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Grade level: 5

Primary Source Citation: *George Washington to Martha Washington*, June 18, 1775. The Papers of George Washington, Alderman Library, U. of Virginia, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-01-02-0003>.

Allow students, in groups or individually, to examine the letter located at the above link while answering the questions below in order. The questions are designed to guide students into a deeper analysis of the source and sharpen associated cognitive skills.

Level I: Description

1. Who wrote this letter?
2. How does the author use sequence?

Level II: Interpretation

1. What is the purpose of the writing?
2. What are the consequences to the author's family if he leads the army?

Level III: Analysis

1. How does the author balance honor and duty to family and country?
2. What does this tell you about leaders and leadership?

From George Washington to Martha Washington, 18 June 1775

To Martha Washington

Philadelphia June 18th 1775.

My Dearest,

I am now set down to write to you on a subject which fills me with inexpressable concern—and this concern is greatly aggravated and Increased when I reflect on the uneasiness I know it will give you—It has been determined in Congress, that the whole Army raised for the defence of the American Cause shall be put under my care, and that it is necessary for me to proceed immediately to Boston to take upon me the Command of it. You may believe me my dear Patcy, when I assure you, in the most solemn manner, that, so far from seeking this appointment I have used every endeavour in my power to avoid it, not only from my unwillingness to part with you and the Family, but from a consciousness of its being a trust too great for my Capacity and that I should enjoy more real happiness and felicity in one month with you, at home, than I have the most distant prospect of reaping abroad, if my stay was to be Seven times Seven years. But, as it has been a kind of destiny that has thrown me upon this Service, I shall hope that my undertaking of it, is designed to answer some good purpose—You might, and I suppose did perceive, from the Tenor of my letters, that I was apprehensive I could not avoid this appointment, as I did not even pretend to intimate when I should return¹—that was the case—it was utterly out of my power to refuse this appointment without exposing my Character to such censures as would have reflected dishonour upon myself, and given pain to my friends—this I am sure could not, and ought not to be pleasing to you, & must have lessened me considerably in my own esteem.² I shall rely therefore, confidently, on that Providence which has heretofore preserved, & been bountiful to me, not doubting but that I shall return safe to you in the fall—I shall feel no pain from the Toil, or the danger of the Campaign—My unhappiness will flow, from the uneasiness I know you will feel at being left alone—I therefore beg of you to summon your whole fortitude & Resolution, and pass your time as agreeably as possible—nothing will give me so much sincere satisfaction as to hear this, and to hear it from your own Pen.

If it should be your desire to remove into Alexandria (as you once mentioned upon an occasion of this sort) I am quite pleased that you should put it in practice, & Lund Washington may be directed, by you, to build a Kitchen and other Houses there proper for your reception³—if on the other hand you should rather Incline to spend good part of your time among your Friends below, I wish you to do so⁴—In short, my earnest, & ardent desire is, that you would pursue any Plan that is most likely to produce content, and a tolerable degree of Tranquility as it must add greatly to my uneasy feelings to hear that you are dissatisfied, and complaining at what I really could not avoid.

As Life is always uncertain, and common prudence dictates to every Man the necessity of settling his temporal Concerns whilst it is in his power—and whilst the Mind is calm and undisturbed, I have, since I came to this place (for I had not time to do it before I left home) got Colo. Pendleton to Draft a Will for me by the directions which I gave him, which Will I now Inclose⁵—The Provision made for you, in case of my death, will, I hope, be agreeable; I have Included the Money for which I sold my own Land (to Doctr Mercer) in the Sum given you, as also all other Debts.⁶ What I owe myself is very trifling—Cary's Debt excepted, and that would not have been much if the Bank stock had been applied without such difficulties as he made in the Transference.⁷

I shall add nothing more at present as I have several Letters to write, but to desire you will remember me to Milly⁸ & all Friends, and to assure you that I am with most unfeigned regard, My dear Patcy Yr Affecte
Go: Washington

P.S. Since writing the above I have received your Letter of the 15th and have got two suits of what I was told was the prettiest Muslin. I wish it may please you—it cost 50/. a suit that is 20/. a yard.⁹

ALS, DTPF. Martha Washington destroyed nearly all of GW's letters to her shortly before her death in 1802. The letter of this date and the one of 23 June 1775 were found by Martha Parke Custis Peter, one of Martha Washington's granddaughters, in a drawer of a small desk that she inherited from Mrs. Washington. See Armistead Peter, *Tudor Place* (Washington, D.C., 1969), 44–45.

1. No previous letters from GW to Martha Washington have been found.
2. GW expressed remarkably similar thoughts to his mother nearly twenty years earlier regarding the soon-to-be-proffered command of the Virginia Regiment. See GW to Mary Ball Washington, 14 Aug. 1755.
3. Between 1769 and 1771 GW engaged workmen to build a small town house on a half-acre lot that he owned at the corner of Pitt and Cameron streets in Alexandria. Lacking a kitchen and some of the other outbuildings conducive to prolonged residence, the house was used by GW during the early 1770s only for occasional overnight stays in town. Lund Washington (1737–1796), a distant cousin of GW, lived at Mount Vernon and served GW as business manager from 1765 to 1785. Mrs. Washington did not ask Lund to make any additions to the Alexandria property, nor did she move to town despite the fears that some Alexandria citizens and others had for her safety at Mount Vernon. Soon after Mrs. Washington realized that GW would not be able to return home in the fall, she set out to join him at his camp in Cambridge (GW to Lund Washington, 20 Aug. 1775; Lund Washington to GW, 5, 29 Oct. 1775).
4. Martha Washington's mother, two brothers, and two sisters all lived near the Pamunkey River in the lower Virginia tidewater. During late October and early November 1775, she visited at the home of her sister Anna Maria Dandridge Bassett in New Kent County (GW to Burwell Bassett, 19 June 1775; Lund Washington to GW, 22 Oct., 5 Nov. 1775).
5. No copy of this will has been found. Edmund Pendleton (1721–1803) of Caroline County, Va., whom GW had previously engaged as a lawyer for the Custis estate as well as for some of his own affairs, was one of his fellow delegates in both the First and Second Continental Congresses. Pendleton left Congress on 22 July and declined to return because of poor health. He became president of the Virginia committee of safety in August and was elected president of the Virginia conventions that sat the following December and May. When the house of delegates first met in October 1776, Pendleton was chosen its speaker. A fall from a horse in the winter of 1777 crippled him for life and greatly restricted his subsequent political activities. Pendleton, nevertheless, became presiding judge of the Virginia court of chancery in 1778 and the next year assumed the same position on the state court of appeals.
6. In the spring of 1774 GW sold his boyhood home, Ferry Farm, located on the Rappahannock River across from Fredericksburg, to Dr. Hugh Mercer (c.1725–1777) of that town for £2,000 Virginia currency. Mercer agreed to pay the sum in five annual installments but proved unable to make the first payment due this year (Hugh Mercer to GW, 6 April 1774; Fielding Lewis to GW, 14 Nov. 1775). After Mercer's death in January 1777 from wounds suffered at the Battle of Princeton, one of his executors apparently discharged the debt (GW to Lund Washington, 18 Dec. 1778, 17 Aug. 1779).
7. In June 1774 GW directed Robert Cary & Co. of London to sell the Bank of England stock in the estate of his deceased stepdaughter Martha Parke Custis and to apply the proceeds to the debt that he owed the firm for goods imported from England (GW to Robert Cary & Co., 10 Nov. 1773, 1 June 1774). The legal documents that GW and Mrs. Washington submitted for that purpose were unacceptable to the bank directors, however. In the spring of 1775, shortly before he set out to attend the Continental Congress, GW learned that they would have to execute a new set of documents. He failed to attend to the matter before departing Virginia, and so he was unable to get it done until sometime after the end of the war (GW to Lund Washington, 10 May 1776; GW to Wakelin Welch, 30 Oct. 1783, 27 July 1784, July 1786; Ledger B, 26, 234).
8. Amelia Posey, daughter of GW's former neighbor Capt. John Posey and a girlhood friend of Martha Parke Custis, apparently lived at Mount Vernon throughout most of the war years.
9. Martha Washington's letter has not been found. GW recorded the £5 in cash that he spent for Mrs. Washington's two suits under the date 20 June 1775 in his cash memorandum book for 3 May 1775 to 22 Dec. 1784 (DLC:GW).