

George Washington The Lansdowne Portrait by Gilbert Stuart

Ideas of things to bring to class with you:

- Elements of Art Board
- George Washington Presentation cd and script
 - A one-dollar Bill
 - Take Home Sheets

(please make copies a day or two in advance)

The portrait activity is from the website of the National Portrait Gallery (www.npg.si.edu) You will find a wealth of information on the history of this era, especially as it relates to George Washington and the Lansdowne portrait.

Introduce yourself and tell the class that you are in class for Art in the Classroom. Review briefly what was talked about last visit.

Before we talk about today's artist let's remember the tools that every artist uses when creating his or her work. These are called the Elements of Art.

(Elements of Art slide – line, shape, color, light, shape, texture and space)
Slide 1

Today we are going to look at a famous portrait. Can anyone tell me what a portrait is? *A likeness of a person or group of people.*

Hundreds of years ago portraits were painted for mostly the royalty and the rich. Portraits were used to mark an important event or record a likeness. Here are some different versions of portraits.



Matisse



Vermeer



Rembrandt



Cassat

Slide 2

Do you notice that some look like real and some are stylized using the artist's imagination and creativity?

What invention happened in this century that gave artists much more freedom when capturing someone's likeness? *The camera. Artists no longer had to make portraits look real, camera's could do that in an affordable way.*

The portrait we are going to look at today was painted about 200 years ago. What was going on in this country about 200 years ago? *The Revolutionary War was over. Our country was in its infancy.*

Who was one of the most important people at that time?
We are going to look at a portrait of George Washington.

With one of the most familiar faces in American history, George Washington is easy to recognize, because you have seen his portrait many times before—it's even on the dollar bill!

From his days as the commanding General of the Army in the American Revolution until long after his death in 1799, Washington has been a popular subject for artists. Even before Gilbert Stuart painted this portrait in 1796, many Americans might have recognized Washington's face through almanacs and newspapers. His courage, heroism, and leadership were legendary. People flocked to see him wherever he traveled. Images of Washington were available to his adoring public. Some of these were good likenesses, and others were not.

Today we are going to look at a portrait of George Washington by a famous portrait artist, Gilbert Stuart. Gilbert Stuart painted George Washington many times. The version that we are going to look at is called "The Lansdowne Portrait". We'll find out how it got its name later. This painting currently belongs to a museum in Washington, DC called the National Portrait Gallery.



Slide 3

Here is a portrait of Gilbert Stuart (1755-1828). He was the preeminent portrait artist in the United States in the early 19th century. He recorded likenesses of American lawyers, politicians, landowners and diplomats, and their wives and children, painting nearly 1,000 portraits in his lifetime. His subjects included numerous presidents and other well-known figures, including Paul Revere, Abigail Adams, and Mohawk Chief Joseph Brandt.

Before we can see this famous portrait, we need to solve a mystery!
In this make-believe mystery, a curator has found a half-finished portrait of President George Washington by the great artist Gilbert Stuart.

Does anyone know what a curator does? *Curators at the National Portrait Gallery collect and care for treasured paintings of people, and research and interpret what the paintings tell us about the painter and the person in the portrait.*

Curators find out a lot about a painting by following clues, just like a detective does. Here, we see George Washington, but the portrait doesn't look complete. Can you help find the missing parts?

Follow the clues to find the missing parts of the portrait. Each correct answer will add a piece to the portrait—and help you learn something about it.



Slide 4

Clue #1

The first President was said to be quite a dancer. So naturally his feet were quick—and silvered. Can you find the answer?



Slide 5

Clue #1 revealed

One, Two, Buckle My ... shoe buckles

In many of his portraits, George Washington wears a military uniform. Yet in this picture of him as the President of the United States he is wearing a black velvet suit and silver buckled shoes. In this portrait, Washington wanted to look more like a civilian (or regular person) than like a general or a king. On the other hand, a black suit was considered formal in Washington's time, as it still is. This tells people that he's important enough to be very well dressed.

About those shoe buckles: A man wore fancy buckles, like these silver ones, because he thought that they would draw a lady's eye to his shapely legs. Those were the days when men showed off their legs and women kept theirs covered.

Clue #2

The pen is mightier than this. And in a patriotic song there's one that is terrible and swift. It's not something that we'd consider wearing today, but you could say it completes George Washington's attire.



Slide 6

Clue #2 revealed

Washington's hand is resting on the sword, which is safely stored in its sheath (or scabbard) by his side. It doesn't look like as if the sword is going to war, does it? For a long time, a sword was said to be "the grand distinguishing mark of a fine Gentleman." It was also a sign of status, especially for a President of this period. George Washington particularly liked to wear a sword, even when he was wearing a suit. Looks pretty cool, huh?

(By the way, in case you were puzzled, the extra credit answer to the song used in the clue is "The Battle Hymn of the Republic.")

Clue #3

Just as milk goes with cereal and peanut butter goes with jelly, this piece of furniture goes with another that is pictured in the portrait. You're probably on one of these right now.



Slide 7

Clue #3 revealed

A fancy chair like this, but smaller, would have been a typical piece of furniture for the home of a gentleman in 18th-century America. On the back of this chair is a shield, which has 13 red and white bars, like the shield in the Great Seal of the United States. The Great Seal is placed on important papers, such as treaties with foreign countries, proclamations by the President, and on the back of the dollar bill.

Clue #4

There is a kind of well that is not very deep. It is not a good place to wash your hands. Another clue: Before there were typewriters or computers, writers had to take a dip in this before going to work.



Slide 8

Clue #4 revealed

The silver inkwell is chock full of important details. There are dogs at the corners, which some people think are there to watch over the words being written. Other people think that the artist put the dogs there as a reminder of Washington's love of the outdoors. Also, dogs are symbols of loyalty. The inkwell also includes a "coat of arms," a combination of symbols that an important family used to identify itself to the world. In the coat of arms of George Washington's British ancestors, there were stars and bars. Although there is no direct connection between the coat of arms and the stars and stripes of the American flag, it is a curious coincidence, don't you think?

Clue #5

I don't say anything, but I can open up and deliver a lot of ideas. You can't tell much about me by just looking at my cover. I can light up your life, but I don't have a switch or power cord.



Slide 9

Clue #5 revealed

When the artist added books to the portrait, he picked them carefully: each points to events in George Washington's life. Books under the table include *American Revolution*, *General Orders*, *Constitutions and Laws of the United States*, which refer to Washington's role as a military leader and his leadership in defining the new government during the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Another fact about George Washington and books: he did not go to school the way you do. Instead, he learned a lot at home by reading books. One of his favorites was about good manners. Really. He copied each of the 110 rules in the book by hand. Here is one: "Be not angry at the table..."

Clue #6

The missing piece is used to set the stage. Ordinarily, you might find a window behind them or some actors waiting to take a bow.



Slide 10

Clue #6 revealed

Take a bow, you found the curtains.

The curtains and the portico (the porch-like area with the columns) follow a European tradition of so-called “state portraits” which includes all those paintings of royal rulers, bishops, admirals or other public figures. These portraits often include a portico-like space with a wall, columns, a curtain and an open space behind the figure. Since George Washington was an especially important person in the United States, the artist wanted to make sure that the portrait included these kinds of clues so that the viewer would immediately know that this man was considered powerful and important.

Clue #7

My name is full of rain, but when you look at me you see a curve of colorful sunshine.



Slide 11

Clue #7 revealed

Right on! Everybody loves a rainbow.

Most people interpret rainbows as a sign that the storm is over. Here it means that the storm of founding a new country has ended, thanks to George Washington. Designers of the Great Seal used storm clouds and rays of light as symbols. They said that the thirteen stars (for the original thirteen states) would be “ringed with rays of light” that are “bursting through a circle of clouds”.

Kids in England used to learn the colors of the rainbow by saying “Richard of York gave battle in vain”. It was an easy way to remember red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet.

You solved the mystery and completed the George Washington portrait! Huzzah! That was the way people said “Hooray!” in George Washington’s time.

You now know more about the portrait than most people would have when it was painted back in 1796. **It shows us what George Washington looked like at the end of his second term as President, three years before he died.**

Gilbert Stuart knew that Washington lacked time and patience for posing. There is no record of how many times Washington posed for the portrait, but typically there would have been at least three sessions, each lasting about two hours. The artist usually devoted what time he had to focusing on the subject’s face and perhaps the hands. A talented artist like Stuart could paint the rest from his imagination or from a discreetly recruited model. Stuart had painted bust-length portraits of Washington twice before, but the portrait painted for the Marquis of Lansdowne was the artist’s first full-length portrait of the President.



Slide 12

Here is the artist working on a portrait of Washington.

So, why is this portrait called the Lansdowne portrait? The Marquis of Lansdowne was British, why would a portrait so important to America be given the name of a British Marquis? Any ideas?

Here is the story: One of the wealthiest men in America had this portrait painted as a gift for the marquis, who was a British supporter of the American cause. It was a gesture of gratitude and a symbol of reconciliation between America and Great Britain. The painting was displayed in Lansdowne's London mansion until his death.

It has traveled to America only three times since its creation, the last time when it was loaned to the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery in 1968. In spring 2001, the National Portrait Gallery rescued the portrait from potential auction, thanks to a generous \$30 million gift from the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation.

Another piece of history learned – not all British were opposed to America's independence.



Slide 13

Here is a portrait of the King of France (King Louis XVI) painted about the same time as the Lansdowne portrait (this painting is dated 1790 and the Lansdowne portrait was 1796).

Do you notice any similarities? *Portico, columns, full-length portrait, sword, curtains, ruler of a country, wig...*

Any differences? *Kind of dress, not as many props, this version is not in color ...*



Slide 14

Thank you so much for helping me restore the Lansdowne portrait. Huzzah! The next time you look at a one dollar bill you can see another portrait of George Washington by Gilbert Stuart.

Let's just review the main points from today:

Portrait – props, dress, setting help tell about the subject
Gilbert Stuart
Colonial America, birth of our nation
George Washington

You may want to pass around a one dollar bill to show Washington's portrait on the front and the Great Seal on the back. If there is extra time, you can read the take home sheet to them. What would the students choose to include in a portrait of themselves?

Burr PTA

Art in the Classroom News

Today in Art in the Classroom we looked at a portrait of George Washington by Gilbert Stuart. Gilbert Stuart painted many versions of George Washington – one of which we see in our daily life. Can you guess where?
It is on the one-dollar bill!

We learned how an artist chooses the clothing, props and portrait setting very carefully to give the viewer a sense of the subject's importance and personality. What would you choose to have in your own portrait?

Here are some interesting facts about George Washington,
the Father of our Country.

Did you know...

He came from a blended family, having two older stepbrothers and one stepsister?

He was actually born February 11, not February 22? England changed its calendar when he was a boy, causing his birth date to become February 22.

His father died when he was 11 years old?

He often had a bad temper but slowly learned to control it?

He loved horseback riding, dancing, and farming?

He was not always a good student?

He did not always get along very well with his mother, who was bossy and controlling?

His older half-brother Lawrence was one of the most important people in young George's life?

He had two stepchildren, but no children of his own?