



Justice and Mercy?

Historical Background:

In 1780, George Washington faced one of the most difficult decisions of the war. Major John André, a respected British officer, had been captured carrying secret papers revealing Benedict Arnold's plot to betray West Point to the British. Washington admired André's courage and character — even many American officers respected him — but André had committed an act of espionage, punishable by death under the rules of war.

Washington had to choose between **justice** and **mercy**: Should he show compassion to a man who had acted honorably, or enforce the law to protect the new nation's fragile sense of order and fairness? In the end, Washington chose justice — André was executed as a spy — but the decision weighed heavily on him.

Writing Prompt:

Think about Washington's decision to execute Major John André. Was it more important to uphold justice or to show mercy? Write about what you think you would have done in his place — and why. Then, connect this theme to your own life or a story you know:

- When has someone had to choose between fairness and compassion?
- Is justice always the right path, or can mercy sometimes be the greater strength?