

Farmer George Plants A Nation

By: Peggy Thomas

Activity Level: Advanced

PURPOSE

Students will use cause and effect cards to describe the relationships between events and ideas in historical informational texts and explain how the author uses evidence to support information in non-fiction text.

NEBRASKA STATE EDUCATION CONTENT STANDARDS CONNECTION

LA 5.1.6 Comprehension

Students will construct meaning by applying prior knowledge, using text information and monitoring comprehension while reading increasingly complex grade-level literary and informational text.

LA 5.1.6.e

Summarize and analyze an informational text, using supporting details to explain the main idea.

SC 5.3.3.b

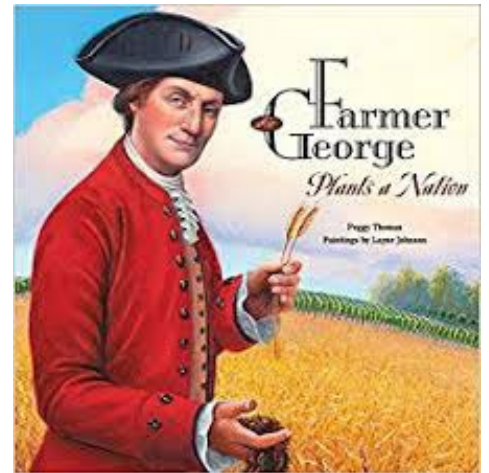
Identify the role of producers, consumers, and decomposers in an ecosystem.

WHAT'S THE CONNECTION TO AGRICULTURE?

George Washington was a farmer, inventor, and scientist. He sought to improve farming methods and share his knowledge with other farmers. The book explores how George Washington was passionate about agriculture and how he grew agriculture in America.

MATERIALS

- Several copies of *Farmer George Plants a Nation* by Peggy Thomas
- Red and green cause/effect and problem/solution cards
- Chart paper
- Markers
- Pens
- Paper
- 16 oz. plastic cups, 1 per student
- Organic items such as grass clippings, kitchen scraps (no meat or dairy), leaves, coffee grounds, bark, etc., plastic wrap, dirt, rubber bands or tape, water



VOCABULARY

Plantation – an estate on which crops are cultivated by resident labor

Climate – weather conditions

Agriculture – science or practice of farming including cultivation of soil for growing crops and animals

Compost – decayed organic material used as plant fertilizer

Ingenuity – the quality of being clever, original, and inventive

Conservation – protection and restoration of the natural environment

Harrow – an implement that is dragged over plowed land to break up clods of dirt, remove weeds, and cover seeds

Mount Vernon – George Washington’s plantation and estate, now a highly visited historic site

BACKGROUND AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION

This book is a very accurate account of the contributions of George Washington. In addition to being a general and the first president of the United States, he also made many contributions to agriculture, particularly in the areas of conservation. He was the most forward-thinking farmer of his time and struggled to create a self-sufficient farm. The book includes actual excerpts from Washington’s writings, a timeline, a resource section, and essays on his thoughts on slavery.

The beginning of America was studded with farmers. Being a farmer contributed to Washington’s leadership ability. In 1790, 90 percent of people in the United States worked as farmers. Today, just 2 percent of working people are farmers. Modern technology for growing, harvesting, and processing crops has become very efficient, allowing a small number of farmers to feed a large number of people.

While today there is a small percentage of people who are actually farmers, the agriculture industry is huge! There are 21.4 million jobs related to agriculture and food. Agriculture is more than just farming—agricultural communications like marketers, public relations experts; agricultural economics like grain broker’s and agricultural policy analyst; agricultural education like farm managers and extension agents; and agricultural engineering like machine design engineers and structural engineers, are just a few examples of the diversity in the agricultural industry!

INTEREST APPROACH

- Ask students to share who George Washington was.
Answers will likely be “The 1st President” and/or “A General”.
- Tell students that George Washington had another job first and see if they can guess what it was...after a few guesses, share that he was a farmer before becoming a general or the president!

PROCEDURE

1. Write the vocabulary words on the board. Tell students to listen for them as you read aloud.
2. Read *Farmer George Plants a Nation* as a class, asking the listening questions as you read.
 - a. When finished, review the vocabulary words with the group, asking students to explain the definition and adding to or correcting their definitions as needed.

- b. Ask if there are any questions and then have students partner to read the book. As they are reading, tell them to look for some of the reasons why Washington did some of the things he did. ‘
- c. Give students the red cards, prepared in advance, with some of the problems or causes for the actions Washington took, including:
- i. Washington became the commander in chief of Virginia’s troops.
 - ii. Farmers planted tobacco every year.
 - iii. It took three men to plant seeds at Mount Vernon.
 - iv. The soil at Mount Vernon became hard and dry.
 - v. Washington needed the best fertilizer.
 - vi. It was expensive to ship tobacco to England.
 - vii. People complained about paying taxes to England.
 - viii. Washington was asked to lead the Continental Army in a fight against the British.
 - ix. Washington was away from Mount Vernon for 8 years.
 - x. Washington bred horses with donkeys.
 - xi. Washington was a great leader.
- d. The green cards will include solutions or effects to describe Washington’s actions.
- i. Washington learned to be a leader and decision-maker.
 - ii. The soil was poor.
 - iii. Washington invented a new plow.
 - iv. Washington rotated his crops.
 - v. Washington conducted an experiment.
 - vi. Washington grew potatoes, turnips, and flax.
 - vii. Washington began making cloth, shoes, and other goods at Mount Vernon.
 - viii. Washington wrote letters to his farm managers at Mount Vernon.
 - ix. Washington’s farm looked shabby and tired.
 - x. Washington was able to use mules to work the land.
 - xi. Washington was elected as the first president of the United States.
- e. Pass out one card to each student. Have students find their cause/effect or problem/solution to match.
- i. Once students find their partner, they work together to create a short summary describing the events surrounding their cards including needs, outcomes, ideas, and character traits that are revealed as a result.
 - ii. Students present their findings to the class.
 - iii. Now ask students what they think the author wants you to know about George Washington. Have students Think-Pair-Share. Think about the answer...find a partner...share their ideas.
 - iv. As a class decide on about three major points that the author wants the reader to know. Write

them on the chart paper. Examples may include:

1. Mount Vernon was George Washington's favorite place.
 2. George Washington made sacrifices for his country.
 3. George Washington was a brilliant problem-solver.
- f. Divide students into small groups. Have each group cite examples from the text of reasons the author gave to support these messages.
3. Review definition of compost with students and how George Washington was one of the first farmers to use various composts.
- a. Show the video "Make the Most of Compost!" by SciShow Kids on Youtube.
 - b. Discuss the definitions of producers, consumers, and decomposers.
 - c. Have students create their own compost, using this activity: "Compost in a Cup".
www.sciencemadefunkids.net
 - d. Have students pick out the producers, consumers, and decomposers from their project

FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS

- What do you feel George Washington's greatest contribution to farming was?
- How are these contributions beneficial to Nebraska farmers?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Make paint out of soil. "Instructions for Making Soil Paints" at www.nrcs.usda.gov.
- Take a virtual tour of Mount Vernon at www.mountvernon.org.
- Create a visual timeline, from the back of the book, of George Washington's life. Assign various students different points along the timeline and have them research the event further to share with the class.
- Read *Thomas Jefferson Plants a Nation* and complete a Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting the two presidents.
- Read Compost Stew: An A to Z Recipe for the Earth.

COMPANION RESOURCES

- www.sodgod.com "Learn How to Compost"
- "Do the Rot Thing... A Teacher's Guide to Compost Activities" www.cvswwmd.org
- www.mountvernon.org
- www.Agclassroom.org Farmer George Plants a Nation Resources and lesson plans

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