

THE GILDER LEHRMAN
INSTITUTE of AMERICAN HISTORY

Dear Colleague,

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History is pleased to announce our annual **Dear George Washington Contest** for elementary school students (grades 2–5). Each student writes a letter to the newly inaugurated President George Washington from the point of view of an eighteenth-century character. The contest encourages students to recognize issues facing early Americans and to think critically about the founding of the nation.

Participation is limited to Gilder Lehrman Affiliate Schools. If your school is not yet a Gilder Lehrman Affiliate School, and you're interested in participating in the contest, please consider applying to the Affiliate School Program. It is a free program that offers great resources! You can learn more about the program at gilderlehrman.org/affiliate.

Entries for the Dear George Washington Contest are due at the Gilder Lehrman Institute on Monday, March 25, 2019, by 5 p.m. ET. Winners will be chosen in the early spring and will be notified by an email to their teacher. Please review the attached documents for more information on submission guidelines, potential topics, and a scoring rubric.

Please feel free to call us (646-366-9666) or email us (affiliate@gilderlehrman.org) with any questions.

Best regards,
Education Department
The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History

Dear George Washington Contest Information, Rules, and Prizes

Contest Information

The Dear George Washington Contest brings history to life for elementary school students by introducing them to the issues facing early Americans and encouraging them to think critically about the founding of the nation. In his first inaugural address, President George Washington acknowledged the enormity of his new role and expressed his hopes for fulfilling the expectations of the newly formed nation. He also spoke of the responsibility shared between himself and Congress to protect the nation's freedom. Washington's address focuses on the protection of liberty and independence, but the new president did not discuss specific priorities for his time in office.

Each student should write a letter to President George Washington about what he or she thinks the President should focus on during his first term. The student should write from the viewpoint of a member of the audience at the inauguration on April 30, 1789, in New York City. The writer can choose any persona, from an average person to a member of Congress—and include one sentence about that character at the top of the letter. For example: “Jane is a housewife with four children from Boston who is worried about the state of the roads in her town” or “John is an eight-year-old boy in New York who would like to know if there will be schools for children.” Potential topics are listed on the next page. Letters should be between 250 and 300 words in length.

A complete transcript of Washington's first inaugural address is available from the National Archives here: http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/american_originals/inaugtxt.html. You can view a copy of the address in the Gilder Lehrman Collection by visiting <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/content/george-washington%E2%80%99s-first-inaugural-address-1789>.

Eligibility and Submission

- **Deadline: Monday, March 25, 2019**
- The contest is open only to students in grades 2–5 at Gilder Lehrman Affiliate Schools.
- Entries may be submitted on our website by using the online form and attaching your entry as directed on the page. Hard copies are not accepted and will not be reviewed.
- Entries should be free of any grade markings, notes, or corrections.
- Entries must be between 250 and 350 words in length.
- To help reduce administrative processing time, please name each file accordingly: School Name_Student Name (e.g., “Central Elementary_Jane Doe”).

Prize Information

First Place: \$100 for the student and a copy of *American History: An Introduction* from the History in a Box series for the school

Second Place: \$75 for the student and a copy of *American History: An Introduction* for the school

Third Place: \$50 for the student and a copy of *American History: An Introduction* for the school

Fourth Place: \$25 for the student and a copy of *American History: An Introduction* for the school

Honorable Mention (six students): Declaration of Independence poster

Potential Topics for Students

Students are not limited to the topics listed below and are encouraged to come up with their own topic.

- What should we rebuild first after the war—hospitals, roads, schools, etc.?
- How should students be educated in the United States?
- How should the new government help soldiers wounded in the Revolutionary War?
- How should the President bring the states together as one nation?
- How should the President prevent another war?
- Should the nation pay its debts? Slowly or quickly?
- Do we need an army and a navy?
- How can we get other countries to respect us?
- How can we get money to run the government?
- Do we need a court system? How should it be organized?
- How can we protect our rights as citizens if they are not specified in the Constitution?
- Why is slavery protected in the new Constitution?
- Does the new nation need a central bank to manage our money?
- Should the government encourage the growth of cities and factories?

Additional ideas for potential audience members:

- Ordinary adult or child
- Foreign diplomat
- Widow who lost her husband in the Revolutionary War
- Runaway slave
- Free African American
- A loyalist who lost his home during the Revolutionary War
- An indentured servant
- A shopkeeper

The Gilder Lehrman Dear George Washington Contest Scoring Rubric

Score of 5

- Main ideas and position are clear, focused, and compelling; knowledge, experience, insight, or unique perspective lends a satisfying ring of authenticity, novelty, and inventiveness.
- The letter is organized in a way that guides the reader through the main ideas and key ideas stand out.
- The letter writer provides clear and detailed context for the reader using appropriate background information.
- The writer uses grade-appropriate vocabulary accurately and effectively, with an overall natural tone, incorporating some common and uncommon words correctly and to enhance overall meaning.
- Sentences are well built and skillfully crafted to reflect logic and sense.
- Very few and minor errors.

Score of 4

- Main ideas and position and most ideas are clear and focused; some elements may not be fully explored; needs additional details in some places to expand the main topic or provide insight.
- The overall structure of the letter is effective, but the balance of ideas and relationships among ideas could be improved.
- Details fit naturally and effectively where they are placed; sequencing makes the text easy to follow and understand.
- The writer uses grade-appropriate vocabulary accurately, effectively, and correctly.
- Sentences are grammatically correct, but may not seem skillfully crafted. Most sentences reflect logic, and, for the most part, show how ideas relate.
- The letter contains few errors, though they are occasionally serious enough to be mildly distracting.

Score of 3

- Main ideas are identifiable, but could be more precisely worded and a lack of clarity interferes with the reader's interest.
- The structure of the letter is functional, but may be so dominant or predictable that it smothers the ideas; the main ideas are appropriately sequenced, but may be better arranged; lingers too long on some ideas and skims over other points.

- Vocabulary is used correctly in most cases; words may occasionally interfere with meaning.
- The structure shows control over simple structure, and reflects some logic, but may not always show how ideas relate. Some run-on sentences or sentence fragments may be present.
- Errors are numerous or serious enough to be a bit distracting, but the writer handles most conventions well.

Score of 2

- Main ideas are vague and require the reader to infer the position. The ideas are unfocused and rarely compelling.
- The structure feels more random than purposeful, often leaving the reader with a sense of being adrift; the pacing is very rough, and main ideas should be more effectively arranged and delivered.
- Vocabulary is frequently incorrect, superficial, and/or inadequate, interfering with meaning.
- The letter shows some control over simple structure, but little or no control over more complex structure. Few sentences reflect logic and show how ideas relate; frequent run-ons and fragments are present.
- Errors are numerous or serious enough to distract the reader frequently.

Score of 1

- Main ideas are unclear, out of focus, indistinct, or not known.
- The structure of the letter is haphazard and disjointed, severely inhibiting the reader's comprehension of ideas; there is no clear sense of pace or direction to carry the reader smoothly from point to point.
- Vocabulary is incorrect and inappropriate, and words corrupt meaning and confuse the reader.
- The structure has little or no control, and tends to obscure meaning, rather than showing how ideas relate; persistent run-ons and/or fragments are present.
- Errors continually distract the reader, and the reader must read once to decode and again for meaning.

Featured George Washington Primary Sources from the Gilder Lehrman Collection

1. [George Washington discusses Shays' Rebellion and the upcoming Constitutional Convention, 1787](#) (GLC02437.09410)
On January 25, 1787, Daniel Shays and his insurrectionists confronted a Massachusetts state militia force outside the Springfield armory. Shays' Rebellion had begun in the summer of 1786, when Shays, a former Continental Army captain, and other western Massachusetts veterans and farmers formed an insurrection against the government for failing to address their economic grievances. On February 3, George Washington wrote to Henry Knox, conveying his thoughts on both the recent rebellion in Massachusetts and the Philadelphia Convention. Washington did not wish to attend the Philadelphia Convention because he doubted what might be accomplished. However, pressure from friends like Knox, associates, and fellow Virginians such as James Madison and Virginia Governor Edmund Randolph—as well as Washington's intention to "do for the best, and to act with propriety"—led the future president to attend the convention.
2. [George Washington's reluctance to become president, 1789](#) (GLC02437.09419)
One of Washington's most famous letters, written shortly before going to New York for his inauguration. Washington writes about his apprehensions on assuming the presidency: "my movements to the chair of Government will be accompanied with feelings not unlike those of a culprit who is going to the place of his execution: So unwilling am I, in the evening of a life nearly consumed in public cares, to quit a peaceful abode for an Ocean of difficulties, without that competency of political skill- abilities & inclination which is necessary to manage the helm..." In it, Washington promises integrity and firmness at his post.
3. [George Washington's First Inaugural Address, 1789](#) (GLC03518)
After officially enacting the newly ratified US Constitution in September 1788, the Confederation Congress scheduled the first inauguration for March 1789. However, bad weather delayed many congressmen from arriving in the national capital, New York. It wasn't until April 6, 1789, that a quorum had reached New York to tally the electoral ballots and declare George Washington the winner. On April 30, 1789, Robert R. Livingston, the chancellor of New York, administered the oath of office to George Washington on a second floor balcony of Federal Hall. Washington and members of Congress then moved to the Senate Chamber, where Washington delivered his inaugural address to a joint session of Congress. Unlike the lengthy 73-page first draft of his speech (which was completely discarded), Washington's inaugural could easily be read in twenty minutes.
4. [Washington on a proposed third term and political parties, 1799](#) (GLC05787)
In June 1799, Jonathan Trumbull Jr., the governor of Connecticut who had served as Washington's military secretary during the Revolution, wrote to urge him to run for a third term as president. "Election of a President is near at hand," Trumbull wrote, "and I

have confidence in believing, that, should your Name again be broert up . . . you will not disappoint the hopes & Desires of the Wise & Good in every State, by refusing to come forward once more to the relief & support of your injured Country.” Trumbull continued, writing that unless Washington sought the presidency, “the next Election of President, I fear, will have a very illfated Issue.”

Washington had several reasons for not running again. There was his promise not to seek unfair power as a government official and his desire to avoid being, as he wrote to Trumbull, “charged . . . with concealed ambition.” There was also his “ardent wishes to pass through the vale of life in retiremt, undisturbed in the remnant of the days I have to sojourn here.” Washington’s early promise and the lure of retirement were reasons for his declining to seek a third term.