

# DAR MUSEUM

*Lessons from the American Home*

## **Object Lesson: The Medal**

*Suitable for 4<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades*

### Summary:

Students will replicate the “object lesson” from the 1860’s, in which they “close read” (or close look at) an object to try to capture and describe as many of its physical properties as possible. Then they will determine its function and use, compare it to other objects like it, and finally, they will reason out its historic value. After trying to reason out this object through observable data alone, they will be given secondary sources that reveal the history and context of the object. They will then re-evaluate their observations and reflect on the relationship between secondary and primary sources, while evaluating the benefits of material history. Written or discussion.

### Learning Objectives:

- Students will practice observation and descriptive language as applied to material history
- Students will understand the pros and cons of observable data, and the necessity of relevant secondary sources
- Students will be familiar with issues around historic and public memory of George Washington

Time: <15 minutes    Required Materials: All required materials are included in this packet.

Curriculum Timing Suggestion: As a monolithic figure in American History, this discussion balances common narratives of George Washington and the founding. Can also be used as an example during Unit 0 of sources or during any discussion of primary and secondary sources.

Skills, Sources, and Concepts	Examples
Compelling and Supporting Questions	What data can we retrieve from historic objects from observation alone? How do secondary sources contextualize primary objects? How can we use material history to augment our understanding of the past? How can material history research be used to develop historical arguments? How do we determine authenticity of historical objects? How was Washington commemorated after his death? How has public memory around Washington developed?
Sources/Evidence	Historic objects, secondary sources, museum databases, material history catalogues
Key Concepts	Art history, public memory, material history
Key Strategies and Skills	Critical reading and thinking, close reading objects, evaluating primary and secondary sources, synthesizing information between primary materials and secondary sources
Evidence-Backed Interpretations	Using secondary sources to contextualize material history, using secondary sources to make claims and arguments about historical objects, using primary materials to make arguments about secondary sources
Action and Communication	Students will become informed and critical consumers of material history, students will hone strong descriptive language, students will practice analysis and exercise reasoned reflection

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Object Lesson: The Medal (*student materials begin on page 9*)

Close Reading: Look at the object below. Write down words or phrases to describe it completely to someone who has not seen it. Do not label it – calling it a medal is not enough. What shape is it? What are the shapes contained within it? What colors does it have and where are they? Describe any images or words you see – what do they depict, what font and color does it use? What materials do you think it is made of? What size is it? What would it feel like if you touched it? Try not to stop writing until time timer is up.



Observe:

*[Do the students recognize the figure on the left? If they read, they'll notice it's George Washington. What is he wearing? Is that the costume we normally see him in? Does his clothing remind us of something or someone else? How about his hair? What information is presented on the front? What is the significance of the word Lancaster? What are the letters that follow signifying? (MDCCCV = 1000 + 500 + 100 + 100 + 100 + 5 = 1805) Can we tell who made the coin? (yes, it says inscribed to his memory by D. Eccleston). What is depicted on the rear? Does the image remind us of anything else? Can you make out any of the text? Why is there a hole in the medal? Do you think this was the original color? What signs of aging can you see? How old do you think the medal is?]*

Here's what the medal says:

Front: General Washington/Inscribed to his memory by D. Eccleston/ Lancaster MDCCCV

Rear: He laid the foundations of American liberty in the XVIII century/innumerable millions yet unborn will venerate the memory of the man who obtained their country's freedom/This land was ours.

Reasoning – Function and Function Qualities: What is this object used for? Do you know or do you think it is used for that purpose? Make sure to distinguish between *assumed knowledge* and *reasoned conclusions*. What physical aspects of this object determine how it is used? What makes it able to do the thing that you think it does? What is the message of the object? What audience do you think it was intended for? Cite specific examples from the object?

*[What might this have commemorated? Can we think of what it may have commemorated based on the Lancaster and Roman numeral clue? What message is the maker trying to convey about Washington? Is it celebratory or critical? What can we learn about Washington solely from the information printed on the medal? Who might have wanted to own and preserve such an item?]*

Reasoning – Comparison: Compare this object to other objects like it. How is it different? How is it the same? In what circumstances would their differences be more beneficial? How could this object be improved to suit different scenarios?

*[Let's think about two comparisons: commemorative coins and medals, and tribute to Washington. What other common items feature Washington iconography – money. What information about Washington is conveyed in those images? What information accompanies the Washington image? Why is Washington on currency? What other figures do we honor the same way? What other ways do we publicly commemorate Washington? How does the Washington memorial convey information about Washington, especially from the exterior? What message does the memorial convey? How do the memorial and the coin convey different messages?]*

Synthesis, Part 1 - Read: Read the secondary source(s) below.

**Source 1:** DAR Museum Catalogue Record # 87.65

“Widely distributed in America, but struck in England, the bronze Eccleston Medal was designed and developed by Daniel Eccleston in 1805... The portrait of Washington was the largest on any medal at the time.”

**Source 2:** *Medallic Portraits of Washington*, by Russel Rulau and George Fuld, 1885.

“This piece apparently was issued with a twist of subtle satire. The obverse of the medal depicts Washington in a heavy suit of armor [like a conquistador’s armor] – ‘a singular conceit,’ notes Baker. The reverse has an Indian standing head downcast, with an arrow in his right hand and leaning on a bow. Then, surrounding the Indian at center are the words THE LAND WAS OURS. The medal appears to be more of a commentary on the expropriation [forceful acquisition of property] by colonists of Indian lands than a tribute to Washington.

Yet the phrase beginning ‘Innumerable millions yet unborn’ is truly laudatory of the nation’s first president and commander-in-chief during the Revolutionary War.”

**Source 3:** *Quaker Studies: Daniel Eccleston of Lancaster 1745-1821*, by Carolyn Downs (University of Lancaster, 2006)

“By 1769, Eccleston was travelling around Montreal as well as the Hudson Valley and Great Lakes region... the time he spent with native Americans may have helped develop Eccleston’s Quaker outlook on the value of people, for his vision of a world in which all were equal and all valued, no matter what their race or religion.”

“He [Eccleston] recalled: ‘During my residence in Virginia, when at Alexandria, I had the pleasure, and I may also add, the honour, of meeting with General Washington, who gave me an invitation to call and spend a few days with him on his estate at Mount Vernon.’”

“What is certain is that Daniel Eccleston was a man who engaged with, and to an extent, anticipated, the issues and themes of his time... he deserves serious consideration as a leading example of the development of a significant body of provincial Enlightenment thought. He was part of the radicalization of England that took place in the wake of the American and French Revolutions... there remains no doubt that the man himself lived life to the full and left a legacy of value...”

Synthesis, Part 2 – Reflect: How did the secondary source change how you viewed the object? Cite specific examples. Look back at your observations – what did you observe accurately, what did you miss or observe inaccurately? Look at your reasoned function and comparisons. Has your concept of the objects function changed? What additional ways does this object differ from other objects of its type now that you've read additional sources? In what ways will this affect how you look at future objects? What questions do you still have? Where would you go to find answers to those questions.

*[What does the first secondary source establish? How does that support or supplement information from the other sources? (They all indicate that this was a popular object for commemoration) Do we find these sources to be reliable? Authoritative? Does this medal reflect how people at the time may have felt about Washington? Does that fit with or contradict how we think Washington was thought of at the time? (Just after his death) How does it match with popular conceptions of Washington today? Are Eccleston's feelings indicative of a greater trend? What in-groups was he a part of that his view may have aligned with? What sort of groups would have disagreed with Eccleston's interpretation? Does Eccleston's personal relationship with Washington affect how we view the medal? What about his relationship with American Indians (he truly travelled with them for quite a while, including high profile political figures)? How does this change our concept of Washington's legacy and the public memory surrounding it? Can you think of modern examples of this sort of critical/satirical commemoration?]*

Additional Reflection Space:

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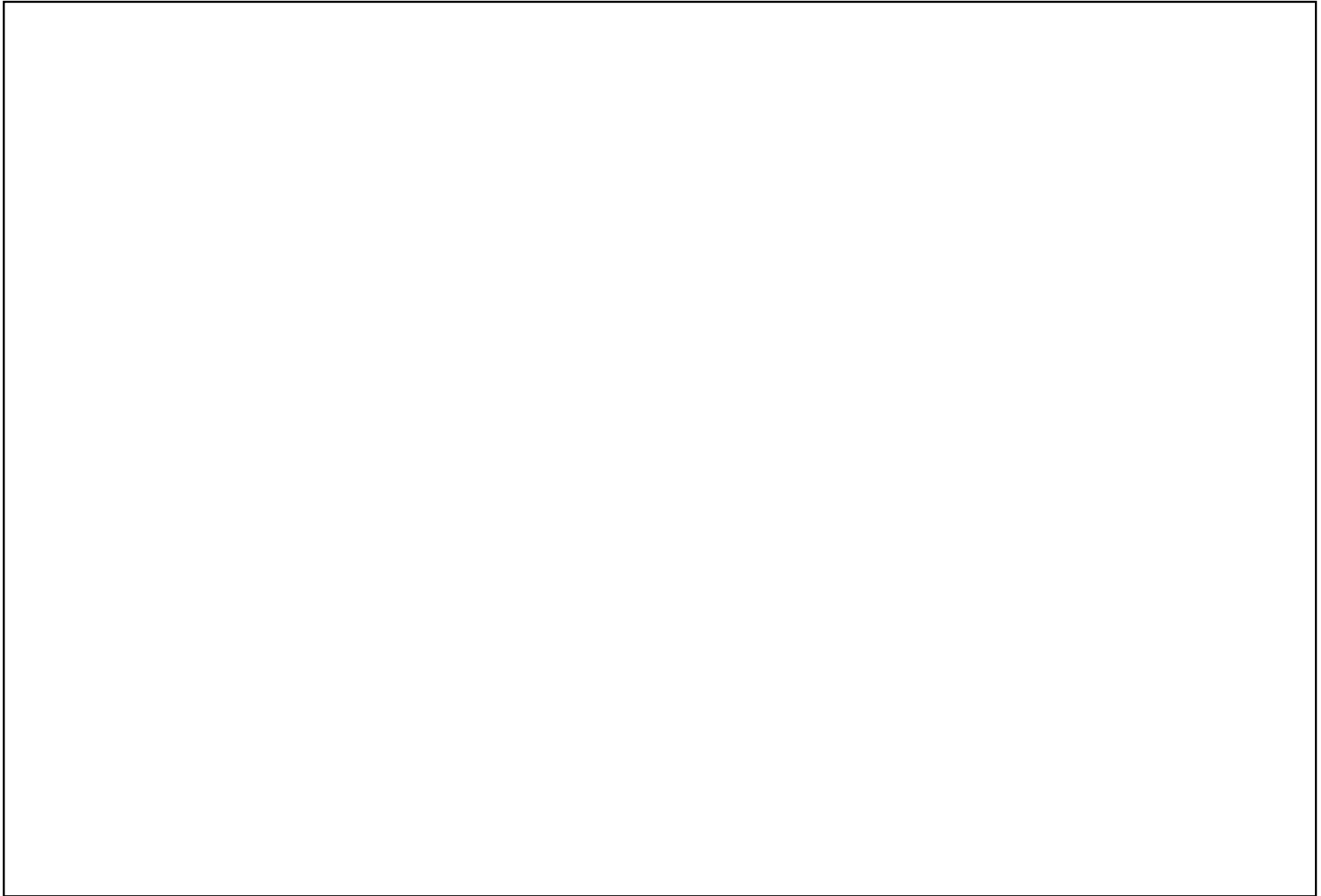
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Reasoning – Comparison: Compare this object to other objects like it. How is it different? How is it the same? In what circumstances would their differences be more beneficial? How could this object be improved to suit different scenarios?

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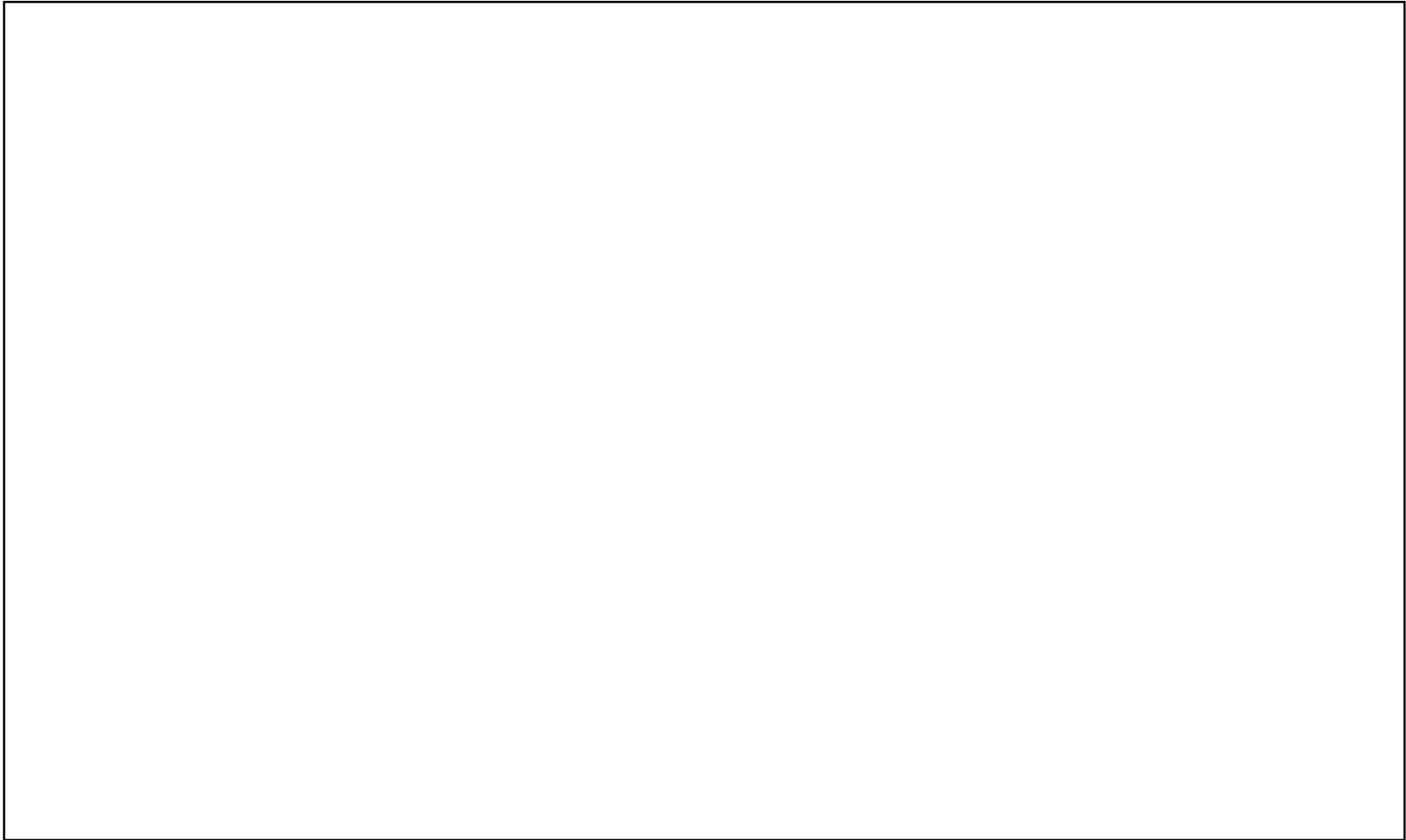
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Additional Reflection Space:

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