

THE ROSENBACH

My Historical Broadway Show, Lesson One

Level: Grades 7-12

There are many different ways to tell stories about the past. There's not just one story. Lin Manuel Miranda wanted to give us a different interpretation of Alexander Hamilton in his Broadway play. He was inspired to write the play after reading Ron Chernow's book about Hamilton. He ended up hiring Mr. Chernow as his historical consultant. Chernow's research included more than 22,000 pages of materials which included lots of letters written by Hamilton.

Why do you think Ron Chernow thought letters written by Hamilton would be useful for his book? Lots of historians have written books about Alexander Hamilton. Why didn't Ron Chernow just read those?

We don't have any Hamilton letters at the Rosenbach. But we do have letters by George Washington, John Adams and the Civil War general Ulysses S. Grant. So let's imagine you are going to write a Broadway show based on a historical character. First step is research. Let's start with a letter from George Washington to his cousin Lund who was taking care of George's farm at Mount Vernon in Virginia. This letter was written to Lund during the fifth year of the Revolutionary War from Morristown New Jersey where the Continental Army camped from December 1, 1779 to June 22, 1780.

Monmouth May 19th 1780.

Dear Lund,

Your Letter of the 10th came to hand last night. - I have not yet had leisure to look into the Papers relative to Mercers business, & what I shall, is more than I am, at this moment, able to say, as few scenes are beginning to unfold themselves, which will by no means lessen my present trouble, or attention - You ask how I am to be rewarded for all this? - There is one, that nothing can deprive me of, & that is, the consciousness of having done my duty with the strictest rectitude, and most scrupulous exactness - and the certain knowledge, that if we should ultimately fail in the present contest, it is not owing to the want of exertion in me, or the application of every means that Congress and the United States, or the States, individually have put into my hands. -

dece. to whom we are infinitely more indebted than we are to our own wisdom or our own exertions. has always displayed its power & goodness, when clouds and thick darkness seemed ready to overwhelm us - The hour is now come when we stand much in need of another manifestation of its bounty, however little we deserve it - In my zeal, I may be more particular at present, I shall only add that with much truth & sincerity I am

Y^r aff^d friend

M^r Washington
desires to be re-
membered to you
& you

E. W. Washburn

May 19th, 1780

Letter from George Washington to his cousin Lund Washington

Morris-Town May 19th, 1780

Dear Lund,

Your letter of the 10th came to hand last night.—I have not yet had leisure to look into the Papers relative to mercers business; & when I shall, is more that I am, at this moment, able to say, as new scenes are beginning to unfold themselves, which will by no means lessen my present troubles, or attention—You ask how I am to be rewarded for all this?—There is one reward that nothing can deprive me of, & that is, the consciousness of having done my duty with the strictest rectitude, and most scrupulous exactness—and the certain knowledge, that if we should—ultimately--fail in the present contest, it is not owing to the want of exertion in me or the application of every means that Congress and the United States, or the States individually, have put into my hands,--

[Provi]dence—to whom we are infinitely more indebted than we are to our own wisdom—or our own exertions—has always displayed its power & goodness, when clouds and thick darkness seemed ready to overwhelm us—The hour is now come when we stand much in need of another manifestation of its bounty however little we deserve it—In my next I maybe more particular a present I shall only add that with much truth and sincerity I am

Yr. Affe. Friend

G. Washington

Mrs. Washington desires to be remembered to you & yours

Read the letter paying special attention to the underlined sections and then answer the following questions.

1. George's cousin Lund sent him some papers related to Mercer's business. George says he hasn't had time to look at them yet. Why hasn't he had the time?
2. Lund asked George what he thought his reward was going to be for leading the country during wartime. What is George's answer?