

Name: _____ Class: _____

No Plans? No Problem!

By Stephen Currie
1999

Washington is the capital of the United States. In this article, Stephen Currie tells the story of the man who planned the city — and the man who saved the plan! As you read, highlight the problems that happened during the city's design.

- [1] When the U. S. government decided to build the city of Washington in 1789, it hired a Frenchman named Pierre L'Enfant to design it. L'Enfant had big ideas. He was a hard worker. And he wanted the new city to be grand and glorious.¹ He planned wide streets that ran straight, and other streets that ran diagonally. He planned public parks and fine buildings. With two assistants, he drew up careful plans that showed exactly what he had in mind.

Unfortunately, L'Enfant was very hard to get along with. He was always picking fights with people. He kept demanding more money for his project, too, and he got mad when the government didn't want to give him more.



"Aerial view from above the U.S. Capitol, looking west along the National Mall, Washington, D.C." by Carol M. Highsmith is in the public domain.

But what really made L'Enfant mad was when people started asking to see his exact plans. Oh, L'Enfant told them about some of his ideas — the streets, the parks, and the buildings. But he refused to show his drawings to anyone but the two assistants. Everybody else, he snapped,² would just have to wait until he was ready.

For more than a year, people asked. For more than a year, L'Enfant refused. Every month they got more frustrated. Every month he got more furious! Finally, President Washington fired him. L'Enfant grabbed all the copies of his plans and stormed back to France.

- [5] When the Americans found out, they were very upset. No plans? They would have to begin all over again! The thought made everybody tired. But they were in luck. One of L'Enfant's assistants was a free black man named Benjamin Banneker. Banneker was a farmer and a scientist. He had studied the moon, the tides, and the weather. He had designed and built a clock. Now, he was ready to help out his country.

Banneker announced that he had a copy of the plans — in his head! Months of working with L'Enfant and studying his designs had helped him remember every detail. Within a few days, with the help of co-worker Andrew Ellicott, Banneker had drawn L'Enfant's plans. He saved the day and foiled L'Enfant's trick.

1. **Glorious (adjective):** worthy of praise; beautiful and inspiring
2. said angrily

Washington was built as planned, and most visitors love its wide streets, its beautiful parks, and its grand buildings. In the history books, L'Enfant gets most of the credit for the design. But now you know the whole story: how Pierre L'Enfant ran off with the plans, and how Benjamin Banneker (with Ellicott's help) turned no plans into no problem.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What is the main idea of the text?
 - A. Banneker made L'Enfant's plans for Washington even better.
 - B. Banneker helped make sure Washington was built as planned.
 - C. L'Enfant wrongly gets credit for the plans that Banneker made.
 - D. L'Enfant could have made Washington even better if he had helped.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "it hired a Frenchman named Pierre L'Enfant to design it. L'Enfant had big ideas." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "Finally, President Washington fired him. L'Enfant grabbed all the copies of his plans and stormed back to France." (Paragraph 4)
 - C. "Within a few days, with the help of co-worker Andrew Ellicott, Banneker had drawn L'Enfant's plans." (Paragraph 6)
 - D. "In the history books, L'Enfant gets most of the credit for the design." (Paragraph 7)

3. Which quote from the text shows what it was like to work with L'Enfant?
 - A. "L'Enfant had big ideas. He was a hard worker." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "he drew up careful plans that showed exactly what he had in mind." (Paragraph 1)
 - C. "L'Enfant told them about some of his ideas — the streets, the parks, and the buildings." (Paragraph 3)
 - D. "he refused to show his drawings to anyone but the two assistants." (Paragraph 3)

4. What is the meaning of "foiled" in paragraph 6?
 - A. fell for
 - B. helped
 - C. stopped
 - D. laughed at

5. What did the government need to do before Washington could be built?
 - A. hire L'Enfant back
 - B. hire all new assistants
 - C. have Banneker draw the plans
 - D. have Banneker design new plans

6. How is the information in the text organized?
 - A. in order of how the events happened
 - B. in order of most exciting facts to least
 - C. in order of newest events to oldest
 - D. in order of least known facts to most popular

7. Which statement best describes the author's point of view?
- A. He thinks that L'Enfant and Banneker do not get enough credit for planning Washington.
 - B. He thinks people should know about Banneker's role in building Washington.
 - C. He thinks that L'Enfant rightfully gets credit for planning Washington.
 - D. He thinks Washington would have been built without Banneker's help.

8. How was Benjamin Banneker different from Pierre L'Enfant?

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Do you consider Benjamin Banneker a hero? Why or why not? What do you think would have happened if Banneker had not offered his help? What would Washington look like today?
2. In the text, the author describes how upset the U.S. government was when Pierre L'Enfant took his plans. How important do you think a capital city is to its nation? What does the U.S. capital mean to you?