

## Monuments of Rome and American Identity: George Washington as Cincinnatus

### Introduction:

This is the introductory lesson to a series on American identity, a psyche filtered through the lens of place and history, a lens focused on Rome and its monuments. George Washington has been called the “father of our country” for his military and political contributions to the founding of the nation. He also established the two-term precedent that presidents followed until the “government by crisis” era of the Great Depression and World War II. This lesson will have students read excerpts from Livy’s *The History of Rome, Volume I, Book 3*, and George Washington’s *Farewell Address* to compare two primary sources to help establish an American identity of civic virtue patterned after the example of Cincinnatus. From this comparison, students should be able to establish why Washington’s historical and civic identity has been idealized in terms of the Roman Consul and Dictator, Cincinnatus. Students will examine images comparing classical Roman statues of Cincinnatus and Augustus to statues of Washington rendered in classical Roman style. Finally, they will analyze an ode by Byron, with reference to Washington and Napoleon, but only one is compared to Cincinnatus. Both Cincinnatus and Washington served their nations during times of crisis. When Rome was threatened by invading forces, Cincinnatus left his farm and his retirement from public office in 458 BCE to mobilize Rome against the threat. He was appointed Dictator, with the resulting *imperium*, or legal force, to deal with the crisis. He defeated the invaders and resigned just 16 days into his six-month term as Dictator. He was appointed Dictator again in 439 and, again, resigned quickly. Washington has been identified as an American analogue of Cincinnatus: an agrarian gentleman, citizen-soldier, elder statesman, and a man who expressed his reluctance to serve more than two terms in his *Farewell Address*, then retired to his plantation, much as Cincinnatus did.

Time: Two class periods.

Essential Question: How much has Rome, as a world intellectual center, contributed to emerging national and global identities of different peoples over time?

### Guiding Questions:

Why would George Washington be compared to a dictator, specifically Cincinnatus?

Has the meaning of dictator changed over time? Explain.

Why would Americans, and the British, use classical Roman historical references to create an identity of contemporary people and events?

Standards (Common Core, NCSS C3): In this lesson, students will:

Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain. ([CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.3](#))

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources. ([CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9](#))

Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system, with attention to various theories of democracy, changes in Americans’ participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present. (NCSS C3 D2.Civ.2.9-12)

### Objectives

Students will evaluate primary sources and images and determine which comparisons can be made accurately between historical figures and eras.

Students will synthesize information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, creating a coherent paradigm of the influence place and monuments have on culture and identity.

Students will analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system, with attention to creation of historical, cultural, and national identities based on various theories of democracy, changes in Americans' participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present.

## Preparation and Resources

Blank Cornell Notes sheets, or paper to create Cornell Notes format,  
<http://www.alvinisd.net/cms/lib03/TX01001897/Centricity/Domain/2193/CNPaperLined.pdf>

Livy, *The History of Rome, Volume 1, Book 3*, <http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/txt/ah/Livy/Livy03.html>

Washington's *Farewell Address*, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/washing.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp)

Byron, *Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte*, <http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/lbyron/bl-lbyron-odetonap.htm>

**Jean-Antoine Houdon**, *George Washington*, 1788-1792, Marble, Richmond, VA,  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Washington\\_\(Houdon\)#/media/File:Virginia\\_State\\_Capitol\\_complex\\_-\\_Houdon%27s\\_Washington,\\_seen\\_from\\_the\\_front.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Washington_(Houdon)#/media/File:Virginia_State_Capitol_complex_-_Houdon%27s_Washington,_seen_from_the_front.jpg)

Cincinnatus statue, <http://www.cincinnatusbook.com/photos/images/z.jpg>

Augustus statue, <http://www.romanemperors.com/images/14-prima-porta-vatican.jpg>

Horatio Greenough, *George Washington*, 1840, marble, 136 x 102 inches, National Museum of American History (photo: [Steve Fernie](https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-americas/british-colonies/early-republic/a/houdon-george-washington), CC BY-NC 2.0), <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-americas/british-colonies/early-republic/a/houdon-george-washington>

## Lesson Activities

(You may wish to front load Tier 1-3 vocabulary prior to the lesson, or put a word wall up to help students read the primary sources.)

5-10 minutes: Pass out double-sided Cornell Notes sheets. Write the essential question above in the essential question box. American Identity should go in the top line of the Topic Box. Cincinnatus and George Washington should both go in the subsequent lines of the topic box. The three guiding questions go in the questions column. All should be on the front side. The back side should be for their questions about the content/lesson/discussion. Each student should get a single Post It sheet. Ask them to write their name on the Post It and then write what they think Dictator means, or three words/feelings that they get when they think of the word. On one wall, post the words Crisis/Emergency (Temporary), on another place the word Permanent. Give them about 30 seconds to process before they write, but it should be a quick activity. When they are through writing, have them place their Post It on the appropriate wall.

15-25 minutes: (Close reading of Livy and Washington sources are modeled on the enclosed, abridged editions). Start with Livy on Cincinnatus. Students should number the paragraphs. Have them turn the source over and identify the title by memory. If they cannot, have them go back and underline or highlight it. Working by themselves, they should read first to determine the main idea of each paragraph, highlighting or underlining as they go. On subsequent readings, students should circle words that are confusing, use a different color highlighter/box sections that describe the Dictator's power, and place five-pointed stars next to text that describes how Cincinnatus was reluctant to become, and stay, Dictator.

When finished, the students should be placed in think/pair/share groups to dialogue about their findings. They should place plus marks next to text that they both identified, write down their differences in the margin of the reading text. They should generate questions/comments in the margins for each paragraph.

Through the dialogue with each other, students should write one “big picture” response to the questions that they generated in the notes section of their Cornell Notes. One or two bulleted supporting details should go under the response.

Students should move from a dyad to a whole class discussion, writing the pluses for similarities on their Cornell Notes, adding to their notes if they hear something that they did not have.

15 minutes: Based on their readings and discussion of Livy and Cincinnatus, ask the students if they would like to add or change anything about their Dictator Post It, or if they would like to move it to a different wall. Allow a minute or two to do so. A short discussion on the changes should happen now.

For the close, students are to write a paragraph, explaining if Dictator meant to the Romans what it means to us, and how Cincinnatus was a Dictator in the Roman sense of the word. They must include accurate, specific details from their Cornell Notes. And they must draw a mnemonic graphic that helps them remember the content. If they do not finish, it can go home as homework. This goes in the bottom box of the Cornell Notes. Answers should reflect Cincinnatus’ reluctance to assume and keep power but should also discuss his discretionary use of *imperium* on the enemy, the Roman legions, and in mobilizing Rome for the fight.

## Day 2

5 minutes: Based on the content, notes, activities, and the whole class discussion from the day before, the students are to write two of their own questions on the blank side of their Cornell Notes. Guide them to include at least one how or why question. This is part of the extending the lesson at the end.

5 minutes: With a partner, discuss the mnemonic graphic that they created yesterday, its connection to the lesson, and how it will help them remember the content. Quick whole-class dialogue on the graphics.

25 minutes: Pass out double-sided Cornell Notes sheets. Write the essential question above in the essential question box. American Identity should go in the top line of the Topic Box. Cincinnatus and George Washington should both go in the subsequent lines of the topic box. The three guiding questions go in the questions column. All should be on the front side. The back side should be for their questions about the content/lesson/discussion. Distribute the Farewell Address. Students should number the paragraphs. After they have numbered the paragraphs, have them turn the source over and say the title by memory. If they cannot, have them underline or highlight it. Working by themselves, they should read first to determine the main idea of each paragraph, highlighting or underlining as they read. On subsequent readings, students should circle problematic words, use a different color highlighter/box on sections that discuss why Washington was retiring from the presidency after two terms, and place a five-pointed star next to text where the students can make a comparison with the Cincinnatus text. When finished, the students should be placed in think/pair/share groups to dialogue about their findings. They should place plus marks next to text they both identified, and write down their differences in the margins. There should be a question or comment for each paragraph, written in the margin.

With their think/pair/share partner, students should write a “big picture” response for the George Washington guiding question on the notes section of their Cornell Notes. Three bulleted supporting details should go underneath the big picture response.

Students should move from a dyad to a whole-class discussion, writing pluses for similarities on their Cornell Notes, adding to their notes if they hear something that they missed.

Next, the student will examine the images from the slide show. If there is time, a gallery walk should go here to get them moving. If time is a factor, use the slide show instead. There will be more on the art history and symbolism of the statues in later lessons. The students should focus on, and describe in their notes, the poses, gestures, and what the statues are holding.

15 minutes: Analyze either the entire Byron ode, or just the stanza devoted to Washington. The students should discuss in pairs, then as a class: Why would Byron, a British poet, choose Washington to contrast with Napoleon? What connection did Byron make with America and Classical Rome? Be sure to include the content on the statues in this part.

10 minutes: Based on the notes, discussions, visuals, and readings, answer the essential question and the remaining guiding question, Why would Americans, and the British, use classical Roman historical references to create an identity of contemporary people and events?

### Extending the Lesson

American historiography and culture are pregnant with allusions to classical Roman subjects, from architecture to art to place names. While we selectively create our identity, it is no coincidence that Americans have recreated themselves and their nation to reflect the power and allure of both the Roman Republic and Empire. Subsequent lessons will focus on:

- Manifest Destiny and imperial expansion.
- Imperial presidency.
- The legacy of the yeoman farmer in American psyche.
- Citizen soldiers and distrust of standing armies.
- Projection of power through naval forces.
- Symbolic representation of Roman monuments and symbolism of art in creating an American identity.

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