

George Washington Myths

Name _____

The Cherry Tree Myth

The cherry tree myth is one of the most popular and enduring George Washington legends. In the story, George's father confronts the six-year-old future hero after discovering his favorite cherry tree was nearly cut down. According to the legend, George replied, "I cannot tell a lie, I did cut the cherry tree with my hatchet." Struck by his son's magnanimous honesty, George's father embraced him rather than punish him.

The cherry tree legend was first told by one of Washington's biographers, Mason Locke Weems. Weems, who deeply admired Washington, wanted to illustrate that Washington's incredible accomplishments were rooted in his values. Furthermore, since Washington was the subject of several biographies soon to hit bookshelves, Locke wanted to make his stand out with new and original information about George's life.

The Silver Dollar Myth

Did George Washington throw a silver dollar across the Potomac River?

In popular culture, Washington was said to have thrown a silver dollar across the Potomac or Delaware River. The myth likely persisted to illustrate the first president as superhuman. According to George Washington's grandson, George Washington Parke Custis, the myth is partially true even though it is likely to disappoint those who liken Washington to a super hero. The river in question was not the Potomac, nor was it the Delaware, but rather the Rappahannock, near George's childhood home. At certain points near the Washington homestead, the Rappahannock narrows to a width of about 250 feet, where it might be possible to throw a round object across. Because the first American silver dollar was produced in 1794, when Washington was 62 years-old, the "silver dollar" may have been a rock or piece of slate.

1. What does “enduring” mean as used in the first sentence?

The cherry tree myth is one of the most popular and enduring George Washington legends.

- A. Boring
- B. Long-lasting
- C. newest
- D. incredible

2. Which of the following best describes the origin of the cherry tree myth?

- A. The author wanted to include truthful information from Washington’s childhood
- B. The author wanted to include information that other biographies would not have
- C. The author wanted to make sure people wouldn’t compare George Washington to his father
- D. The origins of the cherry tree myth remain unclear

3. Which of the following best describes why the quarter myth became so popular?

- A. Because the river in question was actually the Rappahannock river
- B. Because the myth was supposedly told by George Washington’s grandson
- C. Because it was so difficult to throw a silver dollar across a river
- D. Because people wanted to believe that George Washington was like a super hero

4. Which if the following is a legitimate question about the quarter myth?

- A. Who really was George Washington’s grandson?
- B. What did George Washington actually throw across the river?
- C. How narrow was the Rappahannock River?
- D. How old was Washington when he threw the silver dollar?

5. According to the cherry tree myth, why did Washington’s father decide against punishing him?

- A. His father was surprised at how strong he was
- B. His father was unsure of how to handle the situation
- C. His father was proud of his son for being so honest
- D. His father was being magnanimous