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"The Painter and the President" Lesson Plan Guide

by Sarah Albee, illustrated by Stacy Innerst

Unit Overview

Duration: 2 weeks

Subject Integration: ELA, Social Studies, Art, Character Education

Essential Question: How do people create lasting legacies, and what does it take to collaborate successfully even when facing challenges and personality differences?

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Analyze character traits and motivations in historical nonfiction narrative
- Understand the historical context of portrait painting before photography
- Explore themes of legacy, persistence, and collaboration
- Make connections between historical figures and universal human experiences
- Understand the artistic process and challenges of portrait painting
- Practice perspective-taking from multiple historical viewpoints
- Express understanding through creative and analytical projects

WEEK 1: Historical Context and Character Introduction

Day 1: Introduction to Historical Context

Objective: Build understanding of late 18th century America and pre-photography portraiture

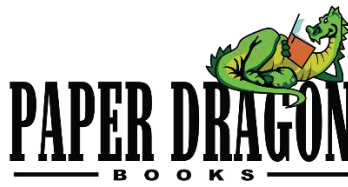
Materials: Timeline of 1790s, images of historical portraits, dollar bills, historical context materials

Opening (10 minutes)

- Show students various dollar bills and point out Washington's portrait
- Quick-write: "How do you think people preserved images of loved ones before cameras existed?"

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Historical Context Building (15 minutes)**
 - Create timeline placing Washington's presidency and Stuart's career
 - Discuss life in the 1790s and importance of portraits
 - Explore why portraits were valuable and how they were used
2. **Portrait Purpose Discussion (15 minutes)**
 - Examine portraits from different time periods



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- Discuss what portraits communicate beyond just appearance
- Introduce concept of legacy and historical memory

Closing (5 minutes)

- Exit ticket: "Why might a leader in the 1700s care about having good portraits?"
- Assign reading: Opening chapters introducing Washington and Stuart

Assessment: Historical context understanding, connection to portrait's purpose

Day 2: Meeting George Washington - The Man Behind the Legend

Objective: Understand Washington as a real person with personality traits and challenges

Materials: Character analysis worksheet, Washington biography resources

Opening (10 minutes)

- Think-pair-share: "What surprised you about George Washington from the reading?"

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Character Analysis** (20 minutes)
 - Create character profile of Washington focusing on personality traits
 - Explore his dislike of sitting for portraits despite understanding their importance
 - Discuss his physical challenges (painful false teeth) and how they affected him
2. **Perspective Exploration** (10 minutes)
 - Why would Washington agree to sit for portraits despite hating it?
 - What does this tell us about his sense of duty and legacy?
 - Connect to students' own experiences doing difficult but important things

Closing (5 minutes)

- Quick poll: "Would you want to be president if it meant sitting for lots of uncomfortable portraits?"

Homework: Read sections about Gilbert Stuart's background and artistic career

Assessment: Character analysis accuracy, understanding of Washington's motivations

Day 3: Gilbert Stuart - Artist and Problem-Solver

Objective: Understand Stuart's artistic process and the challenges he faced

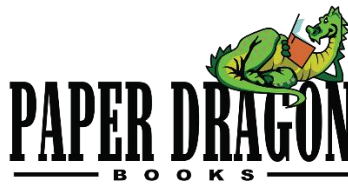
Materials: Examples of Stuart's other portraits, art process discussion materials

Opening (5 minutes)

- Quick discussion: "What makes someone a great portrait painter?"

Main Activity (35 minutes)

1. **Artist Profile** (20 minutes)
 - Analyze Stuart's reputation and artistic skills



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- Explore why painting Washington was so important for Stuart's career
- Discuss what makes a portrait "great" versus just technically accurate

2. The Challenge Analysis (15 minutes)

- Identify specific challenges Stuart faced with Washington as a subject
- Track different strategies Stuart tried to get Washington to relax
- Discuss creativity and problem-solving in art

Closing (5 minutes)

- Exit ticket: "What's one thing Stuart did to try to make Washington more comfortable?"

Assessment: Understanding of artistic process, problem-solving strategy identification

Day 4: The Portrait Sessions - Collaboration and Conflict

Objective: Analyze the relationship between Washington and Stuart

Materials: Collaboration analysis chart, relationship tracking worksheet

Opening (10 minutes)

- Partner discussion: "How do you think Washington and Stuart felt about each other?"

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. Relationship Analysis (20 minutes)

- Map the dynamics between Washington (uncomfortable, impatient) and Stuart (persistent, creative)
- Identify moments of tension and moments of cooperation
- Discuss how both men needed each other despite their differences

2. Collaboration Discussion (10 minutes)

- Explore what makes collaboration successful even when personalities clash
- Connect to students' own experiences working with people who are different from them
- Identify what both men did to make the project successful

Closing (5 minutes)

- Share one tip for working successfully with someone whose personality is different from yours

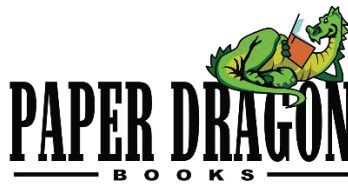
Assessment: Relationship analysis depth, collaboration concept understanding

Day 5: Creating the Iconic Image

Objective: Understand how the final portrait came to be and why it endures

Materials: Copies of the portrait, art analysis materials, dollar bills

Opening (5 minutes)



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- Examine Washington's portrait on dollar bills closely

Main Activity (35 minutes)

1. **Portrait Analysis** (25 minutes)
 - Study the final portrait in detail
 - Discuss what Stuart captured about Washington's character
 - Explore artistic choices (composition, expression, details)
 - Compare to other Washington portraits
2. **Legacy Discussion** (10 minutes)
 - Discuss why this particular portrait became iconic
 - Explore how it has been used and reproduced over centuries
 - Connect to themes of legacy and historical memory

Closing (5 minutes)

- Exit ticket: "What does Stuart's portrait tell us about Washington?"

Assessment: Portrait analysis insight, understanding of artistic achievement

WEEK 2: Themes, Historical Connections, and Creative Projects

Day 6: Legacy and How We Remember

Objective: Explore themes of legacy and historical memory

Materials: Legacy discussion materials, examples of how different figures are remembered

Opening (10 minutes)

- Brainstorm: "How do we remember important people from history?"

Main Activity (30 minutes)

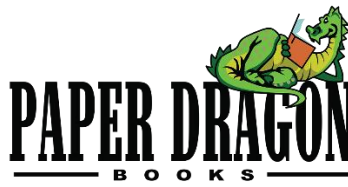
1. **Legacy Exploration** (20 minutes)
 - Discuss why people care about how they'll be remembered
 - Explore different ways historical figures are memorialized
 - Connect Washington's portrait to broader questions of legacy
2. **Modern Connections** (10 minutes)
 - Compare portraits to modern photography and social media
 - Discuss how we create and control our own images today
 - Explore similarities and differences in concerns about legacy

Closing (5 minutes)

- Share one way you'd want to be remembered

Assessment: Legacy concept understanding, modern connections quality

Day 7: Art and the Creative Process



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Objective: Understand portrait painting as both technical skill and creative problem-solving

Materials: Art supplies for demonstration, portrait painting process materials

Opening (5 minutes)

- Review the various strategies Stuart used with Washington

Main Activity (35 minutes)

1. **Artistic Process Discussion** (20 minutes)
 - Explore what skills portrait painters need beyond technical drawing ability
 - Discuss the psychological aspects of portrait painting
 - Analyze how Stuart combined technical skill with understanding of people
2. **Simple Portrait Activity** (15 minutes)
 - Students practice quick portrait sketches of partners
 - Discuss challenges they encounter
 - Connect their experience to Stuart's challenges

Closing (5 minutes)

- Reflection: "What's harder about portrait drawing than you expected?"

Assessment: Understanding of artistic process, personal connection to challenges

Day 8: Historical Context and Research Skills

Objective: Develop research skills while learning more about the historical period

Materials: Research materials about 1790s America, Washington's presidency, colonial dental care

Opening (10 minutes)

- Review what we've learned about life in the 1790s

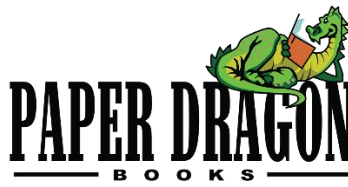
Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Guided Research** (25 minutes)
 - Students explore topics like: Washington's presidency, false teeth in 1700s, portrait painting techniques, Stuart's other famous works
 - Practice finding reliable historical information
 - Take notes on interesting discoveries
2. **Information Sharing** (5 minutes)
 - Quick share of most interesting findings
 - Connect research to understanding the story

Closing (5 minutes)

- Exit ticket: "What's one thing you learned that helps you understand the story better?"

Assessment: Research skill demonstration, relevant information selection



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Day 9: Creative Project Introduction

Objective: Apply learning to creative and analytical projects

Materials: Project guidelines, various supplies

Project Options:

1. **Portrait Project:** Create a portrait (drawn, painted, or digital) of someone important to you with artist's statement
2. **Historical Perspective Writing:** Write diary entries or letters from Washington's or Stuart's perspective
3. **Legacy Presentation:** Research and present how another historical figure shaped their legacy
4. **Artistic Process Guide:** Create an illustrated guide to portrait painting based on Stuart's experience
5. **Comparison Study:** Compare Stuart's Washington portrait to other famous presidential portraits

Structure:

- **Opening** (10 min): Project explanation and selection
- **Work Time** (30 min): Planning and initial work
- **Closing** (5 min): Project plan sharing with partners

Assessment: Project plan quality, connection to themes

Day 10: Project Development and Historical Connections

Objective: Develop projects while deepening historical understanding

Materials: Project supplies, additional research resources

Opening (5 minutes)

- Review project expectations and peer feedback guidelines

Main Activity (35 minutes)

- Independent and collaborative project work
- Peer consultation and feedback opportunities
- Teacher conferences about historical accuracy and creative choices

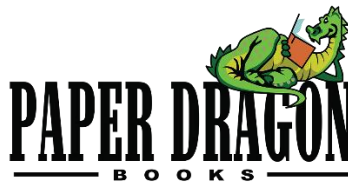
Closing (5 minutes)

- Progress sharing and celebration of creative approaches

Assessment: Project progress, historical accuracy in creative work

Day 11: Project Presentations and Gallery Walk

Objective: Share creative work and learn from classmates' projects



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Materials: Presentation space, gallery walk guidelines

Opening (5 minutes)

- Presentation expectations and supportive audience guidelines

Main Activity (35 minutes)

- For visual projects: Set up gallery walk with artist statements
- For written/presentation projects: Share with class (3-4 minutes each)
- Students provide feedback and ask questions

Closing (5 minutes)

- Reflection on what we learned from each other's projects

Assessment: Project quality, presentation effectiveness, audience engagement

Day 12: Unit Synthesis and Modern Applications

Objective: Synthesize learning and connect to contemporary issues

Materials: Synthesis discussion prompts, modern connection examples

Opening (10 minutes)

- Think-pair-share: "What's the most important thing you learned from this story?"

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Theme Synthesis (15 minutes)**
 - Review major themes: legacy, persistence, collaboration, art and creativity
 - Discuss how these themes remain relevant today
 - Connect historical story to contemporary experiences
2. **Modern Application Discussion (15 minutes)**
 - How do people today think about their legacy and image?
 - What can we learn from Washington and Stuart about collaboration?
 - How does understanding history's human side change our relationship to it?
 - What responsibilities do we have in creating accurate historical memory?

Closing (5 minutes)

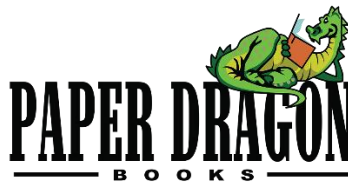
- Unit celebration and acknowledgment of creative work and historical thinking

Assessment: Synthesis depth, contemporary connections quality

Assessment Rubric

Historical Understanding (25%)

- **Exceeds:** Demonstrates sophisticated understanding of historical context, figures, and significance
- **Meets:** Shows solid comprehension of historical elements with adequate detail



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- **Approaching:** Basic historical understanding with some support needed
- **Below:** Limited grasp of historical context

Character and Relationship Analysis (25%)

- **Exceeds:** Insightful analysis of both historical figures' motivations and their complex relationship
- **Meets:** Clear understanding of characters with specific examples
- **Approaching:** Basic character recognition with simple connections
- **Below:** Limited character understanding

Theme Application (25%)

- **Exceeds:** Makes sophisticated connections between historical themes and contemporary applications
- **Meets:** Recognizes major themes with some personal or modern connections
- **Approaching:** Identifies basic themes with guidance
- **Below:** Minimal theme recognition

Creative and Critical Expression (25%)

- **Exceeds:** Demonstrates exceptional creativity while maintaining historical accuracy and thematic connection
- **Meets:** Shows good creative effort with appropriate historical grounding
- **Approaching:** Basic creative expression with some historical elements
- **Below:** Limited creative or critical engagement

Differentiation Strategies

For Struggling Readers:

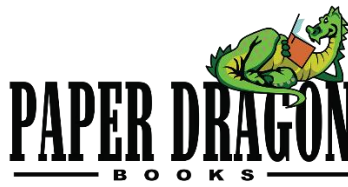
- Audio support for text
- Graphic organizers for tracking characters and relationships
- Visual timeline support for historical context
- Simplified research topics with guided resources

For Advanced Learners:

- Independent research on art history or Washington's era
- Leadership roles in group discussions
- Extended analysis of multiple Stuart portraits or other historical portraiture
- Connections to contemporary discussions about legacy and image

For English Language Learners:

- Visual supports for historical context and art vocabulary
- Collaborative projects with strong peer support



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- Key vocabulary pre-teaching
- Opportunities to share cultural perspectives on portraits and legacy

For Visual and Kinesthetic Learners:

- Hands-on art projects and demonstrations
- Gallery walks and museum-style presentations
- Physical timeline creation
- Acting out portrait sessions or historical scenarios

Materials List

- Class set of "The Painter and the President"
- Dollar bills for portrait examination
- Examples of Stuart's other portraits
- Art supplies for portrait activities
- Historical context images and materials
- Research resources about 1790s America

Extension Activities

Home Connections:

- Family portrait projects with artist statements
- Discussions about family legacy and how families are remembered
- Research of family history and how it's been preserved
- Visit to art museums to see historical portraits

Community Connections:

- Virtual or in-person visits to art museums
- Guest speakers from local art community
- Research of local historical figures and their portraits
- Connection with local historical societies

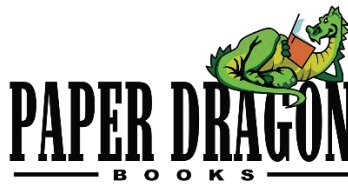
Cross-Curricular Connections

Social Studies:

- Study of George Washington's life and presidency
- Exploration of 1790s American life and society
- Understanding of historical memory and memorialization
- Research on founding era and early American history

Art:

- Portrait drawing techniques and practice



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- Art history focusing on portrait painting
- Analysis of composition and artistic choices
- Exploration of different portrait styles across time periods

Science/Health:

- Historical dental care and its evolution
- Understanding of medical challenges in the 1700s
- Comparison of past and present healthcare

Character Education:

- Persistence through discomfort and challenges
- Collaboration despite personality differences
- Professional dedication and problem-solving
- Thinking about legacy and values

Real-World Applications

Critical Thinking:

- Analyzing primary and secondary historical sources
- Understanding multiple perspectives on historical events
- Evaluating what makes sources reliable and accurate
- Making connections between past and present

Social Skills:

- Working successfully with people who have different personalities
- Persistence in achieving important goals despite frustration
- Balancing personal comfort with professional obligations
- Problem-solving in interpersonal situations

Career Connections:

- Understanding artistic careers and creative processes
- Exploring how historical research works
- Learning about museum curation and historical preservation
- Discussing various ways to contribute to cultural legacy