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.

Dear Friend,

Your letter I found last night. I have received orders to return, so far as my present duties permit, to my home at this moment. All is well, and my present concern is how to assist you in any way possible.

There is no time that I care more about, and as the consequences of your duties are of the greatest importance, I trust your actions are correct, and that certain knowledge that it was more than 20 years ago that it has been, and that it is our duty to act in the present case, it is not enough to the wants of your people, or our people in general, that Congress and the United States, or that of the United States have put into my hands, to

describe. It is to whom we are immediately more indebted than to any one person, and my own exertions have always been directed towards that end. The people are, and I trust will be, of the same nature. However little we serve it, it is my wish, to the greater part, at least, that you and all the people belong to the same.

Yours,

[Signature]

Dr. Washington

[Signature]
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?