

Every artist in America wanted to paint George Washington. It wasn't just that he was the first President of the young United States. He was also a fine figure of a man. He stood tall and straight, and had a strong face. Any artist who did a good portrait of him would be famous.

At least two well-known artists had tried. Neither of their works had pleased Washington. He did not think the portraits looked like him.

Then a young Rhode Island artist named Gilbert Stuart asked to paint his portrait. Washington started to refuse. He hated to have his picture painted. Sitting still was very hard for such a man of action. Besides, he was tired and he was busy. And how did he know that this young man could do a better job than the others?

Still, he was not just a citizen anymore. Now he was a public servant. The presidents who followed him would take him as a pattern. They would study his papers, his speeches, even his pictures. It was his duty to have a good portrait made. And so he tried once more.

Gilbert Stuart always talked to his model while he painted. That made most people lean back and relax. So Stuart talked about the great generals of the past. That, he thought, would interest a general. But Washington did not care much for old heroes. He remained grim and stiff.

Stuart was an honest artist. He had to paint what he saw. Other artists had tried to make Washington look more handsome.

Stuart painted him the way he really looked. The portrait was not a success.

Later Stuart tried again. This time the President was wearing a set of false teeth that did not fit well. They made his face look out of shape. Some artists might have tried to hide this, but not Gilbert Stuart. Again he painted what he saw. That picture did not please anyone either.

Only one portrait that Stuart did of Washington ever really pleased the artist. This was the last one.

Washington was sitting for the picture. As always, he looked stiff and stern. Then all at once he smiled. Stuart looked to see what had caused the smile. A fine horse was passing by outside.

Stuart began to talk about horses. Washington relaxed and talked too. Here at last was a subject that made his face light up. This portrait was not so stern. In it Washington did not look like a hero of old. He looked like the man he was.

Stuart liked this portrait so much that he did not want to part with it. He deliberately left the background unfinished. Then when Martha Washington called for it, he said it was not ready. This made the First Lady quite angry. At last Stuart let her have a portrait. It was not, however, the real one. It was just a copy. Stuart kept the original painting as long as he lived.

This is the portrait of Washington that most Americans know. They can thank the honest artist for showing them how the real Washington looked.

**CHECK YOUR READING**

1. Artists knew that the first one to do a good portrait of Washington would become
  - A rich
  - B famous
  - C powerful
  
2. Washington did not like the first pictures of himself because they
  - A made him look too old
  - B showed him sitting down
  - C did not look like him
  
3. Washington almost refused to let Gilbert Stuart paint him because he did not
  - A like the painter
  - B want a portrait
  - C like to sit still
  
4. Washington decided to let Stuart paint him because
  - A he thought it was his duty
  - B a friend talked him into it
  - C Stuart was a poor man
  
5. While he painted the first portrait, Stuart talked about
  - A important people of the day
  - B great generals of the past
  - C new leaders of tomorrow
  
6. Washington did not think that this kind of talk was
  - A safe
  - B honest
  - C interesting
  
7. Stuart always tried to make the people in his paintings look
  - A as handsome as possible
  - B like heroes of old
  - C just as they really looked
  
8. One picture of Washington did not turn out well because of his
  - A white wig
  - B false teeth
  - C new glasses
  
9. Stuart finally found out that Washington liked to talk about
  - A battles
  - B machines
  - C horses
  
10. The original portrait of Washington was
  - A given to Martha Washington
  - B destroyed in a fire
  - C kept by the artist