

IN CLASS LESSON: WHAT MAKES A GOOD CHARACTER

The lesson plan is designed to introduce the concept of good character development. A person of good character can easily be compared to one of our cape-wearing superheroes today, but what about the many men and women from our history books?

Together, or on their own, students should read the passages about George Washington and Robert E. Lee. They'll learn about both men's achievements, as well as their hardships. Lee and Washington's character has stood the test of time because of the values they lived by and taught to others. When finished reading, students should define the words that make up good character by using a dictionary. Afterwards, students should continue the lesson on good character. The lesson covers; strengths and weaknesses, what a good citizen does for their community, defining characteristics they have in common with Washington and Lee, and summarizing what they learned.

What You'll Need:

- **Pencil**
- **Markers, crayons or colored pencils**

George Washington

A Look at Washington's Character Development

George Washington was born on February 22, 1732, in Westmoreland County, Virginia. His parents were Augustine Washington, a successful planter, and Mary Ball. Little is known about Washington's childhood, but when his father passed away, Washington became **responsible** for his mother and siblings. At just 11 years old, Washington helped maintain their plantation, Ferry Farm. Being the man of the house taught him the importance of **hard work**.

Due to financial distress experienced by his family, George Washington never attended college. His formal education ended at the age of 15, but that did not stop him. At the **ambitious** age of 17, Washington joined George William Fairfax as a surveyor in efforts to survey Virginia's frontier. At the age of 21, Washington was **entrusted** with a mission that would lead him 900 miles north of Virginia to what is now Buffalo, New York, to reclaim lands taken by the French. In 1758, the British regained control of the land and the French and Indian War ended.

One year later Washington made his home at Mt. Vernon when he married Martha Dandridge Custis, a wealthy widow with two children. Washington became an **innovative** farmer when he switched from tobacco to wheat as his main crop. He also expanded the farm's land, buildings and resources.

In 1775, George Washington went to war again. This time as commander of the Continental Army. Washington and his troops fought the British in our fight for independence. Through **determination** and **fortitude** and with the help of the French navy, Washington and his army were victorious over the British in 1783. That same year Washington gave up his position of power when he could've been crowned a king. Instead, he returned home to his family and farm.

Washington could not relax at Mt. Vernon for very long. In 1787 he presided over the Constitutional Convention which drafted our Constitution. In 1789, Washington was elected to serve as our first President. In that time he lead with **fairness** and **honesty**. He showed the public that you could lead with **integrity**. In 1797, believing that his civic duty had been done, Washington finally retired from the public service. His retirement was short-lived however. On December 12, 1799, George Washington passed away leaving a nation in mourning.

Washington took time to plan for what would happen in the future. He used his estate to **make a difference** in the lives of those he didn't know and would never meet. In 1796, Washington donated 100 shares of stock from the James River Canal Company to Liberty Hall Academy, a school on Virginia's frontier. The money the school received from the stock saved the school from financial ruin. Washington didn't believe he should accept the money to use for himself, instead he believed it could give young men the formal education he never received.

Robert E. Lee

A Look at Lee's Character Development

Robert E. Lee was born on January 19, 1807, at Stratford Hall in Westmoreland County, Virginia. His parents were Henry Lee III (Light Horse Harry Lee) and Anne Hill Carter. As a young man Lee attended West Point Academy, where he proved himself to be a **smart** and **ambitious** student. He graduated second in his class, a wonderful **achievement**. After graduating, Lee met Mary Randolph Custis and the two were married on June 30, 1831. Together the couple had seven children to **provide** and **care** for.

During the early years of their marriage Lee served as an engineer. Most of Lee's earliest projects were to design and build East Coast fortifications. One of Lee's most challenging jobs as an engineer was to improve the flow of the Mississippi River in St. Louis, Missouri. This saved the port of St. Louis and opened up the northern Mississippi River to navigation.

Lee's military schooling and critical attention to detail proved useful when he fought with **fortitude** in the Mexican-American War and in the Civil War. During the Civil War, 1861-1865, Lee showed that he had the **leadership skills** it took to command the Confederate forces. However, **the decision to command was not easy**. Lee knew it was his duty to fight on the side of his home state of Virginia, but he also knew it would tear apart what Washington fought and worked for. Lee gained **respect** from his men by proving he could win victories at Second Manassas, Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. Lee also learned quickly from his defeats. When the Union forces could no longer be defeated, Lee rode to the Appomattox Courthouse to surrender to Ulysses S. Grant.

After the Civil War, Robert E. Lee and his family moved to Richmond in hopes of a peaceful life. Lee's **integrity** and **hardworking** nature influenced the trustees in their decision to ask him to be the 11th president of Washington College, once named Liberty Hall Academy. Lee and his family moved to Lexington, Virginia in the fall of 1865 to work for the same school Lee's idol, George Washington, donated funds to help save. As the school's president it was Lee's **responsibility** to hire more teachers and add more courses to the curriculum. Lee believed in a **practical** education that would allow students to find jobs outside of school that would help unite and rebuild our nation. Lee was **successful** in adding courses like engineering, journalism and astronomy to the school. Lee also asked that a gathering place for students and a place to house his office be built. Lee's wish was granted in 1868 when the Chapel was completed.

Robert E. Lee was president of Washington College from 1865-1870. In those five years he shaped the lives of many young men and gave them a **positive role model** to look up to. Lee passed away on October 12, 1870 in his home in Lexington. Many of Lee's accomplishments are still part of higher education today.

Using a dictionary, define the traits that make up good character.



Define Character

C
H
A

ARING-

ARDWORKING-

CHIEVE-

ESPECTFUL-

MBITIOUS-

OURAGEOUS-

RUSTFUL-

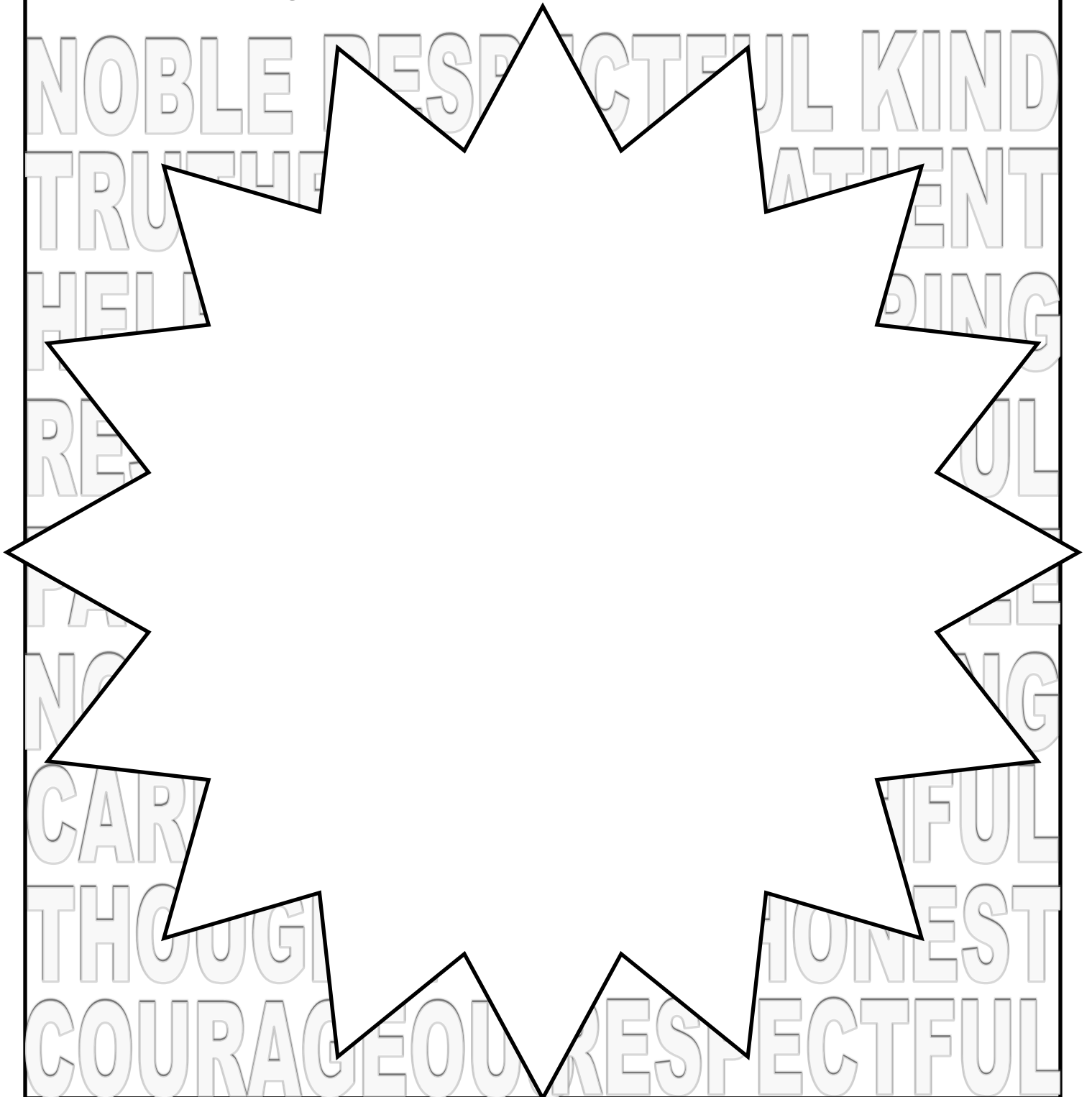
XCELLENT-

ESPONSIBLE-

R

You don't have to be found in a history book or on the movie screen to be considered a hero. Doing the duties of a good citizen is just enough to make you an excellent role model! You read the stories about George Washington and Robert E. Lee, now it's time to tell us your superhero story.

Draw yourself as a superhero. Remember heroes have good traits on the inside and the outside.



Superheroes and role models all have their strengths. Whether they can fly like Superman, or serve their country like George Washington, their strengths help build character. What are some of your strengths?

STRENGTHS

Many role models endure hardships that they have to overcome. Robert E. Lee had to overcome the loss of the Civil War. What is something you've overcome?

HARDSHIPS

Don't forget that even superheroes can struggle with some things; that's why they have sidekicks. Both Washington and Lee had friends and family there to help support them.

WHO IS YOUR SIDEKICK?

**HOW WOULD
YOU HANDLE
BEING A
SUPERHERO?**

Role models practice honesty. Can you tell us about a time you proved that you were honest?

Role models are often considered good citizens. They're people that strive to help their community. In Washington's case, he donated funds to help rebuild a school that would benefit the community. Lee helped students gain a practical education that would help them secure jobs in order to rebuild the nation.

As a good citizen, what is something you can do to help your community?

Superheroes vow to protect others. This character trait can be easily seen in both George Washington and Robert E. Lee. They have both led an army in war and fought to protect others and what they believe in.

What is something you believe in?

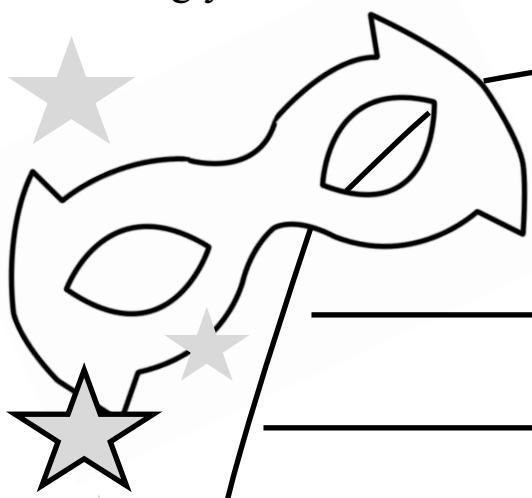
AMBITIOUS
RESPONSIBLE
DETERMINED
HONEST
BRAVE

Pick a superpower from the left you think you have in common with **George Washington**. Tell us why you chose that character trait.

Pick a superpower from the right you think you have in common with **Robert E. Lee**. Tell us why you chose that character trait.

POSITIVE
RESPECTFUL
COURAGEOUS
TRUTHFUL
CARING

Many role models live to share their stories with others, but sometimes their stories have to be passed down. Sometimes their uniforms, suits or gear can tell the story for them. Write about what you learned about George Washington and Robert E. Lee during your lesson on the cape below.



**What I learned about
George Washington.**

CARING
KIND

What I learned about Robert E. Lee.

THOUGHTFUL RESPECTFUL