**Pre-reading**

**Directions: Circle “True” or “False” after each statement.**

1. Hamilton was very rich as a young man. **~~True~~** or **False**

1. Hamilton was born in America. **~~True~~** or **False**
2. Hamilton fought for America in the Revolutionary War. **True** or **~~False~~**
3. Hamilton wanted the American colonies to adopt The Consitution. **True** or **~~False~~**
4. Hamilton became President of the U.S. after the Revolutionary War. **~~True~~** or **False**
5. Hamilton believed it was important for the U.S. to pay back the money it owed to other countries? **True** or **~~False~~**
6. Hamilton was killed in a duel by Aaron Burr. **True** or **~~False~~**

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# **ALEXANDER HAMILTON**

## by Jessica McBirney - 2017

[1]Alexander Hamilton was never one to turn down a fight. The Founding Father is best known for his deadly duel with rival Aaron Burr, but was involved in close to a dozen duels in his lifetime, including one with future President James Monroe. Almost all of the arguments were resolved without any shots fired — except, of course, for his final duel. Nevertheless, Hamilton’s passionate drive pushed him into many confrontations, both physical and political, as he sought a lasting legacy.

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| Hamilton could best be described as …   1. very kind and easy to get along with. 2. strong-willed and willing to make enemies. 3. not very smart and dishonest. |

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## **JOURNEY TO NEW YORK**

Alexander Hamilton was born out of wedlock to European parents on January 11, 1757. He grew up in the British West Indies, a group of small Caribbean islands off the coast of Florida. His childhood was marked with tragedy. First, his father abandoned him and his mother. Later, his mother died of a severe illness, and her estranged husband seized her estate from the orphaned Hamilton brothers. The boys lived briefly with a cousin, but they were separated when the cousin committed suicide.

This left 13-year-old Hamilton to fend for himself. He found a job at an import-export firm. Throughout his teenage years, Hamilton was an avid reader, and he also developed an interest in writing.

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| How would you describe Hamilton’s childhood?  *Hamilton’s childhood was very difficult. He lost both of his parents and he was an orphan by age 13.* |

In 1772 he wrote a vivid account of a recent hurricane that ended up in the local newspaper. Locals were astounded. This self-taught teenager had some serious talent! The town leaders raised enough money to send Hamilton on a ship to the mainland, where he could attend King’s College in New York City. America was on the brink of the Revolutionary War.

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| Why did Hamilton go to America?  *Hamilton was a talented writer and he had the chance to go to college.* |

## **MILITARY SUCCESS**

[5]King’s College shut its doors in 1775, before Hamilton graduated, because British troops occupied New York City. Hamilton decided to enter the military. He saw the army as the best way to advance his political career. He moved through the ranks and soon became General George Washington’s chief staff aide.

To Hamilton’s disappointment, this position kept him out of direct combat. He persistently asked to be put in charge of troops on the battlefield. Washington finally relented and gave Hamilton a few battalions in the Battle of Yorktown, the battle that ultimately secured America’s victory in the Revolutionary War.

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| During the Revolutionary War …   1. Hamilton stayed in college to avoid the fighting. 2. Hamilton was known for being a ferocious soldier. 3. Hamilton wanted to help America by fighting in battle. |

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## **THE LURE OF POLITICS**

After the war, Hamilton briefly served on the Congress of the Confederation. Throughout his time there, he grew frustrated that Congress had so little power to solve problems or collect taxes. His irritation at government ineffectiveness foreshadowed a struggle he would fight for the rest of his career.

Even though he served as a private lawyer for several years, the temptation toward government service never left Hamilton. He despised the Articles of Confederation and wrote frequently about the many problems the document caused — and of course, he believed the government’s lack of power formed the root of those problems. So in 1786, he spearheaded a campaign to create a new Congress and come up with a better governing document.

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| Hamilton believed that the American government ...   1. needed the power to collect taxes from citizens. 2. should be very small and have only a few powers. 3. was far too powerful and that it was abusing citizens’ rights. |

## **CRAFTING THE CONSTITUTION**

It is no surprise that Hamilton was chosen to serve on this new Constitutional Congress. However, he was well known as a headstrong debater who would argue tirelessly for his ideas no matter the consequences, winning him several enemies in the Confederation. He tirelessly lobbied for a powerful national government.

[10] Even though he was ultimately dissatisfied with parts of the Constitution, he agreed to support it because he believed it was better than the Articles of Confederation. Hamilton, along with John Jay and James Madison, anonymously published 85 essays defending the new Constitution to the general public. These are now known as *The Federalist Papers*.

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| Hamilton wrote *The Federalist Papers* to help persuade the American colonies to …   1. adopt the Constitution. 2. not adopt the Constitution. 3. rejoin the British empire. |

## **POLITICAL INFLUENCE**

After all the States agreed to live under the Constitution, General George Washington became President and appointed Hamilton to be Secretary of the Treasury Department. As the very first person in this role, Hamilton was able to design much of the structure and function of the Treasury. He redesigned large parts of the national financial system, established a Mint to make coins, and made regular financial reports to Congress.

Hamilton’s tenure as Secretary of the Treasury led to the earliest U.S. political parties. Parts of his plans to overhaul the national financial system required Congressional approval, but some members of Congress disliked Hamilton and disagreed with his belief in strong government. James Madison and Thomas Jefferson started a Congressional faction against Hamilton’s plans; they became known as the Democratic-Republicans, while Hamilton assembled the opposing Federalists.

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| Hamilton believed that …   1. the United States’ government should have a lot of power. 2. state governments should be more powerful than the United States government. 3. each state should make their own types of money. |

Hamilton retired as Treasury Secretary in 1794 but remained an influential voice in politics. His headstrong personality came to a climax during the presidential election of 1800. His own party, the Federalists, supported John Adams to run for re-election. Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr both ran as Democratic-Republicans. Even though they shared a political party, Hamilton hated Adams and publicly ridiculed him. He also had a deep distrust of Aaron Burr. This left him supporting Thomas Jefferson, his career-long political enemy. When Jefferson and Burr tied, Hamilton was instrumental in breaking that tie and getting Jefferson elected President.

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| Hamilton wanted …   1. Adams to be re-elected as President. 2. Burr to become President. 3. Jefferson to become President. |

## **A DRAMATIC DEATH**

Burr served as Vice President under Jefferson, but when it became clear that he would not be included on the ballot for re-election, Burr ran for Governor of New York in 1804. Once again, his opponent won with the aid of Alexander Hamilton. Soon after, a letter appeared in the *Albany Register* claiming Hamilton called Burr untrustworthy and a “dangerous man.”

[15]Because of this, and because of other unpleasant interactions with the very passionate Hamilton, Aaron Burr had fostered a deep dislike for him. Burr eventually challenged Hamilton to a gun duel. They faced each other on July 11, 1804. Hamilton aimed his gun at the sky at the last second, while Burr’s bullet hit him in the ribs. The wound proved fatal, and Hamilton died the next day.

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| Why did Aaron Burr kill Alexander Hamilton?  *For many years, Burr and Hamilton were bitter political enemies. Hamilton was one of the reasons why Burr didn’t become President or the Governor of New York. Burr eventually killed Hamilton in a gun duel.* |

## **HAMILTON TODAY**

Alexander Hamilton is seen as one of the most influential founding fathers, particularly because of his contributions to the Federalist Papers and the Treasury Department. His portrait appears on the $10 bill.

Hamilton became a recent cultural icon when, in 2015, the musical *Hamilton* premiered on Broadway in New York City. Writer and performer Lin-Manuel Miranda became interested in Hamilton’s story when he read a biography of the famous founder, and decided to write a musical featuring him.

The play’s success has brought Hamilton’s story into the limelight, giving the Founding Father the lasting legacy he sought for much of his short but impactful life.

Exit Ticket

Write a summary that explains why Alexander Hamilton is an important figure in American history? Provide at least 3 facts about Hamilton’s life that help show why he was important. Your answer should be at least 5 sentences long.

*Answers will vary. Students should explain that Alexander Hamilton played a major role in the Revolutionary War, the founding of America’s democracy, and the adoption of The Constitution. Hamilton also helped to create America’s economic system through his role Treasury Secretary.*