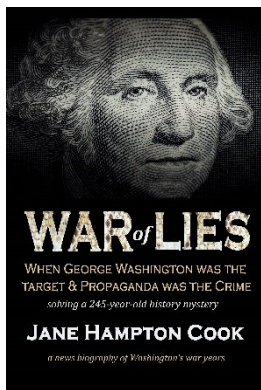


Study Guide for *War of Lies: When George Washington Was the Target and Propaganda Was the Crime* (nonfiction, a history-mystery for ages 12 and up)

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Socratic Method

Named after the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates, the Socratic method is usually a dialogue of questions between a teacher and his or her students. *War of Lies* uses a portion of the Socratic method by asking frequent questions of the reader.

The purpose of this technique is to encourage critical thinking and propel the story forward. This approach is also fitting because questions are an important part of journalism. Many of the author's sources are newspapers from the 1700s.

Part One

Part One introduces George Washington as the commanding general of the Continental Army, which has built a camp at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, in the winter of 1778. While at Valley Forge, George Washington learns about several letters that were published in his name in newspapers and pamphlets. While Washington immediately realizes that these letters are forgeries, the public did not know that Washington was not the author. The author of the letters called this conspiracy against Washington a “war of lies,” which is why the author chose this for the book's title.

The book then flashes back to episodes of Washington's life when he was a young soldier fighting in the French and Indian War in the 1750s. At this time, he was portrayed in newspapers as both a media darling and as a deceitful assassin.

1. There are two examples of snake-like imagery on the cover. Can you find them? What do snake images suggest about the story?
2. What was the purpose of Washington's mission from Governor Dinwiddie?
3. Name some of the conflicts that Washington encountered during the French and Indian War? How did the media portray him at this time?
4. Describe George Washington's near-death experience on the battlefield in 1755. How did people react to learning about it? How did Washington's response reflect faith in God? Providence meant “God's presence” according to John Witherspoon, a minister of the era.
5. Was Washington an assassin? How was this press portrayal similar or different from the media today? How did Washington respond? Do you think it's better to respond to such attacks or ignore them?
6. How did Benjamin Franklin use Washington's journey to the French-English border in May 1754? What image did Franklin create that remains an icon today?
7. What conflict did Franklin face as a young newspaper publisher?

8. How is “colonial cancel culture” different and the same from cancel culture today?
9. Should Franklin be called the father of freedom of speech? Why or why not?
10. What was the final straw for Franklin’s decision to join the American Revolution?

Part 2

1. What do you think of the Rules of Civility? Do you think these maxims should still apply to life today? Why or why not?
2. How were newspapers from the 1700s similar and different to the media today?
3. Describe fake news in the 1700s. How is it similar or different to fake news today?
4. Who are the four suspects behind the counterfeit letters that targeted Washington?
5. Do you have sympathy for any of the four suspects? If so, who and why?
6. What most motivated each of the four suspects? What drove them to make some of the decisions they made?
7. What are some similarities and differences between the four suspects?
8. When James Rivington returns to New York to be the king’s printer, how does he portray the Battle of Saratoga in the fall of 1777?
9. What were some of the issues facing Washington at Valley Forge? Why did Washington hire Baron Von Steuben?
10. What did Horatio Gates and Charles Lee have in common?
11. Why did Charles Lee leave the Continental Army in December 1776?
12. Describe the Conway Cabal. Do you think it was a real threat to George Washington’s leadership or was it overblown?
13. Which Frenchman sided with Washington in the Conway Cabal?
14. How did Alexander Hamilton feel about Horatio Gates and the Conway Cabal?
15. What happened at the Battle of Monmouth? Who won? What did Charles Lee do?
16. What did Lee’s court martial say about George Washington’s ability to judge someone’s character?
17. Why did George Washington suspect that John Randolph, Thomas Jefferson’s cousin, was behind the counterfeit letters?
18. What skill or activity did John Randolph not enjoy as he explained in his letter to his cousin Thomas Jefferson?
19. What is the pattern of evidence for each of the suspects? Which is the strongest pattern?
20. Most movies include a character who undergoes an arc of transformation or change. Which of the four suspects changed the most by the end of the book? How and why?
21. What pattern of evidence pointed to the author’s conclusion about the real culprit?
22. What did Alexander Hamilton do at the end of the book to show his opinion of Charles Lee? What might this foreshadow in Hamilton’s life?
23. What role do you think newspapers played in the American Revolution? Do you think the American Revolution would have happened without newspapers?
24. Why did George Washington declare that he did not write the counterfeit letters at the end of his presidency? What might have happened if he had failed to declare that he was not the author of these forged letters?