



Family Discussion Guide

Part I: Big Themes to Explore Together

Stories can make us think about our own lives. These questions are meant to start meaningful conversations between kids and the adults in their lives about some of the movie's big ideas, like learning from mistakes and discovering what builds character. Family discussions include both adults and kids! Grown-ups don't forget to share your perspectives and stories too. Kids are often curious about the experiences of adults in their lives. Sharing a mistake or challenge you faced and what you learned from it can help them better understand the ideas in the movie. Washington's experiences may seem dramatic or far away, but everyday moments from your life can make the lessons feel more real and relatable.

Growing Up and Understanding Who You Are

Washington begins his journey as a young land surveyor, exploring the rugged wilderness of colonial North America. This part of the movie shows him seeing larger worlds, testing his abilities, and starting to understand what kind of man he might become.

- Washington did not always know who he wanted to be. He was trying new things and making mistakes. How did becoming a land surveyor help him learn more about himself?
- How do you figure out who you want to be? What kinds of things have you done that have helped you learn about your strengths, interests, or values?



Facing Challenges and Hard Moments

The movie shows Washington navigating dangerous missions in enemy territory, dealing with alliances that shift, and surviving moments when orders fall apart. It also depicts the moment when a single decision helped trigger the French and Indian War, forcing him to confront fear, responsibility, and failure.

- Washington had to deal with disappointment, danger, and setbacks, like missions in the wilderness and early military failures. What did he do when things went wrong? What made him persevere?
- What's something that was hard but you got through? How have you dealt with the hard things? Who helps you stay calm when things get tough?



Learning from Mistakes

The movie centers on Washington's early life, including misjudgements, mistakes, and failures that humbled him. These moments shaped him into the leader he would become.

- Washington didn't always make the best choices, especially when he was younger. What decision from the movie do you think was Washington's biggest mistake? How did Washington respond at the moment? What do you think he learned? How did this help him grow?
- When did you learn something important by doing something the wrong way?

Understanding Ambition and Responsibility

Young Washington wants to prove himself, sometimes too quickly. The movie shows him fighting through intense battles, pushing him to be seen as capable, and sometimes acting before he's truly ready. As he grows, he also has to learn when to listen to others and when to trust his own judgment, even if it means making a different choice than the people around him.

- Washington wanted to show that he could do things, even when he wasn't ready. In the movie, moments like when he pushes his way into the Fairfax home and ends up receiving a commission to survey western lands despite not having much experience, show both his ambition and his willingness to take risks. When did his ambition help him take on responsibility, and when did it get him into trouble because he acted before he was ready? When things didn't work, how did Washington take feedback to change course?
- Are you someone who likes to feel totally ready before starting something, or do you prefer to learn as you go?
- Can you think of a time when you took on a responsibility before you felt fully ready? What did you learn from that experience?
- When do you feel ready to show what you can do? When you're working with others, how do you decide when to go along with the group and when to speak up or take a different path?

People Who Shape Us

The movie portrays Washington's relationships with mentors like Lord Fairfax, colonial leaders like Robert Dinwiddie, and family members, all pressuring or guiding him in different ways.

- Washington's mother, brother, and mentors all had an impact on him in different ways. Who helped him make choices, and how did their support (or pressure) change him?
- Who are the people in your life, like family, teachers, mentors, supervisors, or friends, who help you learn and grow? How do they support you? What do you wish they might know or change about how they encourage you? Talk together: who has played that role in each of your lives, and how have they helped you grow?



Part II: Washington as an Example

Seeing Washington as a Person, Not a Statue

The movie portrays him as a young adult making mistakes, navigating danger, and figuring out what kind of leader he wants to become, long before he's a famous figure.

- Who do you think of when you think of George Washington? Do you picture a Founder, General Washington, President Washington, or something else?
- People often think of Washington as a great leader, but first he was a young man who didn't know what he wanted and was sometimes impatient. How does the movie help us see him as a real person who is figuring out how to live?
- How does learning that even famous people had to start somewhere change the way you think about your own journey?

Stories Change How We See Someone

When we tell stories about people we change the way others see them. The movie tells a story about Young Washington to connect his early life to his later accomplishments.

- The filmmakers picked scenes that show how Washington changed and grew as a person. What parts of his story did you find most interesting, and why?
- Think about stories from your family and culture. How do they connect to the way you see the people in them?



How Washington Lived (and Sometimes Struggled) With His Values

Throughout the story, he must choose between personal glory and doing what's right in situations where the stakes are real and dangerous.

- Washington tried to live by values like honesty, bravery, and fairness. Sometimes he succeeded, and other times he struggled. In moments like the events at Fort Necessity or while serving with General Braddock, how do you see him trying to live up to these values? What do his actions show us about how character changes over time?
- What values do you think are important in your family? How do you practice them? Does the way that you practice these values change when it gets hard to do so?

Resilience: Falling Down and Getting Back Up

Whether it's the fallout from his missteps or the danger of the frontier, Washington keeps getting back up. The movie shows him facing consequences that reshape him.

- Washington had to deal with shame, criticism, and even physical danger, but he kept growing. What helped him get back on track after failing?
- What was a time when you felt like there were obstacles preventing you from doing what you wanted or needed to do? What helps you get back on track, try again, or see things in a new way when you fail or feel down?

Washington's Early Decisions and Their Impact

Because Washington was given a lot of responsibility at a young age, his decisions had a big impact on the events in the Colonial Empire.

- Washington made many small decisions when he was young, some of which he did not think through. In the movie, choices like surveying Lord Fairfax's land, taking charge of the militia, building Fort Necessity in a flood plain, and volunteering to support Braddock all lead to unexpected consequences. How do these moments show how small decisions can have big effects? What does this say about how our choices shape what happens next in our lives?
- What decisions have you made in your life, big or small, that have taught you important things? How did they shape the next decision you made?



Character Biographies

George Washington

George Washington was born in 1732 in Virginia and grew up on his family's farms, where he learned practical skills and developed a strong work ethic. As a teenager, he trained as a surveyor and spent several years mapping the Virginia frontier, which helped him gain confidence and knowledge of the land. Beginning in the early 1750s, Washington entered military service and played a key role in the Ohio Valley during the French and Indian War. He eventually became a well-known colonial officer and was recognized for his bravery and leadership.

Governor Robert Dinwiddie

Robert Dinwiddie served as Virginia's lieutenant governor and became a driving force behind Britain's push into the Ohio Valley, setting the stage for the French and Indian War. It was Dinwiddie who launched George Washington's military career, sending the young officer on the 1753 mission that would ignite the conflict and shape Washington's rise.

Thomas Fairfax

The only English nobleman to permanently reside in the colonies, Lord Thomas Fairfax owned considerable amounts of land, which he employed a young George Washington to survey. Fairfax's support and mentorship played a large role in Washington's growing presence in elite political and social circles.

General Edward Braddock

A veteran British Army officer who was appointed commander-in-chief of British forces in North America during the French and Indian War. Known for his strict discipline and traditional European military methods, Braddock led the 1755 expedition toward Fort Duquesne, where he was mortally wounded after a major defeat. His 1755 expedition also forged an important early connection with George Washington, who served as his aide-de-camp and helped lead the retreat and arrange Braddock's burial after the general was mortally wounded. His final campaign became one of the war's most significant early events.

Sally Fairfax

Born Sarah Cary into one of Virginia's oldest and wealthiest families, Sally Fairfax was renowned for her beauty, intellect, and refined education, qualities that captivated a young George Washington and helped draw him into the elite social world that shaped his early ambitions. She married George William Fairfax in 1747 and joined Virginia's largest land-owning families.

Thomas Gage

A seasoned British officer shaped by years of European warfare, Thomas Gage arrived in North America at the onset of the French and Indian War and fought alongside the young George Washington during Braddock's disastrous 1755 expedition, where both men worked under fire to keep British forces from total collapse. His steady discipline and battlefield composure earned him greater responsibility within the British command structure, marking him as a dependable leader on the colonial frontier.



Character Biographies

Christopher Gist

A skilled frontiersman, surveyor, and explorer, Christopher Gist became an integral part of Washington's early surveying story and later served as a guide and Native agent during the opening years of the French and Indian War. His detailed journals produced some of the earliest descriptions and maps of the Ohio River Valley, and his diplomacy with Native nations proved essential to navigating the region. He is also remembered for twice saving Washington's life during their perilous 1753 mission into the Ohio Country.

Lawrence Washington

The elder half-brother and early mentor of George Washington. A veteran of the War of Jenkins' Ear who served with British forces, Lawrence managed the family estate. Lawrence married into the Fairfax family, linking the Washington family to Virginia's powerful Fairfax clan and elevating their social standing. His death in 1752 deeply affected George and helped shape the young Washington's sense of duty and ambition during the years leading up to the French and Indian War.

Mary Ball Washington

Widowed in 1743, she managed her family's Virginia household and lands with unwavering determination, shaping an environment defined by discipline, duty, and self-reliance. Her firm guidance deeply influenced her children, including her son, George Washington. She notably prevented him from joining the Royal Navy, steering him instead toward the profession of surveying.



Want to keep exploring?

Discover more about George Washington and the world he lived in through educational resources from the Bill of Rights Institute and George Washington's Mount Vernon:



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GEORGE WASHINGTON'S
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George Washington



GEORGE WASHINGTON'S
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Native Americans



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Washington's Journal



Want to keep exploring?



Christopher Gist



Thomas Gage



Lord Fairfax



Sally Fairfax



Robert Dinwiddie



Edward Braddock



Mary Ball Washington



**Lawrence
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