

Teacher's Primary Source Analysis: *George Washington and Family* by T.P. Rossiter

1. OBSERVE

a. What kind of primary source is it?

The primary source is an art work, or painting of George Washington at home, etc.

b. What do you see in the image? Note details of your observation.

Students might describe varying levels of details. Teachers may model critical observation habits by encouraging students to identify various details of the painting. The people in this painting are George Washington, Martha Washington, her granddaughters Eleanor and Elizabeth Custis, and a slave maid carrying a tray with drinks in the background. They are in Washington's study with filled book cases, a lit fireplace with candles, vases, and a bust on its mantle, portraits or drawings on the wall, etc. Washington has a book on his left hand, while Martha and one of the granddaughters seem to look to him.

c. Read the text below the image. What information do you get from the text?

The painting's title identifies the painted subjects as George Washington and the others as "family." Thomas Pritchard Rossiter is named as the painter. It also provides the years when the painting was created as 1858-1860. This painting is owned by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association.

2. REFLECT

a. What can you learn from studying this primary source?

Students might mention that the painting tells them various things about Washington and his family. He read a lot and had granddaughters. He was a man of wealthy means in his time. Teachers can point out that the period when the painting was completed was nearly 60 years after Washington's death. Students might consider whether the painting also informs them about how the painter and his contemporaries remembered George Washington.

b. What do you know about the subject of the primary source? List two or more.

*Students might mention what they know about Washington's family life, such as he married Martha Curtis, a widow with two children. George Washington inherited Mt Vernon plantation where he, his family, and more than 300 slaves whom he owned lived. When reviewing student answers to this question, teachers can refer to the "**Timeline**" section of **The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress** website; or **George Washington Biography** interactive at the Mount Vernon website. Also teachers can clarify and correct any myths about Washington that students may mention. For popular myths about George Washington, teachers can refer to **The Man & Myth**, a website by Mount Vernon.*

c. What do you know about life at the time when the primary source was created? List two or more.

Washington finished his second presidential term a year before on March 4, 1797. The United States was an independent and agricultural nation. Slavery was legal in most of the U.S. territories. People traveled mostly on foot and on horses, didn't shower, etc. Teachers can help students relate some of their knowledge to the health conditions of the late 18th century.

Some students may notice that the painting was created about 60 years after Washington finished his second presidential term and just before the start of the Civil War. At that time, the Union that Washington helped create was on the brink of the Civil War, fought over slavery and state's rights. People were enjoying the benefits of the Industrial Revolution with such innovations as trains and factory made good. The Civil War was to bring on new understanding and techniques in medicine.

3. QUESTION

a. What would you like to know more about, after having observed and reflected on the primary source?

Answers will vary.