

Teacher's How Did George Washington Keep Others Healthy and Safe?

AT THE BATTLEFRONT Section

1. As Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, what kind of preventative health decisions did Washington make to ensure the health of his troops?

Washington made decisions about "food storage, placement of latrines, disposal of animal carcasses, and general provisions for clothing and shelter." He also ordered that new recruits be taken to Philadelphia to get smallpox inoculation.

2. Identify and list the primary source in the section that informs you about food supplies ordered by General Washington. What type of primary source is it? And what can you learn from it?

The manuscript is a list of provisions issued under General Washington at Valley Forge, April 1778. It is an original paper manuscript. I can learn that army supplies ordered by Washington were salt, fish, beans, rice, whiskey, rum, beer, and wine for his troops.

3. What event caused Washington to take bold action, what was that action, and why was it bold? List the primary source that is the evidence of Washington's action.

There was an outbreak of smallpox. Washington inoculated and quarantined his troops to prevent its spread. This was both bold and dangerous because it was possible to die from the inoculation, though that was less likely than dying from smallpox.

The primary source is the hand-written order from Washington to Lieutenant Colonel Grier on March 12, 1777.

4. How do the primary source materials you examined add to your view of George Washington?

Answers will vary.

5. What further questions do you wish could be answered?

Answers will vary.

Teacher's How Did George Washington Keep Others Healthy and Safe?

AT THE PLANTATION Section

1. What are the different kinds of sources we have in this section? Which of these tell us about Washington's care for the slaves who lived in his Mount Vernon plantation?

There are drawings, hand-written manuscripts, and tools of and from Washington's era.

There are Washington's list of slaves at Mount Vernon, a doctor's bill for treating both white and black residents at the plantation, and a dental scaler set. There are letters and financial records. In his list of slaves, he documented all of his slaves, including their medical conditions.

2. Washington wanted to be sure that the slaves who worked at Mount Vernon received "every necessary care and attention." What did he mean by that?

Washington wanted to keep his slaves healthy and wanted their ailments treated when they became ill or were injured. He felt that overseers often neglected the health of slaves and made them work when they were unwell instead of taking care of them and "comforting and nursing them."

3. What are the two examples of how Washington took care of the slave's health problems? What do they tell us about Washington?

There are two examples in this section. One is about Washington's long-time valet, William Lee. Lee had bad accidents that made him disabled. Washington changed Lee's job to shoemaker so that he would not have to struggle to walk. The other example is about Christopher Sheels, who was bitten by a rabid dog. Washington sent Sheels to William Stoy, a rabies specialist in Pennsylvania. Sheels survived and fully recovered.

Students will answer differently about what these stories tell us about Washington. Teachers can help students consider how much harder and more expensive it was to travel a long distance in the late 18th century. This may help students understand the extent to which Washington oversaw health efforts for the slaves at Mount Vernon.

4. How do the primary source materials you examined add to your view of George Washington?

Answers will vary.

5. What further questions do you wish could be answered?

Answers will vary.

Teacher's How Did George Washington Keep Others Healthy and Safe?

HOME AND HARDSHIP Section

1. George and Martha Washington never had children of their own. Instead of children of his own, for whom did Washington feel responsible?

Washington "took on the care of stepchildren and grandchildren, as well as orphaned nieces and nephews, for whom he felt a special sense of responsibility."

2. How did Washington help care for his half-brother Lawrence and his step-daughter Patsy?

When Lawrence had tuberculosis, Washington went with him to Barbados, hoping the warm sea air would help. While there, Washington got smallpox, and, despite this trip, Lawrence died. His step-daughter Patsy had epilepsy. He and Martha took her to six different doctors, tried many unsuccessful treatments, and took her to warm mineral baths. She died, too.

3. What were some of the illnesses George Washington suffered from?

George Washington looked strong and healthy, but his ancestors didn't live long lives and suffered from lung disease. In his lifetime, he had fevers, infections, and breathing problems, and he survived at least ten major illnesses including anthrax, smallpox, and malaria, which was very common at Mount Vernon.

4. How do the primary source materials you examined add to your view of George Washington?

Answers will vary.

5. What further questions do you wish could be answered?

Answers will vary.