

Champion of Liberty: James Madison and Diligence

- **Compelling Question**
 - Are you cultivating the diligence necessary to achieve worthy goals such as enhancing freedom for yourself and others?
- **Virtue:** Diligence
- **Definition** – Diligence is intrinsic energy for completing good work.
- **Lesson Overview**
 - In this lesson, students will analyze James Madison’s contributions through diligence to the establishment of the United States Constitution and early republic, exploring events that earned him the title, “Father of the Constitution.”
- **Objectives**
 - Students will evaluate James Madison’s actions to identify examples of diligence and speculate on the possible consequences of a lack of diligence.
 - Students will understand how James Madison’s diligence resulted in lasting benefits for the nation he helped create.
 - Students will analyze their own goals and ambitions to determine how diligence contributes to achievement of worthy goals.
 - Students identify a situation in which a lack of diligence resulted in failure to meet some personal or group goal.
- **Background**
 - James Madison was born in 1751, the eldest of twelve children born to James Madison, Sr. and Nelly Conway Madison. The Madisons owned a large and prosperous Virginia plantation. James, Jr. was educated at home until the age of 12, when his parents sent him to the school of Donald Robertson in a neighboring county. At Robertson’s boarding school, Madison prepared for university studies by mastering various math courses, as well as geography, Latin, Greek, and French. Late in life, Madison said of Robertson, “all that I have been in life I owe largely to that man.” At the College of New Jersey (now called Princeton University) Madison continued his studies by focusing on Hebrew, ethics, and law, earning a bachelor’s degree in 1771. A man of voracious reading appetite and intense curiosity, he owned over 4000 books during his lifetime, on topics including ancient and modern history, political philosophy, natural history, religion, poetry, agriculture, pharmacy, education, military science, law, economics, biblical studies, and many others.

As the relationship between the American colonies and Great Britain deteriorated, Madison “entered with the prevailing zeal into the American Cause,” according to his later writings. Madison was in poor health, and decided after a brief time in the Virginia militia that he was not suited to military life. He pursued a political career, serving in the Orange County Committee of Safety, 1776 Virginia Convention, Continental Congress, Virginia House of Delegates, Confederation Congress, Federal Convention of 1787, United States Congress, Virginia Assembly, in Jefferson’s administration as Secretary of State, and as President of the United States. Though he relished his return to private life upon leaving the presidency in 1817, Madison participated in the 1829 convention to revise his state’s constitution.

He maintained a busy retirement, managing his large Virginia plantation, working on organizing his papers from the 1787 Constitutional Convention, and receiving many visitors at his Montpelier home. He died in 1836, the last man standing from the Philadelphia Convention’s delegates. Virginia Governor James Barbour eulogized his friend and neighbor by hoping that Madison’s legacy “may become a pillar of light by which some future patriot may re-conduct his countrymen to their lost inheritance.”

- **Vocabulary**
 - Voracious
 - Eulogize
 - Tyranny
 - Consent of the governed
 - Compact

- Sovereign
- Confederation
- Magnanimous
- Renounce
- Auspicious
- Inestimable
- Proponent
- Frenetic
- Unremitting
- Amity
- **Introduce Text**
 - Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the “Walk-In-The-Shoes” question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.
- **Walk-In-The-Shoes Questions**
 - As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
 - What challenges are you facing?
 - What fears or concerns might you have?
 - What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?
- **Observation Questions**
 - What positions had Madison held by 1787 that reflected opportunities to influence national affairs? How were his unique skills and interests related to these opportunities?
 - What important steps did Madison take beginning in 1787 that contributed to historians calling him the “Father of the Constitution?”
 - Name some of the difficulties that Madison faced in the struggle for creation and ratification of the Constitution and Bill of Rights, and explain how he exercised diligence.
- **Discussion Questions**
 - Discuss the following questions with your students.
 - What is the historical context of the narrative?
 - What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
 - How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
 - How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
 - How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
 - What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
 - Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
 - How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?
- **Additional Resources**
 - James Madison’s Montpelier <http://www.montpelier.org/james-and-dolley-madison/james-madison/bio>
 - Library of Congress: The James Madison Papers <http://www.loc.gov/collections/james-madison-papers/about-this-collection/>
 - Teaching American History Online Exhibits <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/exhibits/>

Handout A: Champion of Liberty: James Madison and Diligence

Background:

James Madison was born in 1751, the eldest of twelve children born to James Madison, Sr. and Nelly Conway Madison. The Madisons owned a large and prosperous Virginia plantation. James, Jr. was educated at home until the age of 12, when his parents sent him to the school of Donald Robertson in a neighboring county. At Robertson's boarding school, Madison prepared for university studies by mastering various math courses, as well as geography, Latin, Greek, and French. Late in life, Madison said of Robertson, "all that I have been in life I owe largely to that man." At the College of New Jersey (now called Princeton University) Madison continued his studies by focusing on Hebrew, ethics, and law, earning a bachelor's degree in 1771. A man of voracious reading appetite and intense curiosity, he owned over 4000 books during his lifetime, on topics including ancient and modern history, political philosophy, natural history, religion, poetry, agriculture, pharmacy, education, military science, law, economics, biblical studies, and many others.

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Narrative

The political leaders of the thirteen states, coming from what they perceived as the tyranny of Great Britain, were determined to create, not just a new government, but a new form of government. They attempted to embody the principles set forth in the Declaration of Independence in a system that could not violate the rights of the people. Though there was no government at the time which did so, the Continental Congress sought to build a regime based on consent of the governed, which provided for the protection of natural rights, the limitations of a written constitution, and the supremacy of the legislature.

Members of the Second Continental Congress worked from 1776 to 1777 to produce a plan for such a government, and it took the states about four more years of debate before all of them approved it. In 1781, the same year as the last major battle of the American Revolution, the Articles of Confederation became the national compact binding together the United States of America. This document's "firm league of friendship," created a sovereign national union, prohibiting the states from implementing their own foreign policies. However, the document did not allow Congress sufficient authority to carry out such functions as collecting taxes, regulating commerce among the states, or forcing citizens to pay their debts. Shays's Rebellion, an armed uprising by farmers opposing high taxes, began raging in New England states, and the national government failed to raise troops in response. Moreover, Madison attended the Annapolis Convention to resolve some of the problems under the Articles but only a few states bothered to send delegates to the failed meeting. The people's delegates to Congress had acted on their fear of a central government that could abuse its powers and trample upon the rights of the people. The result was a political system in which jealousy and competition between the states caused the confederation to be a nation in name only. Only three years after the peace treaty ending the Revolutionary War, the nation seemed to be collapsing.

In the fall of 1786, James Madison was deeply concerned about the state of national affairs. A frustrated Madison stated, “The crisis is arrived at which the good people of America are to decide the solemn question, whether they will by wise and magnanimous efforts reap the just fruits of that independence which they so gloriously acquired,” or whether “they will renounce the auspicious blessings prepared for them by the revolution.” He knew the republic’s survival was in jeopardy, and he was prepared to do his part in maintaining the liberty so recently secured in the American Revolution. Unwilling to sit idle while the experiment in liberty failed; he would take action.

Madison served in the Virginia Assembly, where he pressed that body to support a resolution for a convention in Philadelphia to strengthen the Articles. Then, he was elected to Congress, where he was instrumental in winning a resolution that endorsed the approaching convention in February, 1787. His persistent efforts in persuading George Washington to attend the convention bore great fruit in lending legitimacy to the Constitution.

James Madison always diligently prepared for political conventions by studying ancient and modern history and thinkers, often thanks to the caseloads of books sent from Paris by his friend Thomas Jefferson. The year before, he had produced a lengthy document for the Annapolis Convention called “Notes on Ancient and Modern Confederacies” and now in the spring of 1787 he analyzed the Articles in “Vices of the Political System.” Madison’s study of political history and philosophy gave him great insights into the nature of human beings and government, thus sharpening his debate skills.

The convention was originally scheduled to begin on May 14, but Madison reported that only he and a few others had arrived in Philadelphia by that date. When he arrived at the Constitutional Convention in early May, James Madison began plotting strategy with members of the Virginia and Pennsylvania delegations. As a result, his brainchild, the Virginia Plan, dominated the discussions and shaped the outcome of the Constitution. Besides delivering many speeches, he diligently took notes and then re-copied them each night in a labor which, as he later wrote, “almost killed him.” The product was the only complete record of the debates of the Constitutional Convention and of inestimable importance to historians.

Over the next year, Madison was one of the key proponents of the Constitution, who became known as Federalists. He wrote twenty-nine *Federalist* essays, which continue to be read for their political principles, in order to help persuade the opponents of the Constitution – known as Anti-Federalists – to support it. His long study of history and politics, and his note-taking at the Constitutional Convention, gave him the knowledge to write the essays with co-author Alexander Hamilton at a frenetic pace of nearly 1,000 words a day (while also serving in Congress). In June, 1788, Madison defended the Constitution tooth and nail against the unremitting assaults by Patrick Henry in the Virginia Ratifying Convention, where the Federalists barely won ratification by a handful of votes. Madison was also a strategist and correspondent behind the scenes to help win ratification in other key states such as New York.

Although Madison lost a bid for the Senate, he did not give up and defeated James Monroe for a seat in the House of Representatives. In the First Congress, he sought to fulfill a promise by the Federalists during the ratification debate to draw up a Bill of Rights to protect essential liberties, even though he had initially believed that such a list of rights was not a good idea. Although most congressmen wanted to move on to what they considered more pressing business, Representative Madison became the firmest advocate for the Bill of Rights. He wanted to reconcile the opponents and the American people to the new Constitution to advance national unity. On June 8, 1789, he introduced the Bill of Rights, stating, “We ought not to disregard their inclination, but, on principles of amity and moderation, conform to their wishes, and expressly declare the great rights of mankind secured under this constitution.” He helped reconcile the hundreds of different proposals for amendments and eventually pushed them through the Congress, and they were ratified by the states in 1791 to become the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

While other Founders played significant roles in the creation of the Constitution and its ratification, no one pursued the goal of strengthening the American political system as diligently as James Madison. He constantly kept the goal in mind and worked hard to achieve it. Madison could have left some of the hard work and responsibility to others, but he exhibited great leadership and persevered through many difficulties. The

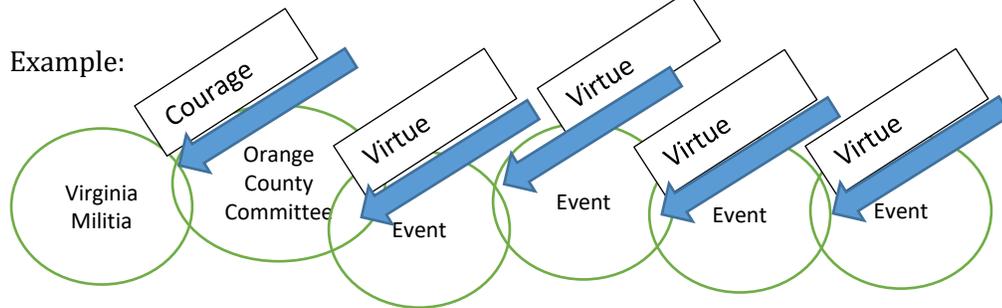
creation and ratification of the Constitution and Bill of Rights were not inevitable and almost met defeat at several key moments. However, James Madison’s diligent preparation and unremitting effort to face those challenges helped him emerge victorious as he helped to create the lasting American constitutional system, earning him the title of “Father of the Constitution.”

Questions to Consider

1. What positions had Madison held by 1787 that reflected opportunities to influence national affairs? How were his unique skills and interests related to these opportunities?
2. What important steps did Madison take beginning in 1787 that contributed to historians calling him the “Father of the Constitution?”
3. Name some of the difficulties that Madison faced in the struggle for creation and ratification of the Constitution and Bill of Rights, and explain how he exercised diligence.
4. Restate in your own words: “We ought not to disregard their inclination, but on principles of amity and moderation, conform to their wishes, and expressly declare the great rights of mankind secured under this constitution.” What virtue(s) are implied in this statement, and how does the statement reflect alignment between James Madison’s purpose and his performance?

Handout B: A Life of Service

Directions: Think of the events in Madison's life as a chain in which the links represent his activities such as education, serving in various elected positions of public service, and voluntary efforts. (Questions 1 and 2 below will help you identify activities and virtues.) With a partner or two, complete a diagram similar to the one below to label at least 6 links in the chain. Also label the virtue(s) that form the connecting points between links. Work with your partners to identify the most important link(s)—the one(s) without which all of the others would have been useless or impossible. Prepare to defend your responses in class discussion.



Note to designer: Insert image of heavy chain with large links and with room for students to label the links.

1. What specific activities did James Madison diligently carry out to advance the development of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, promoting the freedom protected by those documents? What virtues besides diligence were also significant?
2. To what extent did Madison's performance align with his identity and purpose? How did the virtue of diligence make it possible for Madison to contribute to freedom?

Handout C: Journal/Discussion Prompts

Directions: Answer the synthesis questions in your journal. Then, prepare for a classroom discussion in which volunteers share their responses to some of the questions.

1. In what situations in your own life has it been necessary for you to apply diligence, using your unique talents, skills, and interests in order to overcome obstacles or difficulties in the pursuit of worthy goals?
2. How have your actions contributed to the advancement of freedom, promoting life, liberty or the pursuit of happiness for yourself or your peers? Or, what worthy goals have you pursued that you expect to contribute to freedom in the future?
3. What are your most unique skills and talents? What can you do more skillfully than your friends and acquaintances? What brings you joy? This is not necessarily about what makes you superficially happy, but about what brings a sense of deep, worthwhile accomplishment? How is diligent behavior important in cultivating these skills?

To what extent and in what ways does your performance align with your identity and purpose? What are you doing this very day to cultivate skills and interests that will connect today's purposes with your long-term opportunity to enhance and protect the life and liberty of others?