George Washington Visits George, Washington
National Portrait Gallery Exhibition Tours Country, Opens in Oklahoma City

The tour continued on to the Moses Lake Museum and Art Center in Moses Lake and to St. George’s School in Spokane. Everywhere President Washington commanded respect; for six-foot, three-inch frame and 18th-century manner somehow demanded it. Everywhere, heads turned and kids were left wondering, “Was he real?”

The three-day tour came to a close at the Governor’s Mansion in Olympia. And reminiscent of Washington, the state of Washington with a reproduction of the Lansdowne portrait. Governor Gary Locke declared, “Was he real?”

The paper also encourages student involvement. We challenge all to become actively involved in service to country and share their efforts with students across the United States. We hope to publish student art and poetry, as well as stories of service through our website and publication. *Pledge It Forward* and enjoy the journey.

—Felice Pulles, editor-in-chief

Middle School Teacher’s Edition

Fellow educators: The Patriot Papers was developed as a vehicle for enrichment in the classroom. As a teaching tool it seeks to put George Washington in context, realizing that while Washington influenced America, America also influenced Washington. The news of the day, the social scene, the fashion, the gossip, the political events, his family, and his contemporaries all had their impact. This interdisciplinary approach to studying Washington should serve a variety of subjects—literature, history, language arts, and visual arts. Designed to coincide with national curriculum standards in both social studies and the language arts, The Patriot Papers provides opportunities to sharpen critical thinking skills, interpret primary source materials, arrange events chronologically, determine cause and effect, summarize and analyze historical events and ideas, and discover relationships between America’s early history and the present day.

The paper also encourages student involvement. We challenge all to become actively involved in service to country and share their efforts with students across the United States. We hope to publish student art and poetry, as well as stories of service through our website and publication. *Pledge It Forward* and enjoy the journey.

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Related national standards in historical thinking

- Chronological thinking
- Historical comprehension
- Historical analysis and interpretation
- Historical research

Related national standards in language arts

- Reading for perspective
- Reading for understanding
- Applying knowledge
- Evaluating data
- Developing research skills
- Developing writing skills

About the Artist

Gilbert Stuart was born on December 3, 1755, in Saunderstown, Rhode Island. He began to study painting in his early teenage years, while traveling around Europe. After painting the Lansdowne portrait, Stuart painted Presidents John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe. His most famous portrait of Washington is recognizable today on the one-dollar bill and on postage stamps.

Making Connections

Imagine you are an actor who portrays a historical figure. Who would you be? How could you talk, dress, and behave to be like this person? Create this character.

Some Pie!

"George Washington: A National Treasure" is organized by the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, and made possible through the generosity of the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation.

"Jelly Belly" George: Wow! What a Sweet Deal!

It wasn’t the Paul Piper of Hamlin leading the way at the Seattle Art Museum (SAM) on July 2, 2001. It was a life and times cartoon, but the 80 kids gathered in the lobby followed the leader just the same. The excitement: a four-foot-square portrait of George Washington made entirely of jelly beans. The question: How many beans make up the portrait? The mission, should you decide to accept it: compare the famous Lansdowne portrait of George Washington to the Jelly Belly portrait, without any help!

The Jelly Bean portrait is part of an original series designed by San Francisco artist Peter Rocha. Working from photographs, this self-proclaimed “King of jelly bean art” captures the famous faces through rough pencil drawings. He then paints a right color combination and finishes his unique work by applying a mosaic of Jelly Belly beans. Favorites in the growing collection include portraits of Elvis Presley, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., the Statue of Liberty, and the American bald eagle.

To update the portrait, Rocha started with a crowd-funding campaign to replace any jelly beans lost, destroyed, or eaten! He thanks the Jelly Belly Candy Co. for sponsoring the event and treating everyone to a “Jelly Belly” George Bar to the tune of 300 beans, 200 sweet and 30 sour jelly beans, and 300 other assorted jelly beans.

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George Washington Visits George, Washington
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Writing to Learn

Students spend numerous hours learning to write, and we usually depend on the English teachers to instruct them. We forget that students can also write to learn. The very act of thinking an idea through in order to put it on paper leads to clarification of that idea. And as students write, more ideas emerge, questions find answers, and confusion finds clarity as words take shape and form. We need not always know the ending or the answer when we begin to write. The journey will often reveal it.

The activities suggested in Writing to Learn are intended for student exploration, to let students meander through inspirations, arguments, and ideas until they make meaning of their own. Initially, don’t worry too much about form, structure, spelling, and grammar; it’s only a work in progress. Ideas are best generated when words flow quickly. The mind can race far faster than the pen. Let it race and catch those ideas on the fly.

Create an Old-Fashioned Advertisement

Ask students to create advertisements of their own using our authentic 18th-century advertisements as models.

- Advertise an unusual product
- Publicize an upcoming event
- Place a “Help Wanted” advertisement

Making Connections

Construct a timeline that includes both the “Blast from the Past” news stories on page 2 and the entries from “The Pudding Papers” on pages 4 and 7. (Students will need to write headlines for “The Pudding Papers” entries.)

Consider adding drawings, images, or symbols. Add significant world events to the timeline, i.e., the beginning of the French Revolution, advances in science, and noted accomplishments in art, music, and literature. It is important to understand Washington and America’s early history in relation to other world events.

Suggestions for the timeline

- **1761**: Austria: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart begins writing minuets at age five
- **1763**: Europe: The Treaty of Paris ends the French and Indian War. France cedes Canada to England and gives up all territories in the New World except New Orleans and a few scattered islands.
- **1765**: Massachusetts: Chocolate is first produced in America
- **1770**: Germany: Composer Ludwig van Beethoven is born
- **1770**: Boston: Boston Massacre
- **1773**: Boston: Boston Tea Party
- **1777**: Russia: Alexander I, Czar of Russia is born
- **1789**: France: Bastille stormed, French Revolution begins

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**Washington Wins Election to House from Fort Cumberland**

FREDERICKSBURG, 1758—George Washington, son of Augustine and Mary Ball Washington, has been elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses while serving with the British regulars at Fort Cumberland. His friends urged him to return to Virginia and “throw off face,” fearing that he would lose the election. But he chose to stay with his men, and was still successful in winning a seat in the House.

**General Washington Rallies Troops at Valley Forge**

VALLEY FORGE, 1777–1778—General Washington struggles to keep his troops alive and well in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, this winter. Inadequate shipments of food, clothing, and supplies have left the regiment in shambles. Poor hygiene and severe disease threaten the lives of all the soldiers trapped there. General Washington has appealed for more supplies, but has not been successful. In the meantime, General Washington struggles alongside his men, while his political enemies threaten to remove his power. Some critics feel that others are better suited to lead the Continental army.

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**Washington Graciously Delays Retirement for a Second Term**

PHILADELPHIA, 1795 (AP)—President George Washington has won his second election to the presidency of the United States! The inauguration will take place on March 4 in Philadelphia, the new capital of the United States. Moreover, Washington is doubtful about being the President again. He wrote to his friend Henry Lee: “What it was after a long and painful conflict in my own breast, that I was until then unwilling to form the request, in time, that no votes might be thrown away upon it being my final determination to return to the walks of private life.” The next four years could be difficult; there are debates over the interpretation of the Constitution. Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton, who helped create the National Bank and the National Mint, will continue to work with the President. Edward Randolph will replace Thomas Jefferson as secretary of state.

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**Washington Unanimous Pick for President at Convention!**

NEW YORK, 1789 (AP)—After months of debate to establish our new American government, the first official election was held on February 4, 1789. George Washington received all 65 electoral votes! Washington, who will be inaugurated on April 30 of this year, accepted the presidency, even though he wished to retire in his state of Mount Vernon and noted, “I was summoned by my country” said Washington. He and his wife Martha will move to Washington, the capital of New York City.

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**The Women of Valley Forge and the American Revolution**

Martha Washington and other wives assisted with cooking and entertaining the men at Valley Forge. Did you know that some women actually fought in the American Revolution? Deborah Samson served in the Continental army for three years, under the name Robert Shurtleff. She maintained her identity as a man until she was discovered in 1781. Margaret Corbin replaced her husband on the battlefield at Fort Washington, performing all of his duties. Anne Bailey rode hundreds of miles alone to gather ammunition to bring to Fort Lee. For more information on women and war, visit userpages.aug.com/captbarb/index.html.

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**Whiskey Rebellion Shakes Pennsylvania**

PHILADELPHIA, 1794—Westmore Pennsylvanians have stirred a violent opposition to government taxes. They are launching the first major civil insurrection of President Washington’s term in office. Last week, U.S. Marshal David Lawton was trying to collect taxes on locally distilled liquor in Washington County. Military action will be taken, much to the regret of the President: “I have accordingly determined to do so, feeling the deepest regret for the necessity, but with the most solemn conviction, that the essential interests of the Union demand it.” The army is being organized from other northern states and they will advance into Pennsylvania shortly.

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**A LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT**

On Tuesday next, being the 4th instant, A new COMEDY, called FALSE DELICACY By the author of A WORD TO THE WISE

I must be temperate in my speeches. Notice that the Theater at Petersburg is to be closed for the fourth day by the American Company the engagement coming in from the Northwest, from which it is probable they will not return for another play.

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**Phillip, Paper**

A BLAST FROM THE PAST

WASHINGTON, D.C., 1776—William Phillips is the President of the Continental Congress, this week. With the war, visit www.georgewashington.si.edu. (detail) by Johann Gotthard von Müller, after Terilee Edwards-Hewitt, Emily van Agtmael, Studio A, Alexandria, VA, 20013-7012. © 2003 Smithsonian Institution. All rights reserved.

The opinions expressed in the Patriot Papers are those of the contributors. For more information, visit the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, or call 1-866-NPG-KITS.

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**Editorial Staff**

Guest columnist: Emily van Agtmael
Editorial consultants: Margaret Sweeney

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**Teaching Materials**

Two teaching materials are available to educators at the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

NATURAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

Teaching Materials to accompany the exhibition George Washington: A National Treasure are available to educators at the National Portrait Gallery. Teaching materials to accompany the exhibition George Washington: A National Treasure are also available to educators at the National Portrait Gallery.
November 1796

RUNAWAY SLAVE

Mrs. Washington was greatly distressed by the loss of Olney Judge, her Mount Vernon servant so skilled in needlework. The girl, who had been hired by a Quakeress who died before she could be free, was a young woman of about ten years of age, was taken by her master to the Yellow House, where she was employed in making dresses and other articles for the family.

The girl was never seen again. It is believed that she was taken away by some of the Negroes, and that she is now living in the Virginia or Maryland countries. The latter is more likely, as the Negroes are said to have taken the girl with them.

In Washington's will, he left all of his slaves to his wife, Martha. The slaves were to be freed on her death, and the master was to be paid $200 a year for their support until that time. The slaves were to be divided among the children, with each receiving one third of the estate.

December 1790

FREEDOM TOO GREAT A TEMPTATION

President Washington has brought a handful of servants from Mount Vernon, but he will still be faced with the difficulty of providing for the Pennsylvania land-office and other public business. These men, who have lived in Pennsylvania for six months in a row, are believed to be of the best breed, and are said to have been well-behaved and contented. The President has given them a month to choose their destination, and then they will be sent back to their duties.

Washington allowed his slaves to marry, although such arrangements were not legally binding at that time. In his will, Washington freed all of the slaves he owned. His personal valet, William Lee, was released from his service.

Did You Know...?

- Washington came from a landed family, having two elder stepbrothers and one stepmother, who were the elder of the children of his father's second wife.
- He was active in his February as an eleven-year-old boy, engaging in his father's business.
- His father when he was 11 years old.
- He often had a bad temper but slowly learned to control it.
- His father died when he was 11 years old.
- He did not always get along very well with his mother, who was temperamental and controlling.
- His older half-brother Lawrence was one of the most important people in young George's life.
- He had two stepchildren, but no children of his own.

Possessions

Today most of us own many more things than we really need to live in. When Washington was 11 years old, his family owned an inventory (or list) of their possessions. Here is what it showed, besides their land:

- 16 pairs of shoes
- 17 yellow wax candles
- 19 beds
- A coach
- 1 door
- A fireplace set
- 10 tablecloths
- 18 small spoons
- 4 small spoons
- 1 pitcher
- A book
- A compendium
- A silver plate
- 10 pairs of shoes
- A looking glass (mirror)
- 1 silver plate
- 18 small spoons
- 1 large spoon
- A book
- A compendium
- A silver plate
- 10 pairs of shoes

How many of these items are normally in your family today? Are you surprised at the “large” list of the inventory of possessions? If you were to make an inventory of every item in your house, how long do you think the list would be? How many houses would be like those described in George Washington’s

For Discussion and Debate

Have students further research on slavery. Good websites include Mount Vernon’s site at www.mountvernon.org, the Hubbard House Underground Railroad Museum in Ohio at www.hubbardhousegrrmuseum.org, or the Decatur House at www.decaturhouse.org.
Building Vocabulary

Define the terms “Federalist” and “Republican” as used in Washington’s time. What did each political party represent? Which parties did Jefferson and Hamilton support? Why? How do these terms relate to the Republican and Democratic parties of today?

Vocabulary Words

camp fever 1. Typhus: an infection characterized by high fever, headache, and dizziness; a.k.a. camp diarrhea
cede vt. 1. To surrender possession of, formally or officially. 2. To yield or grant, as by a treaty.
tippet n. 1. A long, slender boa used like a scarf. It was considered a fancy accessory in the 18th century, usually made of swallowdown or fur.

Making Connections

You as President

What qualities made George Washington a good President? What kind of person should be the President of the United States? Do you think you have what it takes to be a future President? Would you want to be President? Why or why not?

Writing to Learn

Research colonial medicine

• Find early medical treatments for some common ailments today.
• Research and chart the rising number of female doctors from 1800 to the present day. Devise a graph to present your data.

For Discussion and Debate

The Role and Responsibility of the Press

The entry for August 2, 1793, “The President Enraged,” reminds us that criticism of the press is nothing new.

• Research the effect of the press on political campaigns and elections. How has its role affected election results? Candidates elected?
• Debate freedom of the press vs. the necessity for national security. Today, more than ever, the issue is a difficult one. Does the need for national security ever override the public’s right to know?
George Washington Dies at 67

A few riding outside during very bad weather last Thursday and Friday, George Washington became ill on Saturday, December 14. An infection knew as erysipelas gave him a sore throat, fever, and difficulty breathing. Doctors tried a practice called bloodletting that made small cuts on his arm to take out blood. They hoped to relieve the pressure in his throat so he would be able to breathe better. Unfortunately, bloodletting did not help. Doctors also gave him many different fluids to gargle or swallow, including mixtures of vinegar, molasses, and butter. None of these cures helped the former President breathe easier.

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Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so; Death shall be not proud, though some have called thee

Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well

From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well

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From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
Using white chalk or a gel pen, trace the outline of

Position the lamp or flashlight so that it shines directly on the head. Make sure you can see a sharp outline of the person’s profile on the wall.

WHAT TO DO:
1. Arrange the chair about 12 inches from the wall.
2. Position the lamp or flashlight so that it shines directly on the head. Make sure you can see a sharp outline of the person’s profile on the wall.
3. Tape black construction paper on the wall where the shadow falls.

3. After you trace, cut out the silhouette and glue it onto a piece of colored construction paper.

WHAT TO DO:
1. Arrange the chair about 12 inches from the wall.
2. Make your own silhouette using white chalk or a gel pen. Trace the outline of the person you want to silhouette. Use the light and the model until the shadow is clear.
3. Tape the finished silhouette onto construction paper.
Philadelphia, January 1791

MRS. WASHINGTON’S DRAWING ROOM: On Friday evening at eight, your humble correspondent was among the ladies and gentlemen in attendance at Mrs. Washington’s weekly reception. Mrs. Washington, plainly dressed, but in a gown of rich silk, sat on a chair by the fire-place and amusing her guests with a custom which each lady returned. Each gentleman honours Miss Coffee, too, and cake was served, and had I come in the summer, I would have been offered lemonade and ice cream. The ladies enthralled above, and a candlelight is a great improver of beauty, they appear to great advantage. President Washington circled among the crowd, smiling agreeably with the ladies. It is said that he keeps count of the number who come to pay their respects to Mrs. Washington and was pleased to find the room so crowded.

Philadelphia, February 1797

NEW THEATER ON CHESTNUT STREET: We are informed that the President of the United States intends visiting the theater this evening and has sent his carriage to bring the Vice President and his family to join him. The play to be performed is ‘The Patriot Paper,’ written by Dr. Hare, and it will display morality, machinery, and decorations, the likes of which have never been seen before. A representation of a storm, an earthquake, a volcanic eruption, as well as a procession of Indians, await all who enter. Columbus will be followed by others called A Jiffy or the P. D. F. Kid.

Philadelphia, September 1796

PEALE’S MUSEUM: A visit to Mr. Peale’s museum, Prudence Pudding tells us, is well worth the admission fee of four handfuls of a dollar, readily to be obtained from the museum’s counter. Peale’s museum is filled with portraits of statesmen and sea, a rich array of birds, and a great collection of the beasts, and work of tiger, rhino, and many other fearful animals. In one room are riches, black, and spattered snakes, confined in cases enclosed with wire and glass. She was astonished to see Mr. Peale take out a black snake about four or five feet long and long, which he permitted to touch his cheek and turned it back. In the yard and stable were eagles, owls, baboons, and a six-footed cow. Mr. Peale is also a painter, and there can be seen in his museum more than a hundred portraits of the more noteworthy personages of our country, including our illustrious Washington.

June 1791

THE PRESIDENT ON TOUR: When he entered upon the duties of his office, George Washington decided he would visit all parts of the United States to please the citizens and to see how they felt about the new government. After Silvertongue, who is with the President’s party, reports that they are nearing the end of their two-month journey of 1,800 miles. Everywhere there has been a remarkable распростering of affection for the President, Silvertongue informs. There have been clumps of preparation, and every step of the circuit has come out to meet him with addresses of welcome. Ladies, some tugged up to the ears, have embraced themselves with author and headbands painted with images of the President and patriotic colors. The festivities include the ringing of bells, bands of music, cannon salutes, and many more. The President at the President’s right.

Word find key. Puzzle on page 8.

Quiz: On which paper bill can you see President Washington’s face?

Tile game key. Game on page 8.

George Washington — A MAN OF SERVICE; Mrs. Washington’s runaway who was staked away! — GUNNY ASIDE: Mississip Crow (Quas); THE ALES OF CIVILITY; Faith Proctor — ON A FASHION FRENZY; Patriot p. — FELLOW COUNTRYMAN

Making Connections

Fashion design: Design clothing for a historical character or for a historical novel or play.

Research: Investigate Peale’s Museum, Ricketts’s Amphitheatre, or the history of the circus.

Create: During the 1770s “Poet’s Comers” appeared in newspapers throughout America. Anonymous poems, songs, and satires comment on issues of the day. Americans also produced a great number of political broadsides—sheets of paper covered with anonymous poems, songs, and essays—that could be tacked up around the city, left on doorsteps, or even read to groups on street corners. Have your students try their hand at creating broadsides, writing political or social poetry, or drawing political cartoons.

Maxims

Benjamin Franklin is well known for writing or rewriting common-sense advice and perspectives on his life and times, as found in Poor Richard’s Almanac, which was popular in his day and remains popular. Students enjoy deciphering the Franklin proverbs. Initiate a class discussion around some or all of the following:

- Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.
- Never leave till tomorrow what which you can do today.
- Great talkers, little doers.
- No gains without pains.
- To err is human, to repent divine; to persist, devilish.
- He has lost his boots but saved his spurs.
- He that falls in love with himself, will have no rivals.
- He that lies down with dogs shall rise up with fleas.

Your Own Portrait of George

What you will need:

- Thin newsprint or tracing paper
- A new quarter (or one that is not worn down)
- Peeled crayon

What to do:

1. Put a quarter on a sheet of thin newsprint or tracing paper.
2. Hold the coin steady as you rub over it with the side of a crayon. TIP: If you find that the coin slips, you can put a circle of tape on the bottom of the coin to hold it to the desk.
3. As you rub the crayon over the coin, you will begin to see the head of President Washington appear!
Divide students into groups and let them brainstorm about possible service projects they could undertake.

Have your students write political poems on “America 2003” and submit them to PatriotPapers@npg.si.edu.

Where’s George?  word find puzzle
Answers on page 7.

When English as a Second Language (ESL) students planted flowers in front of College Place Middle School in Lynnwood, Washington, few expected that the volunteer project would become part of the curriculum. The kids had paid for the flowers themselves. But when they asked to plant a second garden, teacher Merle Proctor asked the Parent Club for funds and condensed the project into a lesson plan. Soon students and parents planted side by side. Now the efforts has expanded to include Master Gardeners and a unit of lessons for science, art, math, and as well as English. Proctor and the Master Gardener volunteers hope the lessons teach the kids to make gardens both beautiful and environmentally sound.

When American Bar Association’s Division of Legal Services, which sponsors the annual Image of Freedom contest, announced that the theme for 2003 was “Independent Courts, Independent Judges: Captured on Film,” there was no shortage of potential contestants. The photograph captures her classmate styli, “because judges should make pure decisions [and] follow only the law, so that we will have freedom.” No one has the right to influence them.” This picture illustrates the need for judges to make decisions based on the law, not on personal feelings or politics.

THE PATRIOT PAPERS HONORING COMMUNITY SERVICE

Page 6

FAITH PROCTOR

12-Year-Old Thy Vu Wins Contest

Challenged to illustrate how “Independent Courts Protect Our Liberty,” contestants in the 2003 Images of Freedom Student Photography Contest ranged from middle school through high school. Yet it was a 12-year-old who captured first prize. Thy’s portrayal, “A Pure Conscience,” made her the youngest contestant. Jim Landman, associate director of the American Bar Association’s Division of Public Education and organizer of the contest, hopes that the theme for this year was particularly difficult, making Vu’s accomplishment even more impressive. In April, Vu traveled to Washington, DC, to receive her award and tour the Capitol.

When Proctor began cartooning as a young age to distract herself from the bullying that took place at her school in Vietnam, Vu was a seventh-grader at College Place Middle School in Lynnwood, Washington. Vu draws from real life to express her observations, hopes, and dreams. Although she still enjoys drawing, she no longer uses it as an escape. Vu credits her mother, also an artist, for encouraging her imagination and teaching her about the use of light and the use of color. It was this exceptional use of light and nature that the panel of judges noted in Vu’s winning entry.

The photograph captures how Vu’s portrayal exemplifies people with a perfect reason to celebrate. Vu’s portrayal, “A Pure Conscience,” made her the youngest contestant. Jim Landman, associate director of the American Bar Association’s Division of Public Education and organizer of the contest, hopes that the theme for this year was particularly difficult, making Vu’s accomplishment even more impressive. In April, Vu traveled to Washington, DC, to receive her award and tour the Capitol.

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Pledge It Forward—Self to Service

A Challenge from The Patriot Papers

The Portrait Gallery’s Office of Education would like to recognize those who continue to care about community. We challenge you to Pledge It Forward—pledge time to your schools, youth organizations, senior centers. We’ll feature your stories and photos on our website at www.georgewashington.si.edu.

Projects of particular merit will be published as The Portrait Papers. Get creative, get busy. And together, we can build a community of caring. Write to us at PatriotPapers@npg.si.edu.

GUIDE/GRAB

“All the World’s a Stage”: Red Land High Proves “That’s What Friends Are For”

Students Raise $6,500 in One Week for Billy Spong

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Tile Game

Unscramble the tiles to reveal a message.
Answers on page 7.

TABLE

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Too often the work of a teacher goes unrecognized. The hours are long, the pay is low, the food is lousy, and students are often difficult to compliment. If they like you, they don’t cause trouble. If they don’t, they do. But one dedicated Pennsylvania teacher did receive a substantial “payback” that will long be remembered.

William Benjamin (Bill) Spong III teaches English, journalism, and speech at Red Land High School, located in a rural area called Etters on the outskirts of Harrisburg, Pa. An alumnus himself, he has taught there since the fall of 1994. In 1999 his wife Denise gave birth to a very special little boy, William Benjamin (Billy) Spong IV. Just 15 hours after birth, Billy suffered a massive heart attack that caused irreparable damage to his nervous system. Just six months later, at the Kennedy-Knorr Children’s Center in Baltimore, he was diagnosed with a very rare form of cerebral palsy known as echoid, the youngest child ever to be diagnosed, and the doctoring began. With little ability to control his muscles, Billy’s development was severely delayed. At the age of three, he was just starting to sit up; he does not walk. It was then that Spong heard of a new experimental therapy being offered in Detroit. Developed for children with movement disorders, it involves wearing a special suit that forces the muscles to work. Billy made two trips to Detroit for this special therapy, and already he has started to crawl, can push buttons, and is even trying to stand. Unfortunately, the cost of travel and treatment is huge; a trip to Detroit with therapy runs about $10,000.

To help with the considerable cost of this long-distance therapy, the teachers and most of the school’s 1,200 students at Red Land High thought of a way to “Pledge It Forward” and help out. Under the direction of teacher Alison Genco, the students mounted a talent show like no other. When the call went out for auditions, everyone answered. Seventy-two students in 42 acts auditioned, 25 acts were chosen, and the talent went on sale. In just one week, they sold out 4,000 seats. Local businesses also got involved, donating money and prizes for an auction.

The show included everything from dance to a violin concert to a black-belt karate act that included the breaking of a cement block. The winner—enthusing Kristen and Karlyn Kennedy—performed a mime to “I Believe I Can Fly” and received a check for $100. But the real winner that night was probably Billy. In just one week, the students had raised $6,500 and they presented a check to Billy, his parents, and his baby sister, while actors and audience sang “That’s What Friends Are For.” Some of the money will buy Billy a special walker; the remainder will go toward the purchase of an electric wheelchair.

For Bill and Denise Spong, it was a show of support they will never forget. And for Billy, it’s just wondering how fast he’ll be able to race in an electric wheelchair.