

EXPLORE WITH THE COLUMBUS MUSEUM

Meet the Washingtons!



Rembrandt Peale, *George Washington*, ca. 1855, Collection of The Columbus Museum



Rembrandt Peale, *Martha Washington*, ca. 1855, Collection of The Columbus Museum

George Washington was born in February 1732. An observant and practical man, Washington led the Continental Army to victory during the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783) as its Commander-in-Chief. Six years later, he was unanimously elected to serve two terms as the first president of the United States of America.

Martha Washington was born in June 1731, and, unlike most women of her time, learned to read and write. Throughout the Revolutionary War, Martha would join George and his troops during the harsh New England winters at their temporary campsites. While there she visited soldiers, nursed the ill and dying, sewed socks, and encouraged other colonial women to do their part in supporting the troops.

Look closely at these portraits depicting America's first family. As primary sources, portraits are important because they act as a visual record of historical information. Besides telling us what they looked like, what idea or ideas do these portraits communicate about the Washingtons?

An icon or symbol, is something that stands in for or represents something else. George Washington could be considered a symbol of the American Revolution, as he was an important figure during that time. Rembrandt Peale first painted Washington's portrait in 1795. For the next 28 years, Peale painted variations of this portrait, obsessively trying to capture the qualities and characteristics that made Washington an American hero. Once he was happy with his work, he produced over 78 nearly identical copies of the original, including the one seen here.

Use the following questions to guide your observations and discover how the artist wants us to remember his subjects:

- How are they dressed?
- At what point in George and Martha's lives do you think these portraits were created?
- What visual clues led you to this conclusion?
- Where are the subjects looking?
- What part of each portrait captures your attention?



EXPLORE WITH THE COLUMBUS MUSEUM

Meet the Washingtons!

(Continued)

What does it mean to be a good leader? As a leader, George Washington had many responsibilities and was called upon to serve in a variety of unique situations. His decisions often reflected the dominant values and customs of the time in which he lived.

Use the space below to describe a time when you were called upon to be a leader. What characteristics of good leadership did you demonstrate?
