



George Washington, Spymaster: How the Americans Outspied the British and Won the Revolutionary War

Thomas B. Allen , Cheryl Harness (Illustrator)

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Now in paperback—the award-winning National Geographic book that presents the untold story of the invisible war behind the American Revolution. A riveting tale of intrigue, spies, counterspies and secret agents, *George Washington, Spymaster* is a unique and entertaining account of one of the most important chapters in our nation's history. The compelling narrative reveals the surprising role played by the first commander-in-chief, General George Washington in the War of Independence.

Follow the action as 1775 dawns, and Washington finds himself in serious trouble. At war with Britain, the world's most powerful empire, his ragtag army possesses only a few muskets, some cannons, and no money. The Americans' only hope is to wage an invisible war—a war of spies, intelligence networks, and deception.

Enter the shadowy world of double agents, covert operations, codes and ciphers—a world so secret that America's spymaster himself doesn't know the identities of some of his agents. Meet members of the elusive Culper Ring, uncover a "mole" in the Sons of Liberty, and see how invisible ink and even a clothesline are used to send secret messages. You can even use Washington's own secret codebook, published here for the first time. Experience at close quarters the successes and failures of the Americans as they strive to outwit the British. Meet the chief of covert operations, one Benjamin Franklin, and several other surprising players in America's secret war.

Author Thomas B. Allen has sifted through dozens of historical documents and coded letters to uncover the facts about a time shrouded in secrets. Archival art, coupled with lively pen-and-ink sketches by children's illustrator Cheryl Harness, detail all the action and adventure of this momentous tale. Like the highly acclaimed hardback, this little paperback is sure to have a big impact on the imagination of readers everywhere.

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From Reader Review George Washington, Spymaster: How the Americans Outspied the British and Won the Revolutionary War for online ebook

Meagan says

This book tells the story of the Revolutionary War from the angle of the spies who helped win it. The story of America's first spies lends the history a sense of adventure and an immediacy that's lacking in so many historical books for children, making this an excellent choice for kids who have trouble enjoying history. In addition, the book is well-researched and includes the web addresses where readers can find the original letters and journals online. Finally, readers can get involved with the original Revolutionary War codes, making and breaking them themselves. The book contains George Washington's code key, and several codes are tucked away in the margins of the book. Attentive readers who find these codes can use the code key to crack the messages!

Denise Ortakales says

This is a wonderfully designed little book—feels good in your hands, pages have deckled edges, uses a font reminiscent of the time, and the jacket is printed in letterpress. I can see where kids, especially boys, would get caught up in the whole spy thing; there are codes to decipher throughout the whole book. Kudos to National Geographic for making history fun!

Josiphine/Tessa says

It's rather like a picture book version of Washington's Spies: The Story of America's First Spy Ring and would be better for younger people. However, the fact that it had codes hidden in the margins, and that it used a Colonial type gave it bonus points.

Scott Dunham says

My 10 year old son and I read this together before bedtime, and we devoured it over 3 nights! I've studied the Revolutionary War just a bit, but never realized how much espionage and plain old fooling the British Army played a role in our becoming a Nation!

This book touched on Benedict Arnold, so now we've gone and checked out 3 more books on the man whose name has become synonymous with "TRAITOR"! My son wants to know what happened to Arnold. Sounds like it all could make a great movie someday.

Steven Stickler says

George Washington was a SPY?!

One simple thought struck me about halfway through this book: this is not the Revolutionary War I learned about when I was a kid. Not even close. I vaguely remember learning about the many problems folks in America had with King George (so many, in fact, that they made a list). There were lessons about the desire for independence, about military strategy, muskets, and a guy riding around on a horse waking people up. Don't even get me started on the military commanders in white wigs and white pants (!). Interesting stuff, sure. But if you had told me way back then that there were spies in this war, that George Washington was not just a General but a spymaster...well, you know, that is something that would have made me sit up and pay attention.

This is precisely the angle that Thomas Allen explores. Narrowly focused on the role that spies and spycraft played in the Revolutionary War, Allen presents an entertaining and thorough narrative coupled with a substantial amount of archival evidence showing how espionage affected the War's outcome. He shows examples of actual codes that were used, explains how some of the tools of spycraft (such as invisible ink, masks, etc.) played a role, and, perhaps most interesting of all, reveals the actual codebook that was used by Washington's ring of spies. In doing so he opens up a fascinating window on the war itself, showing a dimension of the war that is often ignored in American History texts.

This book would be a terrific supplement to classroom lessons on the Revolutionary War and is sure to delight kids (and adults) with an interest the world of spies and spycraft. It just goes to show: not every guy in a white wig and white pants, with a legend about chopping down a cherry tree following him around, is entirely what he seems. Definitely true in the case of George Washington. That guy was cool.

Porter Broyles says

This was a fun little history book for older elementary school kids. I thought it covered a lot of material and was enjoyable.

Philip says

For a man who "couldn't tell a lie," Washington was pretty deceptive.

Also, he didn't tolerate the deception of others very well, as there were a lot of hangings going on.

The book doesn't deal with Washington as much as it does the spies he handled. (I'm using handled there ambiguously - did you catch that? Handled as in "is in charge of" as well as in "dispatched." Not too shabby...)

It was nice reading this after reading The Notorious Benedict Arnold last year and The Inner Circle the year before. If I had to pick between them, I'm going with the one dedicated to Arnold - although all three were good.

The Arnold book and the Washington book were both directed at kids, dealt with spying and treachery, and were non-fiction. All three dealt with the Culper Ring. The Inner Circle is non-fiction and action, aimed at adults.

Last thought: there's been quite the hullabaloo regarding Snowden's releasing secret documents to the press. I found the section on the Hutchinson Papers - which were leaked to the press by Benjamin Franklin - fascinating - especially given our recent history.

I've heard a lot of people say that Snowden should come here to face trial. Maybe. But I wonder if those same people would have argued that Franklin should have gone to England to face trial. ...I know, I know... apples to oranges...

Laura Verret says

Military secrets! Double agents! Undercover missions! Betrayal, intrigue – *espionage*.

If any of that up there sounded exciting to you, or if you happen to be a fan of the American War for Independence, then *George Washington, Spymaster* is the book for you!

Most books about the American Revolution focus on the philosophical causes for the war, or the politically charged atmosphere which surrounded its necessity. Some talk about the famous figures who spurred on that war, or the important battles that were fought. Few take on the subject of Washington's network of spies, and the important part they played in the war. But this book makes the case as Major George Beckwith, head of British intelligence operations during the war, stated, "Washington did not really outfight the British, he simply outspied us!" [pg. 149]

While perhaps a stretch – there is no doubt that Washington was a brilliant General and a good fighter – it is also true that Washington's network of spies formed a vital part of the war as they not only gathered information from the British, but also fed disinformation to the British. In fact, Cornwallis' surrender was largely due to the fact that he had been fed disinformation from double agents who convinced him to send his troops to the wrong places and left himself open for attack.

My two favorite parts of *George Washington, Spymaster* were the chapter concerning Benjamin Franklin's spying shenanigans in France [which were considerable], and the variety of methods used to convey information from one side to the other. One of my favorite stories was of "Old Mom" Rinker who would conceal a note inside a skein of yarn, sit out to do her knitting by the side of a cliff, then "accidentally" knock the yarn over the edge where it was found by Patriots. :)

Conclusion. Perhaps not the most thorough book, but a really fun one for students of the American War for Independence.

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Jessica says

I'm not a big fan of reading history but this book is so cool! It's a different take on the American Revolution by talking about how George Washington was a spy with many undercover agents working on both sides. I wish my American History textbooks were written this way.

Lora Innes says

This little book is so much fun! A very quick read, but original and entertaining!

Kelsey says

My husband insisted on buying this book at the Mount Vernon bookshop even though it is intended for children. Well, I ended up reading it before he did and found it to be an easy, enjoyable read about spies during the Revolutionary War. This is exactly the kind of book that I enjoyed as a child (I LOVED the Dear America series). This book is full of interesting snippets of history that often get left out from more traditional history narratives. Who doesn't love a story about a woman throwing balls of yarn over a cliff, each with a secret message inside? That's the sort of thing that interests me.

This is a very good book for kids interested in espionage or the revolution. It's also good for adults who don't want to read a heavy tome on the subject.

Kristy says

Jumped around a bit, which made it a little confusing, but a fascinating look at the spy network that Washington ran during the Revolutionary times. But my favorite part was the description of Washington's false teeth.

Lila says

Mitten Award Honor Book

Not only does this book have great information on Washington's network of spies, it also gives sample codes and coded messages throughout. What a fun way to learn about codemaking, history, strategy and more!

Jessica says

I would not recommend this book for children. This book deals with a LOT of different people, and the

author is not good at reminding the reader who these people are when they show up again. The main problem is that the scope of this book is just too big, making the content overwhelmingly detailed and specific. The language itself is appropriate for children between 10 and 12, but no child would ever read this book unless it was assigned because it is confusing, deals with too many people, and does not really focus that closely on the premise of the book, that being what George Washington did as a spymaster. This book dwells a lot on speculation and records actions done by spies outside of Washington's influence as well as British spies. It also deals with a lot of the surface battles as well to show cause and effect of the spies actions, but as mentioned, it just is not presented in a very engaging manner and is too much to take in. Because of this, though the information presented in this book is unique and informative, it is neither something children would like to read nor something they will enjoy reading, so I would not suggest recommending it to any child, though as an adult, I found it a fascinating read.

Maureen says

I read this book for research purposes and it brought to light some angles and names I'd not known/considered before, and helped fill in some holes I'd found in other sources. This should be required reading for students learning about the Revolutionary War. Not only is it truthful and engaging, it proves that history is anything but boring!
