

Be Washington: At Mt. Vernon or Online.

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Be Washington is the first of three new tour enhancements rolling out this Spring. Yes-- it is a computer game. Younger visitors will recognize as a role-playing game: one faces the same crisis which required Washington to make tough decisions: the Second Battle of Trenton, The Newburgh Conspiracy, The Whiskey Rebellion, and The Genet Affair. And the clock is ticking.

Players are confronted with each situation, and a panel of advisors represent different positions. Choose wisely among them; there is not enough time to listen to each advisor's entire argument. Without warning, the time for consulting the advisors ends.

Then, players see another vignette of the developing situation. Two or three new advisors appear, for a quick final round of consultations before a decision must be made.



At the end of each round, players learn what decisions others made, and which path Washington himself took.

One can play at Mount Vernon, in a special theater by the gift shop. One or two people can sit at each station, sharing a large touch screen. Pairs face a bit more pressure, because they must decide which advisors to listen to, and for how long. Each round will take about 20 minutes.

Mount Vernon will not take reservations for the Be Washington theater, one will simply queue. We can recommend that students play online, and even on smartphones. The URL is quite simple: BeWashington.org.

The theater is also available for private gatherings before or after hours. Catering can be arranged as well.

The next enhancement varies by season. During the off-season, there will be one

Mount Vernon interpreter for the entire tour up to and through the mansion. Groups of twenty will meet in the “twelve acre field” across from the bowling green, or in the Visitors’ center during inclement weather. Tours should leave about every five minutes if there is a demand, so splitting a bus should not be a major problem. Some of us may have experienced the beta test of this procedure last summer.

This Spring Season will run from Saint Patrick’s Day through the 22nd of June. Its goal will be to “increase student engagement”. The logistics to enter the Mansion will remain the same as prior years, but there will be more interpreters engaging the the students while in line. They can still win wristbands, which will feature the BeWashington.org URL this year.

Once inside, students will have a block of time at each stop, and permission to photograph whatever catches their interest. “Let students create their own experience.” is this year’s watchword, says Linda Powell, director of interpretation. Interpreters will be able to answer students’ questions and observe their reactions at each stop.

The third major change is the expanded experience in the 4-D theater, There is still snow, blowing wind, strobe lights and shaking seats. Yet, almost everyone agreed that the experience is less about the special effects and more about a fairly complete outline of the Revolutionary War. The time has lengthened to about 20 minutes, so it can cover the arc of the war from the victories at Boston, though the winter of discontent at Valley Forge, and finally to the surrender at Yorktown. Each of the three changes, from the new video game through the revised mansion tour to the expanded movie, is designed to dive deeper.



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