, and interjects the information gleaned to help give depth to Washington and the other important people. In many cases the author actually uses quotes from these documents in order to add some authenticity to what could sometimes be considered speculation about an event or a person's reaction to an event. These are the only instances of actually knowing what each person has thought or felt. In some cases, the author adds slight speculation of a person's motives or feelings based on surrounding documentation or past behavior of that person in similar circumstances. In general, though, this book is a re-telling of facts with supplementation of quoted material to add depth and dimension

The book is rich in settings indigenous to the actions related to the American Revolution. Beginning in mid-1700s Virginia, the author paints the picture of rural life of Washington's youth. From there, Washington forges new territory as he moves westward toward the burgeoning settlement of Pittsburgh and then later on into the Ohio Territory. Washington comes to know this area well as a soldier during the French and Indian War. Washington returns to Virginia where he buys property, the most famous being his estate at Mount Vernon on the Potomac River. Once married, Washington expands Mount Vernon into an imposing property lush with verdant farmland.

When the call for revolution reaches Washington, he travels to Philadelphia, the most sophisticated city in the country in the mid 1700s. Washington is drawn into the dining and shopping opportunities while also serving in the first Continental Congress there. Washington's appointment as leader of the Continental Army takes Washington first to Boston to meet his troops and later on to New York to defend this important port city. During the course of the Revolutionary War, Washington and his troops will cover most of New York state and the areas of Boston, Philadelphia, and port cities in New Jersey such as Princeton and Trenton. During his presidency, Washington is able to make more leisurely trips throughout New England and the Southern states. Having never traveled further than his home state of Virginia, Washington is smitten with these other states, especially South Carolina. Eventually, Washington returns to his beloved Mount Vernon in Virginia where he dies in December of 1799.

Tone

The language of the book is very structured and formal, a reflection of the tone used in the time of Washington. Essentially, the language used in that time is a variation of the strong British style from which the Americans evolved. Conversations are stiff yet very polite and each person is addressed as "Mr.", "Miss", or "Mrs." and first names are never used when speaking with another. Meanings in conversations are never direct with the words shrouded in flowery language and ,roundabout verbiage with the open possibility of misinterpretation.

The author seems to emulate the style of the people of the time and writes in the passive voice. This style is more difficult to read and takes more time to understand the intent but is in character with the period of the piece. The author is clearly well versed in detail about the people and the reader can almost feel the author holding back so as not to overburden the narrative. One other technique the author uses is to write long paragraphs describing a person or event and then insert a brief summary sentence at the end of that paragraph. This also occurs at the end of each chapter where the author takes the opportunity to briefly summarize for the reader the important facts or activities to take away from that chapter.

Structure

This novel is comprised of fifty-two chapters, each approximately eight pages long. Each chapter has a name identifying the main activity for the content as well as an accompanying notation of the time period covered. Each chapter is a small history lesson outlining the important and most relevant actions in Washington's life. Because this book is a distillation of another four-volume biography written by the author, it holds just the highlights of Washington's personal and professional career. For this reason there are some disjointed gaps between chapters, yet the flow is relatively smooth without losing meaning. The author admits that he originally could not imagine writing a single volume on Washington, but after the publication of the four-volume set, it was easier for him to distill the most important material into this book. Feeling that the voluminous amount of material encompassing Washington's life does exist in the larger biography, the author felt comfortable to produce this piece of the major highlights. The author does a masterful job of providing a working timeline of Washington's life with the appropriate amount of context without the added burden of the information, which it is clear that the author possesses. The author does note that, with the exception of the account of Washington's death, each chapter has been rewritten from its original form in the master work.

Quotes

"Washington's existence at Mount Vernon was being troubled and made fascinating by the woman to whom he wrote, when he was old and celebrated, that none of the subsequent events of his career 'nor all of them together have been able to eradicate from my mind those happy moments, the happiest of my life, which I have enjoyed in your company.' What surely was the most passionate love of Washington's life had dark overtones: Sally was married, married to his neighbor and close friend George William Fairfax." Love and Massacre, p. 19

"The officers on their horses were perfect targets. One after another they went down. Washington's horse was shot from under him. He leapt on another. Bullets tore his coat. Braddock toppled over. Washington's second horse crumpled; his hat was shot off. However, as he later wrote, 'the miraculous care of Providence . . . protected me beyond all human expectation.'" Love and Massacre, p. 26

"The most significant aspect of Washington's early career was that it took place at all. Every responsibility he assumed required public selection and support. When he was hardly beyond his teens, many of his associates were already convinced that his destiny was importantly linked with the destiny of America." George Washington's First War, p. 36

"That his perfidious Indian guide should, even at point-blank range, have missed Washington in the wilderness seems reasonable, but it is strange that during the Braddock massacre, when every other mounted officer was struck, he remained uninjured. And then there was the time he rode between the two firing columns, striking up the guns with his sword. In subsequent years, during the Revolution, Washington was again and again to take the most foolhardy risks, but the bullets, although they tore his clothes and killed his horses, never touched his body." George Washington's First War, p. 36

"Washington's agricultural activities were by no means limited to utility. Although he never painted a picture and wrote no more poems after he emerged from adolescence, he was always passionately concerned with aesthetic effect. This could manifest itself in the spacing on the page of a letter or of a survey. It found its greatest expression in the design of Mount Vernon (he was his own architect) and the embellishment of the grounds." Washington in His Landscapes, p. 52

"Washington saw as the fundamental issue the question whether the British acts were random results of stupid misadministration or whether they were proofs 'of a fixed and uniform plan to tax us.' He was shocked to read of the Boston Tea Party because he believed it would encourage the British to further excesses. It was the extremity of those excesses that finally forced him to make up his mind. The 'intolerable acts' which closed the port of Boston and abrogated the charter of Massachusetts 'exhibited,' he believed, 'an unexampled testimony of the most despotic system of tyranny that was ever

practiced in a free government.' Opposition had become an absolute duty." A New Call to Arms, p. 58

"They waited bravely enough, but when a small British force—not more than sixty or seventy men—appeared, they jettisoned their guns and knapsacks and took off for the rear. Washington galloped after them, shouted, struck at them with his riding whip, but to no avail. He threw his hat on the ground crying out, 'Are these the men with whom I am to defend America?' And again, 'Good God! Have I got such troops as these?'" The Continental Army on Trial, p. 84

"Washington galloped to the rescue, conspicuous on a tall white horse. He lined up his own men and then rode ahead of them as they advanced against the British. When the two forces came in range, both fired: Washington was between them. An aide, Colonel Richard Fitzgerald, covered his face with his hat to keep from seeing the Commander in Chief killed. When Fitzgerald lowered the hat, he saw many men dead and dying, but the General was sitting untouched on his horse." Heights, p. 97

"The men were to erect huts fourteen feet wide by sixteen long and six and a half feet high. Each was to house twelve men. Fireplaces were to be made of laths covered with mud. While the huts were being built, the men lived miserably in tents. Dr. Albigence Waldo wrote, 'Poor food—hard lodging—cold weather—fatigue—nasty clothes—nasty cookery—vomit half my time—smoked out of my senses—the devil's in it—I can't endure it... A pox on my bad luck. There comes a bowl of beef soup—full of burnt leaves and dirt, sickish enough to make a Hector spew—away with it boys—I'll live like the chameleon upon air!. . ." The Conway Cabal, p. 110

"'There comes a soldier, his bare feet are seen through his worn-out shoes, his legs nearly naked from the tattered remains of an only pair of stockings, his breeches not sufficient to cover his nakedness, his shirt hanging in strings; his hair disheveled; his face meager. . . He comes and cries with an air of wretchedness and despair, 'I am sick, my feet lame, my legs are sore, my body covered with this tormenting itch . . . and all the reward I shall get will be—Poor Will is dead.'" The Conway Cabal, p. 111

"'The genius of this nation,' he wrote a European comrade, 'is not in the least to be compared with the Prussians, the Austrians, or French. You say to your soldier, 'Do this, and he doeth it, but I am obliged to say, This is the reason that you ought to do that and then he does it.'" The Road Turns Upward, p. 118

"'General Washington,' so testified Lafayette, 'seemed to arrest fortune with one glance. . . His presence stopped the retreat. . . His graceful bearing on horseback, his calm and deportment which still retained a trace of displeasure . . . were all calculated to inspire the highest degree of enthusiasm. . . I thought then as now that I had never beheld so superb a man.'" The Road Turns Upward, p. 123

"Although usually busy in the morning, 'from dinner till night he is free for all company. His worthy lady seems to be in perfect felicity when she is by the side of her Old Man as she calls him. We often make parties on horseback. Then General Washington throws

off the hero and takes on the chatty, agreeable companion. He can be downright impudent sometimes. . .'" Enter a French Army, p. 134

"'In no instance since the commencement of the war has the interposition of Providence been more conspicuous than in the rescue of the post and garrison of West Point from Arnold's villainous perfidy.'" Treason, p. 148

"'It is incredible that soldiers composed of men of every age, even of children of fifteen, of whites and blacks, almost naked, unpaid, and rather poorly fed, can march so well and stand fire so steadfastly.' He credited 'the calm and calculated measures of General Washington, in whom I daily discover some new and eminent qualities. . . He is certainly admirable as the leader of his army, in which everyone regards him as his father and friend.'" Yorktown, p. 157

"As Jefferson was later to comment, 'The moderation and virtue of a single character probably prevented this Revolution from being closed, as most others have been, by a subversion of that liberty it was intended to establish.'" A Gulf of Civil Horror, p. 175

"'At length, my dear Marquis,' Washington wrote Lafayette, 'I am become a private citizen on the banks of the Potomac, and under the shadow of my own vine and my own fig tree. Free from the bustle of a camp and the busy scenes of public life, I am solacing myself with those tranquil enjoyments which the soldier who is ever in pursuit of fame; the statesman whose watchful days and sleepless nights are spent in devising schemes to promote the welfare of his own, perhaps the ruin of other countries (as if this globe was insufficient for all); and the courtier who is always watching the countenance of his prince, in hopes of catching a gracious smile, can have very little conception. I am not only retired from all public employments, but I am retiring within myself, and shall be able to view the solitary walk and tread the paths of private life with heartfelt satisfaction. Envious of none, I am determined to be pleased with all, and this, my dear friend, being the order of my march, I will move gently down the stream of life until I sleep with my fathers.'" Goodbye to War, pp. 180-82.

"In a statement involving three future Presidents, Madison wrote Jefferson about Washington: 'To forsake the honorable retreat to which he had retired and risk the reputation he had so deservedly acquired, manifested a zeal for the public interest that could, after so many and illustrious services, scarcely have been expected of him.'" Canals and Conventions, p. 203

"Eliza gave particular emphasis to an argument so personal that others seem to have been afraid to use it. Knowing 'your sensibility with respect to public opinion' she felt obliged, as Washington's friend, to point out that much of his popularity 'will be torn from you by the envious and malignant should you follow the bent of your inclinations.' It would be said 'that a concurrence of unparalleled circumstances had attended you,' and that since 'ambition has been the moving spring of all your acts,' when the going became hard, 'you would take no further risks' for the people. It would be said that, foreseeing collapse of the government, he was fleeing to escape the crash." No Exit, p. 270

"He continued in a pitiful vein uncharacteristic of the proud old hero: he hoped that, 'as I did not seek the office with which you have honored me, that charity may throw her mantle over my want of abilities to do better; that the gray hairs of a man' who had spent 'all the prime of his life in serving his country, be suffered to pass quietly to the grave, and that his errors, however numerous, if they are not criminal, may be consigned to the tomb of oblivion.'" Washington's Farewell Address, p. 348

"When Adams had taken the oath, made his speech, and departed; when the inauguration was over, the audience rushed after Washington to the street. They followed him towards the Francis Hotel where he intended to congratulate the new President. As Washington went through the door and the door closed behind him, the crowd, seeing their hero pass from them, made 'a sound like thunder.'" The End of the Presidency, p. 358

Topics for Discussion

Do you think George Washington was a better general or a better president? Explain.

What characteristics did Washington display in his military and personal life that led to his unanimous nomination for General of the Continental Army and election as the first President of the United States?

To many people, independence is a word at the head of a document. Discuss the risks and ramifications for those Founding Fathers who crafted that document.

What do you think Washington would find interesting about the role of the President of the United States today?

If all men are created equal, as the Declaration of Independence states, why did some of the Founding Fathers refuse to abolish slavery on their estates?

What did you learn from this book that surprised you the most about George Washington?

Discuss how the American Revolution would have played out if the Founding Fathers had had the electronic communications available to us today.