

**Book: *Farmer George Plants a Nation***  
 By: Peggy Thomas

**Activity Level: Advanced**

Source: Adapted from Farmer George Plants a Nation lesson plan by Kerry Gray

**Purpose**

Upon completion of this lesson, students will be able to describe the relationships between events and ideas in historical informational texts and explain how the author uses evidence to support information in nonfiction text. Students will also gain an understanding of composting and it's many benefits.

**Vocabulary**

plantation	climate	agriculture	compost
agriculturist	ingenuity	soil	conservation
colonists	estate	harrow	slavery
Mounty Vernon			

**What's the Connection to Agriculture?**

The relationship between agriculture and the environment: Discover how natural resources are used and conserved in agriculture.

**State Standards It Supports**

**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.

**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 grinds, bark, etc., plastic wrap, dirt, rubber bands or tape, water

**Links to Resources (cross reference materials & activities)**

- [www.sodgod.com](http://www.sodgod.com) "Learn How to Compost"
- "Do the Rot Thing... A Teacher's Guide to Compost Activities" [www.cvswwd.org](http://www.cvswwd.org)
- [www.mountvernon.org](http://www.mountvernon.org)
- [www.Agclassroom.org](http://www.Agclassroom.org) *Farmer George Plants a Nation* Resources and lesson plans

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**BASIC ACTIVITY:**

**1. Background Information**

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.

**2. 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!

**3. Listening Questions**

- Why do you think the author chose this title for the book?
- What are some job titles that George Washington held in his life?
- What was life like at Mt. Vernon?
- What kind of crops did George Washington plant?
- What were his concerns about planting tobacco?
- What did George Washington invent? Why?
- What did George Washington believe that the prosperity of America depended on?

**4. Procedure**

*Write the vocabulary words on the board. Tell students to listen for them as you read aloud.*

*Read Farmer George Plants a Nation as a class, asking the listening questions as you read.*

- When finished, review the vocabulary words with the group, asking students to explain the definition and adding to or correcting their definitions as needed.
- 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.
- Give students the red cards, prepared in advance, with some of the problems or causes for the actions George Washington took, including:
  - Washington became the commander in chief of Virginia's troops.
  - Farmers planted tobacco every year.
  - It took three men to plant seeds at Mount Vernon.
  - The soil at Mount Vernon became hard and dry.
  - Washington needed the best fertilizer.
  - It was expensive to ship tobacco to England.
  - People complained about paying taxes to England
  - Washington was asked to lead the Continental Army in a fight against the British.
  - Washington was away from Mount Vernon for 8 years.
  - Washington bred horses with donkeys.
  - Washington was a great leader.

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The green cards will include solutions or effects to describe Washington's actions.

- George learned to be a leader and decision-maker.
- The soil was poor.
- Washington invented a new plow.
- Washington rotated his crops.
- Washington conducted an experiment.
- Washington grew potatoes, turnips, and flax.
- Washington began making cloth, shoes, and other goods at Mount Vernon.
- Washington wrote letters to his farm managers at Mount Vernon.
- Washington's farm looked shabby and tired.
- Washington was able to use mules to work the land.
- Washington was elected as the first president of the United States.
- Pass out one card to each student. Have students find their cause-effect or problem/solution to match.
  - 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.
  - Students present their findings to the class.
  - 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.
  - 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:
    - Mount Vernon was George Washington's favorite place.
    - George Washington made sacrifices for his country.
    - George Washington was a brilliant problem-solver.
  - Divide students into small groups. Have each group cite examples from the text of reasons the author gave to support these messages.

*Review definition of compost with students and how George Washington was one of the first farmers to use various composts.*

- Show the video "Make the Most of Compost!" by SciShow Kids on Youtube
- Discuss the definitions of producers, consumers, and decomposers.
- Then, have students create their own compost, using this activity: "Compost in a Cup" [www.sciencemadefunkids.net](http://www.sciencemadefunkids.net)
- Have students pick out the producers, consumers, and decomposers from their project.

### 5. Follow-Up Questions

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

### 6. Extension Activities

- Make paint out of soil. "Instructions for Making Soil Paints" at [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)
- Take a virtual tour of Mount Vernon at [www.mountvernon.org](http://www.mountvernon.org)
- Create a visual timeline, from the back of the book, of George Washington's life. Assign

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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*.

<p><b>Washington became the commander in chief of Virginia's troops.</b></p>	<p><b>Farmers planted tobacco every year.</b></p>	<p><b>It took three men to plant seeds at Mount Vernon.</b></p>
<p><b>The soil at Mount Vernon became hard and dry.</b></p>	<p><b>Washington needed the best fertilizer.</b></p>	<p><b>It was expensive to ship tobacco to England.</b></p>
<p><b>People complained about paying taxes to England.</b></p>	<p><b>Washington was asked to lead the Continental Army in a fight against the British.</b></p>	<p><b>Washington was away from Mount Vernon for 8 years.</b></p>
<p><b>Washington bred horses with donkeys.</b></p>	<p><b>Washington bred horses with donkeys.</b></p>	

<p><b>George learned to be a leader and decision-maker.</b></p>	<p><b>The soil was poor.</b></p>	<p><b>Washington invented a new plow.</b></p>
<p><b>Washington rotated his crops.</b></p>	<p><b>Washington conducted an experiment.</b></p>	<p><b>Washington grew potatoes, turnips, and flax.</b></p>
<p><b>Washington began making cloth, shoes and other goods at Mount Vernon.</b></p>	<p><b>Washington wrote letters to his farm managers at Mount Vernon.</b></p>	<p><b>Washington's farm looked shabby and tired.</b></p>
<p><b>Washington was able to use mules to work the land.</b></p>	<p><b>Washington was elected as the first president of the United States.</b></p>	