

**Topic:**

Buttons for General  
Washington by Peter and  
Connie Roop

**Time:**

1-2 days

**Grade:**

K-2

**Core:****Objectives:**

1. Students will see the Revolutionary War period through the eyes of a boy their own age.
2. Students will learn more about George Washington, the Father of our Country.

**Procedure:**

1. Give students the background to the story as found in the authors' note. Tell them that buttons were an important accessory at this time and were hard to replace. People dressed up an outfit with different buttons and kept sets of them for special occasions.
2. Students should also be told that 1777 was near the end of the Revolutionary War. The colonists were a rag-tag army without enough food or supplies. Thousands of colonial soldiers had just spent the winter in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, not far from the setting of our story, without shoes to wear! Though the colonists would win the war, the British seemed much stronger and better-supplied at this point in the war.
3. Also, students may need some background vocabulary:
  - a. Quakers
  - b. Tories
  - c. Spy
  - d. Guardpost
  - e. General
  - f. Uniform
  - h. Decode
  - i. Patriot
4. Read the story with the children. It is worded so that the children could help with the reading.
5. Stop several times during the reading and let students answer the questions, Handout 1, that go with the story. These could be answered individually or by the class together. For each two questions that are answered correctly, color and add a button to John Darragh's coat, Handout 2.

**Additional Resources:****Author:**

Carol Lear

6. When the class is finished, ask students the questions about George Washington, Handout 3.
7. Let them take home the questions to answer with parents or older brothers and sisters.
8. Second grade children could prepare the short play adapted from the book, Handout 4, to act out for younger grades, parents, or for a patriotic assembly.

HANDOUT 1

**QUESTIONS ON BUTTONS FOR GENERAL WASHINGTON**

1. In which American city does the story take place?
2. What is hidden in the buttons?
3. What does Samuel Baker call John?
4. Why does Samuel Baker hit John?
5. Why doesn't John fight back?
6. What does the soldier at the Guardpost check that belongs to John?
7. What does John lose so he must return to the city?
8. The bearded man takes John to a \_\_\_\_\_ in a clearing.
9. Who is the tall man in the blue uniform whom John meets in the tent?
10. What does General Washington call John?



## HANDOUT 3

### TEN INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT GEORGE WASHINGTON

1. George Washington's father's name was \_\_\_\_\_, and his mother's name was \_\_\_\_\_.
2. By the time he was 16, George was a trained \_\_\_\_\_ which he found to be interesting, useful work.
3. Before he was 20, George caught the terrible disease \_\_\_\_\_ on the island of Barbados in the Caribbean Sea.
4. George began his military career fighting with the British and against the French in the \_\_\_\_\_. He became the commander of all of Virginia's military when he was only 25 years old.
5. Following Lexington and Concord, the Second Continental Congress voted to form an army and asked \_\_\_\_\_ to be the commander of that army.
6. Washington and several thousand soldiers spent the winter of 1777 at \_\_\_\_\_ in Pennsylvania. The men dressed in rags, and many had no shoes.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ was a trusted and good American officer under Washington until he joined the British and became one of America's most famous traitors.
8. Under General Washington, the French and Americans won the final battle of the Revolutionary War near \_\_\_\_\_.
9. George Washington was chosen unanimously (by everyone) to be the \_\_\_\_\_ at a meeting held in Philadelphia to improve the government of the new, independent country. This meeting became known as the Constitutional Convention.
10. Soon after his death, a man who had served under Washington in the army wrote that Washington was "\_\_\_\_\_ in war, \_\_\_\_\_ in peace, and \_\_\_\_\_ in the hearts of his countrymen."

## Answers to Ten Interesting Facts About George Washington

1. Augustine and Mary
2. Surveyor
3. Smallpox
4. French and Indian War
5. George Washington
6. Valley Forge
7. Benedict Arnold
8. Yorktown
9. Chairman
10. First

## HANDOUT 4

### **BUTTONS FOR GENERAL WASHINGTON**

A short play adapted from the book  
by Peter and Connie Roop

#### **Characters**

- Narrator
- John Darragh
- John's mother, Mrs. Darragh
- John's father, Mr. Darragh
- Samuel Baker, a boy John's age whose family favored the British
- British guard
- Five British soldiers looking for someone
- Bearded man with a pistol (an American guard)
- Man guarding General Washington's tent
- British soldiers in Market Street
- Soldiers in blue uniforms
- Charles Darragh, John's brother
- General Washington

**Narrator:** In 1777, it seemed that the British were winning the Revolutionary War. The British army, under General Howe, had captured and occupied Philadelphia.

Philadelphia was the home of many Quaker families, the gentle people who had originally settled the area. The Darragh family were Quakers. They lived across the street from General Howe's British headquarters.

As Quakers, the Darraghs were gentle people who opposed violence and war. They said "thee", "thy", and "thou". They weren't supposed to fight on either side, but soon Charles joined General Washington's army. The rest of the family became spies to aid in Charles' safety.

Mr. Darragh created a code for secret messages. Mrs. Darragh hid the messages in the buttons of 14-year-old John's coat, and John took the messages to General Washington's camp. There Charles read and decoded the messages, giving General George Washington important information about the size of the British army, the state of supplies and planned attacks.

One of John's dangerous missions might have happened something like this:

**SCENE 1:** John and his father sit anxiously as his mother finishes sewing buttons on John's coat.

**Mother:** Are any soldiers in the street, John?

**John:** Only the guard at General Howe's headquarters.

**Mother:** Remember, John, keep away from the British soldiers. And go the way I told thee.

**John:** But I know a faster way.

**Father:** Do as thy mother asks. She has sent messages to General Washington before. (John nods, but he fidgets.)

**John:** I'm anxious to be going, Mother.

**Mother:** Here, John. The new buttons look just like the old ones. (Mother hands John the coat.)

**John:** (Quietly to his mother as he runs his fingers over the cloth-covered buttons.) Could anyone guess that you have put important information inside **these** buttons? If I am caught, will anyone be able to read the messages?

**Father:** No. I wrote them in a code that only thy brother, Charles, can read.

**John:** I wish I could hand the buttons to General Washington.

**Mother:** Maybe someday thee will. (John carefully buttons his coat.)

**Father:** Be careful. The British are looking for American spies.

**Narrator:** John knew he was in danger. He must be careful. Captured spies were lucky to end up in prison. Usually they were hanged!

**Mother:** Here is thy pass to leave Philadelphia. Thou needs it to pass the British guards. We will wait supper for thee. (John puts the pass in his pocket, and he nervously touches the buttons again for good luck.)

**Father:** Godspeed, John.

**Narrator:** John walked up Second Street. He turned on Market Street. British soldiers were everywhere.

**SCENE II:** A few people and many British soldiers, dressed in red, move about. John

walks past the people to a guardpost with one British soldier inside. The guard is busy and pays no attention to the squabble near him.

**Samuel Baker:** Hey, Yankee Doodle. (John turns.)

**Narrator:** John didn't like Samuel or his family. They liked the British soldiers and wanted the British to win the war.

**Samuel:** Did you see all of our new soldiers? You Americans can never win now. General Howe will whip Washington before Christmas.

**John:** He will not!

**Samuel:** Oh, yes he will. We British are too strong for you. (John steps up to Samuel, angry.)

**John:** Just thee wait and see who wins the war. When we win, thee can return to England where thou belongs!

**Samuel:** (Poking John.) Who is going to make me?!

**John:** (Yelling) ME! (Samuel suddenly hits John hard in the stomach, and John falls.)

**Samuel:** See, we will win! (Samuel walks proudly away.)

(John stands up and brushes off his coat. He looks mad enough to fight, but doesn't.)

**SCENE III:** British soldier at a guardhouse. John approaches the soldier and stops.

**John:** Here is my pass to leave Philadelphia. (He hands the pass to the guard. The guard looks at the pass for a long time very carefully. John looks worried.)

**Guard:** You are going to your aunt's house?

**John:** Yes.

**Guard:** I must check each pass carefully. There are many American spies. You are not a spy, are you? (Soldier smiles.)

**John:** Oh, no, sir! (Quickly.)

**Guard:** Off with you then. Just remember, we hang any spies we catch. (John puts his

pass back in his pocket and looks around sharply as he walks away. The guard leaves the scene.)

**Narrator:** John is more worried as he passes his aunt's house. What would the British say now about his pass? Would they guess he was a spy? Would they find the secret messages? (John is walking carefully and slowly while the narrator is speaking. He jumps over a "ditch" and hides behind a "tree." Five British soldiers come along the road and pass slowly, as though looking for someone.)

**John:** (Emerging from behind the tree. . .) Whew! That was too close! (He touches each button, again.) No! A button is missing. (He searches the nearby area for the button. Then, as if thinking aloud. . .) The button must have come off near the guardhouse when Samuel punched me in the stomach! I have to go back! I must find that button!

**SCENE IV:** The guardhouse again with the British soldier just standing up. He has something in his hand. John hurries up and looks quickly at the ground nearby.

**Guard:** Are you back so soon? (He walks toward John.)

**John:** (Jumps in surprise at the guard's words.) I lost one of my buttons. My mother would not be happy if I could not find it.

**Guard:** (The soldier holds out his hand. He has John's button.) I found it where you boys were fighting.

**John:** (Takes the button with shaking hands.) Thank thee for finding my button. (He backs away.)

**Guard:** On your way, then. (John puts his button deep in his pocket and looks toward the sky.)

**SCENE V:** The woods again.

**Narrator:** John takes a shortcut through the woods, against his mother's warning. After an hour, he stops to rest and takes a drink from an icy stream. (John is bending over, as if drinking from a stream.)

**Bearded Man:** (Grabs John from behind.) What might you be doing in these woods? (The man aims a pistol at John.)

**John:** I was hunting.

**Man:** Hunting without a gun?

**John:** I was really going to my aunt's house.

**Man:** I will take you with me to find out the truth. Now march! (They walk together through the woods.)

**SCENE VI:** John and the man leave the woods. They see a white tent in a corner of the "stage." Soldiers in blue are marching around. (For play purposes, the tent would be 3-sided. The audience will have to see inside it shortly.)

**Man:** We will have the truth from you now! (He takes John to the white tent.) I have a spy here. (Said to a man guarding the tent.) I caught him prowling in the woods near Philadelphia.

**Tent Guard:** (The tent guard steps inside the tent and returns quickly.) Bring him in. (Man pushes John into the tent.)

**Washington:** Sit down, son. (John sits.) They tell me you are a spy. You are young for a spy. Whose side do you spy for?

**John:** General Washington's side. I am John Darragh. Charles Darragh is my brother. He helps General Washington. Can I see Charles now?

**Washington:** (To the tent guard.) Send Charles Darragh to me at once. (John sits stiffly, waiting. General Washington is consulting a map.)

**Charles:** Why, John!

**John:** (He turns and smiles.) Mother sent me. I have some messages for General Washington. (He takes the button from his pocket.) There is a message in Father's code hidden inside. (Charles takes the button, removes the message, and looks carefully at it.)

**Washington:** Please decode the message right away, Charles.

**John:** Don't! Only General Washington is supposed to know.

**Charles:** (Laughing.) John, this **is** General Washington. (General Washington and John shake hands.)

**Washington:** It is an honor to shake the hand of so brave a patriot.

**John:** Thank thee, sir.

**Washington:** Charles, please report to me after you have decoded the messages. (He leaves the tent.) (Charles cuts the buttons off John's coat. He quickly removes the messages and begins sewing the buttons back on.)

**Narrator:** (While Charles cuts and sews.) So John **did** deliver the messages to General Washington himself and the words of praise still fill his ears . . . a brave patriot . . . so young . . . .

**Charles:** Now be careful on the way home. We need thee to bring more buttons.

**John:** (Again touching the buttons for good luck and laughing.) I will bring enough buttons for General Washington's whole army!