

## Dear George Washington Contest Information, Rules, and Prizes

### Contest Information

The Dear George Washington Contest brings history to life for elementary-age 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 focused 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. Students should write as if they are a member of the audience at the inauguration on April 30, 1789, in New York City, either as an average person or as a member of Congress—and include one sentence about their identity at the top of their letter. For example: "Jane is a housewife from Boston, with four children, 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 at the bottom of this 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](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/american_originals/inaugtxt.html).

### Eligibility and Submission

- **Deadline: Friday, December 6, 2013**
- Open only to students in grades 2–5 at Gilder Lehrman Affiliate Schools
- Entries may be submitted to our website by using the online form and attaching your entry as directed on the page, or by emailing [affiliates@gilderlehrman.org](mailto:affiliates@gilderlehrman.org) with the entry and cover sheet, which can be found in the contest forms above. 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 300 words in length
- Each submission must be accompanied by the cover page with a parental signature

### Prize Information

First Place: \$100.00 and a copy of *American History: An Introduction*, for the school  
Second Place: \$75.00 and a copy of *American History: An Introduction*, for the school  
Third Place: \$50.00 and a copy of *American History: An Introduction*, for the school  
Fourth Place: \$25.00 and a copy of *American History: An Introduction*, for the school  
Honorable Mention (six students): U.S. Constitution poster

The top entry from each school will also receive a special certificate from the Gilder Lehrman Institute.

### Potential Topics for Students

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

- 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 colonies 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 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 person or child
- Foreign diplomat
- Widow who lost her husband in the Revolutionary War
- Runaway slave
- Free black
- A Loyalist who lost his home during the Revolutionary War
- An indentured servant
- A shopkeeper

## Gilder Lehrman Dear George Washington Contest

In his first inaugural address, President George Washington spoke about the challenges he faced as the first president of the United States, and the importance of his new role. Washington was proud of the new country and all that the Revolution accomplished. He also talked about the responsibility shared between himself and Congress of making sure that Americans' rights and freedoms were protected. What President Washington didn't talk about in his speech was how exactly he would handle the many problems and questions that citizens of the new nation faced.

Now let's go back in time. Your challenge is to advise the president. You will write a letter to President George Washington letting him know what you think he should focus on during his first term in office, since the address did not cover many issues facing the average American. But first imagine yourself in the audience at Washington's inauguration in New York City on April 30, 1789, or as an ordinary citizen who has just read his speech. Make sure that you clearly identify your role at the top of your letter. Try to be as detailed as possible. For example: "Jane is a housewife from Boston, with four children, 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." Possible topics and characters are listed below, but be creative! Your letter should be between 250 and 300 words.

### Possible Topics

- 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 colonies 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 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?

### Possible Characters

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

# COVER SHEET

## Gilder Lehrman Institute Dear George Washington Contest

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Contestant's name and grade

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School name

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School phone number

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Teacher's name

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Teacher's email address

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Contestant's home address (number, street, apartment)

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Contestant's home address (city, state, zip)

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Parent/Guardian Name

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Parent/Guardian Phone Number and Email

**By signing below, I grant the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History permission to reproduce my child's letter for non-commercial use on the Internet and/or in print publications.**

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Parent's signature

Date

**Gilder Lehrman Founding Dear George Washington Contest**  
**Scoring Rubric**

The Dear George Washington Contest brings history to life for elementary-age students by introducing them to the issues facing early Americans and encouraging them to think critically about the founding of the nation. Students will be scored by experienced teachers based on the rubric below.

**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 readers through the main ideas and so that key ideas stand out.
- The letter-writer provides clear and detailed context for the reader using appropriate background information.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 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 readers to infer the position. The ideas are unfocused and rarely compelling.

- The structure feels more random than purposeful, often leaving readers 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
- Shows some control over simple structure, 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 readers 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; no clear sense of pace or direct to carry readers smoothly from point to point.
- Vocabulary is incorrect and inappropriate, and words corrupt meaning and confuse readers
- 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 reader, and the reader must read once to decode, and again for meaning.