



George Washington in Song



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Intended Grade Level: Middle School

Lesson Purpose: Students will investigate and analyze the historical significance of the Revolutionary War song, “Yankee Doodle.” Students will create their own “Yankee Doodle” style verses about George Washington and the American Revolutionary War.

Lesson Objectives:

- Comprehend the significant events in the life of George Washington.
- Analyze verses from “Yankee Doodle” and describe the significance of the song to American history.
- Create an additional verse about George Washington and/or the Revolutionary War.

National Standards:

NSS-USH.5-12.3 ERA 3: REVOLUTION AND THE NEW NATION (1754-1820s)

- Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in forging the revolutionary movement, and the reasons for the American victory
- Understands the impact of the American Revolution on politics, economy, and society
- Understands the institutions and practices of government created during the Revolution and how they were revised between 1787 and 1815 to create the foundation of the American political system based on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights

NL-ENG.K-12.1 READING FOR PERSPECTIVE

Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

NL-ENG.K-12.3 EVALUATION STRATEGIES

Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

NL-ENG.K-12.4 COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to



communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes

NA.5-8.8 UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MUSIC, THE OTHER ARTS, AND DISCIPLINES OUTSIDE THE ARTS

Achievement Standard:

- Students compare in two or more arts how the characteristic materials of each art (that is, sound in music, visual stimuli in visual arts, movement in dance, human interrelationships in theatre) can be used to transform similar events, scenes, emotions, or ideas into works of art
- Students describe ways in which the principles and subject matter of other disciplines taught in the school are interrelated with those of music (e.g., language arts: issues to be considered in setting texts to music; mathematics: frequency ratios of intervals; sciences: the human hearing process and hazards to hearing; social studies: historical and social events and movements chronicled in or influenced by musical works)

Materials:

- Warren, Jack D. "George Washington – A Biography For Teachers." The George Washington Biography Lesson. Mount Vernon, Virginia: George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens, 1989. (Included on the CD)
- Paper and markers

Time Frame: Approximately three class sessions

Procedure:

1. Students will read the "George Washington Biography Lesson."
2. Using the George Washington Timeline (included below), students will create a timeline of the major events in George Washington's life.
3. Students will read The Story of "Yankee Doodle" (included below).
4. Using the same format as the George Washington timeline, students will create a second timeline featuring the events described in the featured verses of the song "Yankee Doodle." Make sure that the beginning and ending years for the timeline are the same, and that the marks for dates are in the same positions.



5. Students will compare the George Washington timeline and the “Yankee Doodle” timeline by positioning the timelines one above the other. Students should answer the following questions:
 - Do the two timelines have any events in common?
 - If yes, how many?
 - What events?

6. Students will select an event from George Washington’s life featured on their George Washington Timeline that does not have a companion event on their “Yankee Doodle” timeline. Students will write a new verse to “Yankee Doodle” featuring that event.

7. Students will sing their new verse to the class. Using their George Washington Timelines as a guide, the class should try to guess what event the new verse describes.



*This has been adapted from a lesson plan by Cheryl Koleshis,
George Washington Teachers’ Institute 2006.*



George Washington Timeline

Date Due: _____

George Washington was a public figure in our country for over 45 years. He made contributions in many different areas of importance including military, government, farming, and the arts. You will be creating a timeline of the significant events of his life. This will be used later for other assignments.

You will be given an excerpt from *The George Washington Biography Lesson* to use as a resource, however, you may use other information that is available to you. All sources need to be included in your Works Cited, which will be on the back of your Timeline.

For this assignment you will use a piece of 12" x 18" paper. Cut the paper in half lengthwise and attach the halves to make the timeline longer. You will use this space to include your information.

Be sure to include the following:

- A title
- 20-25 events that are dated and explained in complete sentences.
- A Works Cited on the back
- Appropriate decorations and/or graphics



The Story of "Yankee Doodle"

There are many stories about the origin of the song "Yankee Doodle." After some research, this is the background that most sources agreed upon.

In 1756 the British army was fighting the French army and Indians in the French and Indian War. Volunteers were needed to assist the British soldiers in fighting a wilderness war at Niagara. From the villages and farms of Connecticut, young, eager recruits met at the home of Colonel Thomas Fitch, son of the governor. Before they set out for Fort Crailo, Elizabeth Fitch, his sixteen-year-old daughter, felt that they looked unmilitary. Most were dressed in their everyday work clothes and armed with muskets used to shoot game, not military rifles. Elizabeth wanted the men to look more military, so she and some other girls went into the chicken yard and gathered up feathers for the men to put into their hatbands.

When the Connecticut cavalry rode into headquarters at Fort Crailo, the British soldiers were wildly amused. These soldiers thought it was below them to fight alongside these backward-looking, unfashionable colonials. Dr. Richard Schuckberg, a British army surgeon, exclaimed, "Why, stab my vitals, they're macaronis!" Then he was heard to begin singing the words to a jingle that he made up on the spot and set to an old familiar folk ditty called "Lucy Locket Lost Her Pocket." These words are those familiar to most people today. Here an explanation is included for each line:

Yankee Doodle came to town	The British called Americans Jonathans. The term Yankee is Dutch for <i>jankee</i> or little John. The Dutch called the English who settled in Connecticut Yankees. A doodle is a foolish person. Thus, we have the name Yankee Doodle. The first line was intended to insult the rural nature of the Yankees by referring to the fact that going to town was a big event.
Riding on a pony	The pony is intended to again ridicule the Connecticut soldiers. Soldiers in the army rode steeds. The colonials showed up riding horses used to plow the fields.
Stuck a feather in his hat	The feathers supplied by Elizabeth Fitch



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And called it macaroni	“Macaroni” refers to Italian and French fashion that the British accused the colonials of trying to copy by putting a feather in their hats. It’s not about a type of pasta.
Yankee Doodle, keep it up	The first line encourages the colonials to keep up pretending to be soldiers because it amuses the British troops.
Yankee Doodle Dandy	A dandy is someone who spends his money on clothes to try and look like he is upper class.
Mind the music and the step	Dancing was popular in colonial times, but American folk dances did not have the sophistication of European ones.
And with the girls be handy	This line is intended to insult the colonists’ wives and girlfriends, implying that they will be unfaithful while the soldiers are away at war.

The song "Yankee Doodle" expresses the European's opinion of the colonials. It shows them to be a backward group of people with no sense of style or fashion. When the American War of Independence broke out, the song became popular with British troops. It poked fun of the colonial culture and speech. In 1775 on their way to Lexington and Concord to reinforce British soldiers already fighting, Brigadier General Hugh Percy had this verse played as they marched:

Yankee Doodle's come to town
 For to buy a firelock,
 We will tar and feather him
 And so will we John Hancock

Later the song became the rallying song for colonials during the Revolutionary War. "Yankee Doodle" was well known in the New England colonies before the war. Only after the first skirmishes did the proud Americans begin to use it. They may have been at a disadvantage to the British army, but they beat them back to Boston on April 19, 1775. They created their own verses like this one.



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Yankee Doodle is the tune
That we all delight in,
It suits for feasts, it suits for fun,
And just as well for fightin'

Later it was documented that the Americans sang the following verse at Bunker Hill:

Father and I went down to camp,
Along with Captain Good'in,
And there we see the men and boys
As thick as hasty puddin'

As George Washington took command of the Continental Army in Boston, other verses evolved. These are three of the verses:

He got him on his meeting clothes,
Upon a slapping stallion,
He set the world along in rows,
In hundreds and in millions.

And there was Captain Washington,
And gentlefolks about him,
They say he's grown so tarnal proud,
He will not ride without them.

And there was Captain Washington
Upon a slapping stallion,
Giving orders to his men;
I guess there was a million.



When the British troops under General Burgoyne surrendered on October 17, 1777, the Americans played this tune.

Lastly, when Cornwallis surrendered, Henry Knox, Washington's chief of artillery, wrote that the British band was not allowed to play this song at Yorktown. Instead, according to Marquis de Lafayette, the French army played "Yankee Doodle" to discomfort the British as they marched from the fort between the French and Americans.

Cornwallis led a country dance
The like was never seen, sir,
Much retrograde, and much advance,
And all with General Greene, sir.

The song's history did not end with that war. The Union army sang it during the Civil War. Later American soldiers in World War I and II made it known internationally. This song made the term "Yankee" synonymous with American. "Yankee Doodle" even became the official state song for Connecticut. "Yankee Doodle" was first sung publicly at an Independence Day celebration in Philadelphia and grew to become a 4th of July tradition.