



Manners & Mores of Washington's America

Intended Grade Level: Middle School

Lesson Purpose: This lesson is intended to engage students in an in-depth study of the manners and mores of late 18th century America and of the personal rules of decorum by which George Washington lived. It is highly doubtful that the list of "110 Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation" that George Washington hand-copied sometime before the age of sixteen -- and that is sometimes sold today as George Washington's "etiquette book" -- actually comprises his own personal list of decorum rules. There is a good chance that the list was a school curriculum staple of a sort that would not have been uncommon in his day, and that copying it may well have been nothing more than a way of practicing penmanship. But whether it was his personal list or a standard "recipe" of general rules for civil behavior that many children learned, the Rules can provide a window into the ethics and manners of Washington's times.

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will examine the list of Rules and imagine what it was like to live in a world imbued with such guidelines and expectations. Students will classify and categorize the various concerns addressed by the Rules.
- Students will analyze what expectations govern their own behavior. Students will write up their own list of Rules covering the same categories that they identified in Washington's list.

National Standards:

NSS-C.5-8.5 ROLES OF THE CITIZEN

What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?

- What is citizenship?
- What are the rights of citizens?
- What are the responsibilities of citizens?
- What dispositions or traits of character are important to the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy?
- How can citizens take part in civic life?



NL-ENG.K-12.5 COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

Materials:

- Washington's "Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation," available at the Digital Papers of George Washington, <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/civility/transcript.html>

Timeframe: Approximately two class sessions

Procedure:

1. Distribute the Rules. Have the class select and circle a few to read and discuss aloud. Review and define the following categories and have students classify the selected Rules under the appropriate category using the Classification Template (included below) as an example:
 - Core ethical values
 - Ways of showing respect
 - Rules of decorum (helping you avoid embarrassment or offense to company)
 - Rules reflecting and upholding the social hierarchy.
2. For each category, have students discuss which rules they chose and whether their classmates agree with their choices. Then have students asterisk those rules that they believe would have *no* place in a contemporary list and circle those they feel have *enduring* or *continuing* value.
3. Next, ask individual students or pairs to write their own list of ten Rules that reflect the most important "do's" and "do not's" of our contemporary society. Have the students share the Rules with the class and discuss how the manners and mores of Washington's time have changed today.



*Adapted from a lesson plan submitted by Rene Lape,
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Washington's *Rules of Civility* Classification Template
(Use this as a model to create your own table.)

<i>Core Ethical Values</i>	<i>Ways of Showing Respect</i>	<i>Rules of Decorum</i>	<i>Rules Reflecting & Upholding the Social Hierarchy</i>
#22 "Shew not yourself glad at the misfortune of another though he were your enemy."	#4 "In the presence of others sing not to yourself with a humming noise, nor drum your fingers or feet."	#15 "Keep your nails clean and short, also your hands and teeth clean, yet without shewing any great concern for them."	#28 "If any one come to speak to you while you are sitting stand up tho he be your inferior, and when you present seats let it be to every one according to his degree."