

DEAR GEORGE, DEAR MARY

Discussion Guide questions/Draft

1. A novel built on historical fact has to maintain accuracy to a previous era while reading smoothly to a modern reader. What sorts of decisions do you think the author made to ensure she was serving her audience?
2. Based on the knowledge you now have about George Washington's relationship with Mary Philipse, what do you think his marriage to Martha Custis was like?
3. Mary Calvi speculates in DEAR GEORGE, DEAR MARY that unrequited love might have sparked a flame that ignited a cause that became the American Revolution. Do you agree that the young George Washington's personal life may have affected his relationship with—and opinion of—the British?
4. Philipse Manor is still standing and operates as a New York State historic site in Yonkers, New York. Bottles from patent medicines and spices as well as shards of bone china and rougher stoneware plates and cups are on display at the site. What do you imagine daily life was like in Philipse Manor during Mary's time?
5. The main topic in Mary Calvi's novel is the relationship between George Washington and Mary Philipse, but Mary's relationships with other women inform the book as well. Which one was most vivid to you, and why?
6. Part of the intensity of the action in DEAR GEORGE, DEAR MARY is heightened because communications in the mid-eighteenth century were so very different from communications in our time. What events do you think were dictated by the communications—or lack of communications—between the principals in the novel?
7. What did you think about George Washington as a soldier? A lover? Did this book change your view of him as president?
8. Why do you think Mary was branded a traitor? Do you think any part of her behavior or attitude was traitorous?
9. The author uses Washington's hand-written copy of "Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation", which had been circulating for at least a hundred years before Washington copied it out, as a leitmotif. What did you deduce about Washington and his life from Calvi's use of these rules throughout her novel?