

**GILBERT STUART - FAME I – FEBRUARY 2005
(1755-1827)**

*(Suggested costume: white ruffled shirt & black jacket)
(Please choose the material appropriate for your grade level. You will not present all of it.)*

INTRODUCTON:

In February, we celebrate the birthday of a very important leader in our country's history. Does anyone know whose birthday is on February 22? I'll give you a hint. He was a general of the colonial army during the Revolutionary War and our first president. (*George Washington*) We'll talk about George Washington in a few minutes, but first let's do an experiment with color and light.

COLOR AND LIGHT:

I will be turning out the lights and asking you to look at things in the dark. (*Ask for 2 volunteers. Turn lights off.*) I am giving my volunteers 2 pieces of material. Can you tell me what color each one is holding? How about my eyes, what color are they? It's hard to tell, isn't it? How can I be sure what the colors are? (*Turn on the lights*) What does this demonstration tell you about color? (*It takes light to make color.*)

LIGHT AND SHADOW DEFINE SHAPE AND FOCUS INTEREST:

Let me show you something about light and shadow. If I shine this flashlight on this cardboard, do you get many shadows? (*No*) Why? (*It's flat.*) If I shine the light on this ball, what happens? (*I get shadows because it's round.*) Light and shadow can help an artist make things look as if they have shape and depth even when they are flat. What is this? (*Show picture of circle*) What could I do if I wanted to make this circle look like a ball? (*Add shadow to give shape...show picture of shaded ball*)

Let's pretend we are artists and we want to paint someone's portrait. (*Ask for volunteer*) When I shine this light on his/her face, do I get shadows? (*Yes*) The face isn't flat; it has angles, curves, and lots of shape. What area of his/her face has the most light on it? (*Shine light on forehead*) Notice where the light hits the skin, it is bright and seems concentrated. What happens as we go farther from the forehead? (*We see less light and more shadow.*) We say the light has become diffused or less bright.

Our artist for today, Gilbert Stuart, was a master of light and shadow. Close your eyes while I turn the print over. Now open them and tell me what you notice first in the painting. (*His face*) Why? (*Light and shadow*) Who is this man? (*George Washington*) What area of the face has the most light on it? (*His forehead.*) See how there is a bright spot and the light fades – just like it did on our volunteer's face. Where is the light coming from? (*Left front, from slightly above*) Where are the shadows? (*eye sockets, nose, under jaw*) Why would Stuart use all the light on the face and none in the background? (*He probably wanted us to study the face with no other distractions.*)

Viewers don't usually look at his jacket or jabot first. Does anyone know what a jabot is? (*Write word on board. It's the decorative ruffle on the front on the shirt.*) Would an important man today wear a jabot to get his portrait painted? (*no*) What might he wear instead? (*A necktie*) Why do you think that George Washington wore a jabot in every portrait that was done of him? (*It was the style in his time.*) Stuart painted the clothing with as few brush strokes as possible. He said that he would leave the creation of clothes to a tailor! Only the face interested him.

The surface of this painting is flat, but the light used makes it look as though it has a curve to it. (*Show Manet's The Fifer*) How is the fifer's face different from Washington's face? (*looks much flatter*) You have seen Washington's portrait many times, can anyone tell me where? (*on a dollar bill*) It has been said that if Washington came back to earth and did not look like Stuart's picture, he would be declared an impostor. The image we have of our first President of the United States is the one Stuart painted.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY:

Gilbert Stuart was the most famous portrait artist of his time and became known as the "Painter of Presidents." He painted five of our presidents: John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe. (*Ask older*

students to guess which presidents he painted.) He began painting portraits at age 13 when a friend gave him some paints and brushes. He was growing up when some very important things were happening in our country. By the time he was 20, the Revolutionary War was about to begin. Stuart and his family were Tories. What was a Tory? (*They wanted to stay part of England and not become a new country.*) Stuart didn't think many people would want to have portraits done since everyone was busy fighting and he was on the "wrong side." He boarded a ship out of Boston Harbor and went to England.

For several years Stuart didn't do well in London. He was nearly penniless when another American living in London, Benjamin West, befriended him. West tried to help younger American artists in any way he could. He even made brushes from his cat's fur – his father thought the cat had some awful disease causing its hair to fall out!

Stuart soon became better at portraits than West and much faster. He could paint a copy from our portrait in 2 hours. By age 30, Dukes, admirals, lords, and even kings sat for him. Why do you think portraits were so important in that time? (*No cameras*) Stuart returned to America after the war and continued painting in the English tradition of "idealized" portraits. He did not show Washington's mole or the scar on his face. He made Washington look god-like.

Stuart was a charming man. He would try very hard to get the people he painted to be comfortable and show their personality so that he could paint that feeling into the portrait. He had a very difficult time doing that with Washington; Washington was so serious. He tried to interest him in all sorts of subjects to get him to relax, but nothing worked. All of a sudden, Stuart noticed that Washington's eyes lit up as he gazed out the window. Guess what he saw out there? (*A horse*) Washington loved horses and loved talking about them. So that solved Stuart's problem. Whenever he painted Washington, they talked about horses.

I mentioned that Washington was so serious, but many historians believe that he was in constant pain because of problems with his teeth. None of the dentists at the time knew what to do besides take them out. Finally, Washington had to have false teeth made. They were carved by hand out of hippopotamus ivory and cow's tooth and held in his mouth with metal springs. (*Show picture of his dentures.*) These false teeth were a little large for his mouth, creating a peculiar expression, which you can see in many of his portraits.

People said that Gilbert Stuart could capture the "inner soul" of his sitters. He refused to use the customary ready-made recipe for flesh tones. Stuart said good flesh coloring was based on the use of all colors and he never mixed them. He wanted to see each shining through the other. (*Demonstrate ruddy cheeks and shaven beard. Walk around with the portrait so students can see this for themselves.*) Most artists at the time drew the features out carefully with chalk first. Stuart felt it was more spontaneous and alive looking to do it all with his brush and paint.

Stuart was never adept at handling finances so it was either feast or famine for the Stuart family and its twelve children. Washington's wife, Martha, commissioned the portrait in 1796 and expected to take it to Mt Vernon when her husband left the presidency the following year. Unfortunately, she had not counted on Stuart's unreliable ways. The painter never finished the picture. (*Show portrait, page 6*) Instead he used it as a template for many copies, 130 according to 1 record. His artwork commanded high prices, yet he spent more than he earned and teetered on the verge of bankruptcy throughout his life. When he died, his family couldn't afford a grave so they buried him with a relative. When descendants had enough money to unearthen the artist and move him to Newport, they couldn't locate him.

Our portrait hung in the White House in the new capital of Washington, D.C., during the presidency of James Madison. As the U.S. again went to war with England in 1812, the British were taking over the capital. Madison got word to his wife, Dolly, to be ready to leave and to "save the state papers and documents." The wagon was loaded and ready to flee when Dolly went back into the White House to save Washington's portrait. She took the canvas from its frame and then grabbed the Declaration of Independence. The British soon appeared and burned the White House, but the portrait was saved!

During this same War of 1812, another important event in our history occurred. (*Introduce FAME partner*)

Art Project: Draw Washington's portrait on a dollar bill. Emphasize light and shadow.

* For a description of the symbols and numbers on a dollar bill, see <http://www.ronscurrency.com/ronef.htm>