



Letters to the President

Noah Webster knew a lot of famous Americans. He even visited George Washington at his house called Mount Vernon! Letters between Noah Webster and George Washington still exist today. See if you can read their handwriting, then answer some questions about them!

Name _____ Date _____

1. What is the date on George Washington's letter and where is he when he writes it?
2. Is George Washington responding to a letter written by Noah Webster? What makes you think that he might be?
3. George Washington mentions "husbandry," "vegetable manure," "buck-wheat," and "crops" in his letter. What do you think he is writing about? (Hint: Look up the words in Webster's dictionary!)
4. At the end of his letter, George Washington says that he must "hasten to conclude" his writing (i.e. he has to quickly finish). Why?

Bonus: When George Washington writes this letter, how long has he been President?

Letter, George Washington to Noah Webster, Part 1

New York August 28th 1790.

Sir,

I have received your letter dated the 28th of July, and accompanied with the volumes which you was pleased to present me: for which I request you will accept my thanks.

Being on the eve of my departure for Virginia, it is impossible for me at present to do any thing more on the subject of your letter, than just to make two or three remarks which have occurred in the moment of perusal. I think your train of reasoning in general good, and that the application of the principle in practical husbandry may be of considerable utility. This opinion is derived in part from facts; for your theory respecting vegetable manure has formed a part of my system of experiments for several years past. Buck-Wheat, sowed expressly for the purpose of manure, and, when in its most luxuriant state, turned into the earth by ploughing, has been found beneficial to the Crop, but not fully to answer my expectations. I cannot now give a detail of the Causes which I conjecture operated in rendering the effect less visible than I had concluded it would be; and I fear I shall not have leisure myself to repeat the experiments.

Letter, George Washington to Noah Webster, Part 2

experiments.

I cannot suppose there would be anything improper in bringing your observations on so interesting a matter immediately to the consideration of some agricultural Institution. But, in truth, I have so many objects which claim my attention that I must hasten to conclude, with sentiments of regard and esteem,

Sir,

Your most Obedt. Servt.

G. Washington

Noah Webster Esquire.

Letter, Noah Webster to George Washington, Part 1

This is a copy of Noah Webster's letter. Unfortunately, the original has not been preserved.

[Copy.] [The original is on half a folio
sheet. The leaf bearing address
has not been preserved.]

Hartford Sept^r 2^d 1790

Sir.

Your Excellency's obliging favor
of the 28th ulto was duly rec^d & demands my
particular acknowledgements. The appro-
bation given to my theory of vegetable manure,
by so experienced & judicious a cultivator of
the earth as your Excellency, is a flattering
circumstance; but I know the multiplicity
of business which necessarily attends your
high & important office, & therefore beg that
not one moment's attention may be shown
to me for that communication. The vanity
of carrying on a correspondence with an ele-
vated & esteemed character, would be despicable,
& forms no part of my motives. The com-

Letter, Noah Webster to George Washington, Part 2

(omitted by
Copyist)

munication I made is a secret & I wish it to remain so; not because I doubt the justness of principles advanced, but because any doctrines I might advance, under the signature of my name, would not meet with the consideration they might deserve. Setting aside my youth, the prejudices of many men are against me. I have written ^{much} more than any other man of my age, in favor of the revolution & my country, & at times my opinions have been unpopular.

I wish now to attend solely to my profession, & to be unknown in any other sphere of life. My sole view in writing to your Excellency on the subject of agriculture, was to ascertain the justness of my principles, & if just, to submit to your better judgment the mode of making the sentiments public. I have only to request that no personal attention to me may ever take your mind from public concern, & neither deserve nor expect it.

I have the honor to be with great attachment
& respect, Your Excellency's most obliged,
most humble Serv^t
Noah Webster jun

The
President of the U States



Letters to the President

5. What is the date on Noah Webster's letter and where is he when he writes it? How long did it take Noah to respond to George Washington's letter?

6. In his letter, Noah Webster refers to George Washington as "Your Excellency," a sign of respect. What other phrases does he use in his letter to show respect for the President?

7. Why does Noah Webster want his ideas about agriculture to remain a secret? Is he popular with everyone?

8. At the end of his letter, Noah Webster says "I neither deserve or expect it." What is he talking about? (Hint: Read the previous line of his letter.)

Bonus: How old is Noah Webster when he writes this letter? What do you think about a man of his age writing to the President of the United States?