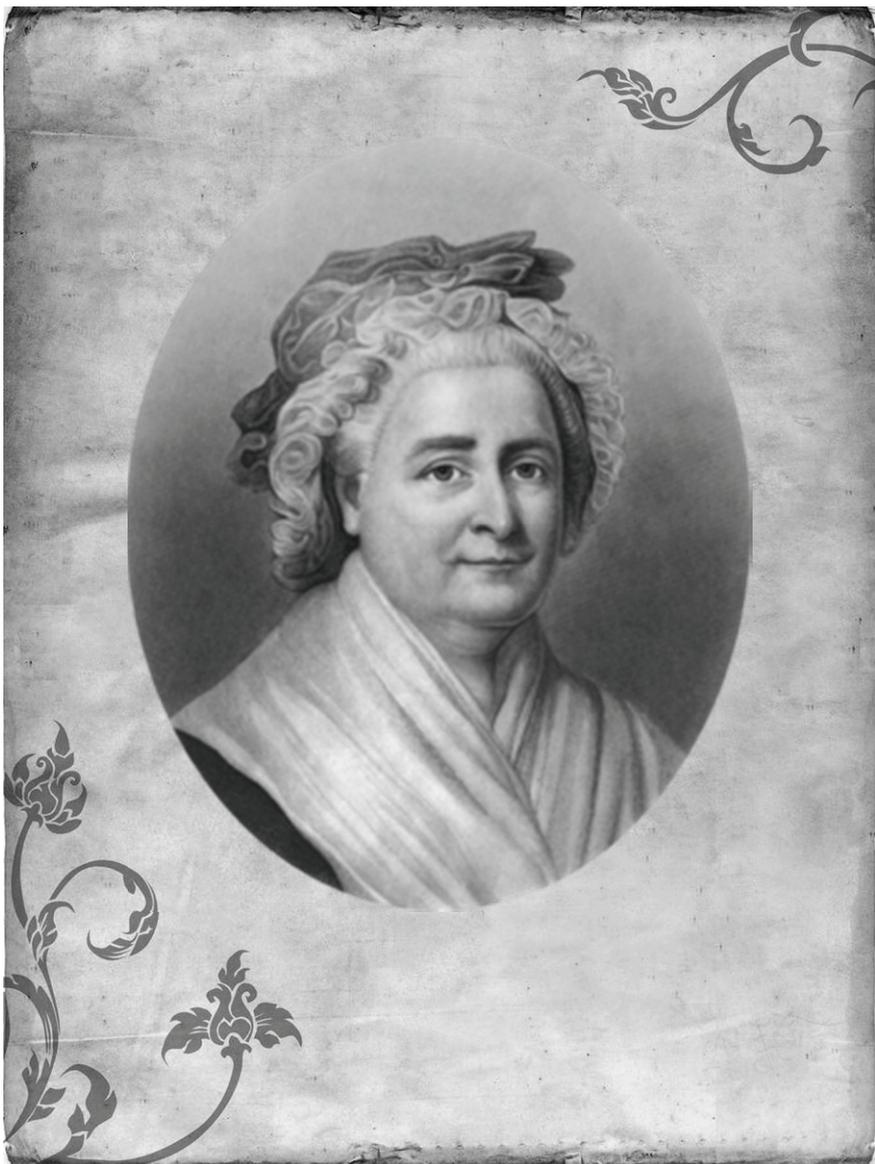# FACT OR FICTION?

Martha Washington took great delight in being the first First Lady.

FICTION

Martha Washington was good at pretending. She pretended to be a happy First Lady but she really wasn't. First Ladies were expected to be dressed up all the time. First Ladies were expected to give fancy receptions. Martha did not like dressing up or fancy receptions. She liked being a plain Virginia housewife!

When Martha married George Washington she was a wealthy widow, and he was the owner of Mount Vernon. Most folks would guess they led a life of ease with lots of servants to wait on them. Not so! George was forever running off to fight in one battle or another, and Martha kept things going at Mount Vernon. Martha could cook, sew, clean, and do almost any other chore that was needed on the plantation. On top of that, she was an excellent horsewoman. She once rode a horse up and down the stairs in her uncle's house.

Whenever George would stay in one place long enough, Martha showed up and set up housekeeping. She even spent the winter with George at Valley Forge. It was a cold, wet, miserable time, but Martha was used to roughing it. She and George would take long rides together. When she wasn't looking after George, she spent her time caring for wounded soldiers and patching up their uniforms.

Imagine how Martha felt when George became president, and she was plunked right in the middle of New York and Philadelphia society. (The White House hadn't been built yet.) Society ladies who put on their finest dresses to visit the president's wife were shocked to find her in an apron knitting socks for her husband.

Martha was delighted when it was time for George to step down as president. No one was happier to return to the everyday chores at Mount Vernon than she was. She didn't have to pretend anymore. She could be what she always said she was – a plain Virginia housewife.

Martha Dandridge Custis Washington (1731-1802)
wife of George Washington
First Lady 1789-1797