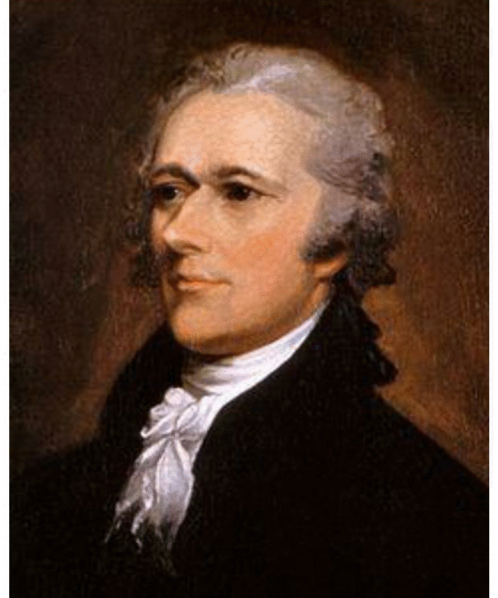


# Alexander Hamilton

by Jessica McBirney

*Alexander Hamilton (1757-1804) was an American political figure and one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. In this informational text, Jessica McBirney discusses Hamilton's life and accomplishments, specifically his contributions to America's revolutionary founding and early politics. As you read, take note of Hamilton's opinions on America's government and how his opinions compared to others.*

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,<sup>1</sup> 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.



## Journey to New York

2 Alexander Hamilton was born out of wedlock<sup>2</sup> 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<sup>3</sup> 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.

3 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<sup>4</sup> reader, and he also developed an interest in writing.

4 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.<sup>5</sup>

## 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.

6 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<sup>6</sup> and gave Hamilton a few battalions<sup>7</sup> in the Battle of Yorktown, the battle that ultimately secured America's victory in the Revolutionary War.

<sup>1</sup> the third Vice President of the United States, serving during President Thomas Jefferson's first term

<sup>2</sup> The phrase "out of wedlock" means that a child is born when the mother and father are not married.

<sup>3</sup> **estranged (adjective):** no longer close, affectionate, or connected with someone

<sup>4</sup> **avid (adjective):** having or showing a great desire, interest, or enthusiasm for something

<sup>5</sup> the armed conflict between Great Britain and thirteen of its North American colonies that lasted from 1775-1783

<sup>6</sup> **relent (verb):** to agree to do or accept something after resisting or refusing

<sup>7</sup> a large body of troops ready for battle

## The Lure of Politics

7 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.

8 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<sup>8</sup> 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<sup>9</sup> a campaign to create a new Congress and come up with a better governing document.

## Crafting the Constitution

9 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<sup>10</sup> 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<sup>11</sup> and James Madison,<sup>12</sup> anonymously published 85 essays defending the new Constitution to the general public. These are now known as *The Federalist Papers*.

## Political Influence

11 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<sup>13</sup> to make coins, and made regular financial reports to Congress.

12 Hamilton's tenure<sup>14</sup> as Secretary of the Treasury led to the earliest U.S. political parties. Parts of his plans to overhaul<sup>15</sup> 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<sup>16</sup> against Hamilton's plans; they became known as the Democratic-Republicans, while Hamilton assembled the opposing Federalists.

13 Hamilton retired as Treasury Secretary in 1794 but remained an influential<sup>17</sup> 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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<sup>8</sup> the original constitution of the U.S. that was eventually replaced by the U.S. Constitution in 1789

<sup>9</sup> to lead a movement

<sup>10</sup> to seek to influence a politician or public official on an issue

<sup>11</sup> one of the Founding Fathers and the first Chief Justice of the United States

<sup>12</sup> one of the Founding Fathers and the fourth President of the United States

<sup>13</sup> a place where money is made, especially under state authority

<sup>14</sup> the holding of an office

<sup>15</sup> to take something apart in order to examine it and repair it if necessary

<sup>16</sup> a group within a larger group that has different ideas and opinions than the rest of the group

<sup>17</sup> **influential (adjective):** having influence or the power to cause change

## A Dramatic Death

<sup>14</sup> 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*<sup>18</sup> claiming Hamilton called Burr untrustworthy and a “dangerous man.”

<sup>15</sup> 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.

## Hamilton Today

<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> The play’s success has brought Hamilton’s story into the limelight,<sup>19</sup> giving the Founding Father the lasting legacy he sought for much of his short but impactful life.

1. Describe Alexander Hamilton’s childhood.
2. In what ways did Hamilton participate in the Revolutionary War?
3. Describe Hamilton’s problem with the Articles of Confederation.
4. How did other politicians feel about Hamilton’s ideas as Secretary of the Treasury?
5. How is Hamilton viewed today? Explain the reasons for this.

## 6. PART A

Which of the following identifies the central idea of the text?

- A. Hamilton was responsible for shaping America’s newly developing government, and supported the power remaining with the people rather than with the government.
- B. Hamilton was too stubborn to admit when he was wrong or accept ideas other than his own, stunting America’s progress.
- C. Hamilton’s strong opinions and tendency to fight relentlessly for his beliefs contributed to the large impact he had as a Founding Father, but also made him several enemies.
- D. Hamilton’s career began on the battlefield with General George Washington, but he preferred creating change out of harm’s way.

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<sup>18</sup> a newspaper

<sup>19</sup> the focus of public attention

## **PART B**

**Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?**

- A. "Nevertheless, Hamilton's passionate drive pushed him into many confrontations, both physical and political, as he sought a lasting legacy." ( Paragraph 1)
- B. "His irritation at government ineffectiveness foreshadowed a struggle he would fight for the rest of his career." ( Paragraph 7)
- C. "He despised the Articles of Confederation and wrote frequently about the many problems the document caused" ( Paragraph 8)
- D. "As the very first person in this role, Hamilton was able to design much of the structure and function of the Treasury." ( Paragraph 11)

## **7. PART A**

**How do paragraphs 2-3 contribute to the development of ideas in the text?**

- A. They show that Hamilton had to overcome several obstacles early on in his life to succeed.
- B. They show that Hamilton was intelligent from a young age and had a promising future ahead of him.
- C. They show that Hamilton had the support of several family members to pursue his education.
- D. They show how surprising Hamilton's later achievements were due to his difficult beginnings.

## **PART B**

**Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A?**

- A. "Alexander Hamilton was born out of wedlock to European parents on January 11, 1757." (Paragraph 2)
- B. "He grew up in the British West Indies, a group of small Caribbean islands off the coast of Florida." (Paragraph 2)
- C. "His childhood was marked with tragedy. First, his father abandoned him and his mother. Later, his mother died of a severe illness" (Paragraph 2)
- D. "Throughout his teenage years Hamilton was an avid reader, and he also developed an interest in writing." (Paragraph 3)

- 8. How did Hamilton contribute to the changes made to the Articles of Confederation? How did his views on the Articles of Confederation compare to his views on the United States Constitution, which replaced the Articles? Use evidence from the text to support your answer and be sure to elaborate thoroughly.**



## Lin-Manuel Miranda

by Jessica McBirney

*Lin-Manuel Miranda is best known for creating and starring in the Broadway musicals Hamilton and In the Heights. He has received the highest honors in theater, television, and music for his talents and innovation in the arts. In this informational text, Jessica McBirney discusses Miranda's life and career as an artist. As you read, take notes on the development of Miranda's career in the entertainment industry.*

19 Lin-Manuel Miranda is an American writer and actor who has risen to popularity in recent years for his unique combination of hip-hop and Broadway-style music to tell stories. His two most popular musicals, *In The Heights* and *Hamilton*, both purposely feature a diverse range of actors and characters from different backgrounds.

### Formative Childhood

20 Lin-Manuel Miranda often cites his childhood years as a source of inspiration for his work. He was born on January 16, 1980, in Washington Heights, a majority-Latino neighborhood in Upper Manhattan, New York. His parents were of mostly Puerto Rican descent; his mother worked as a clinical psychologist, and his father was a Democratic Party consultant who advised New York City's mayor in political situations. Growing up in Washington Heights gave Miranda a love for music, especially hip-hop. For one month each summer, Miranda also went to stay with his grandparents in Puerto Rico. As a teenager, he wrote jingles for advertisements.

21 Miranda started attending Wesleyan University in 1998, where he co-founded a hip-hop comedy group called Freestyle Love Supreme. In his second year, he wrote his first full-length musical and titled it *In The Heights*; the story was set in his own home neighborhood of Washington Heights. Wesleyan's student theater group accepted it and performed the musical over one weekend in April of 1999. During the rest of his time at the school, Miranda wrote and directed other plays and musicals with the student theater program.

### In the Heights

22 *In The Heights* stuck with him, and even after he graduated college in 2002 Miranda worked with professional directors to write five more drafts of the musical. The story centers on a young man named Usnavi, who runs a small store in Washington Heights and hopes to someday win the lottery so he can go back to his native country, the Dominican Republic. Miranda and the directors he knew finally got the show to play in an off-Broadway theater.<sup>20</sup> It was so successful that in 2008 the musical opened on Broadway; Miranda himself played the lead, Usnavi.

23 *In the Heights* won two Tony awards and the 2009 Grammy Award for Best Musical Theater Album. Miranda was also nominated for a Tony for Best Actor in a Musical.

24 After *In The Heights*, Miranda dabbled in a variety of areas and got to express his flair<sup>21</sup> for the unusual. He co-wrote a musical called *Bring It On: The Musical*, which played in Atlanta, Georgia, in 2011 before touring around the country. He appeared on several TV shows, including an episode of *How I Met Your Mother* written entirely in rhyme (a tip of the hat to Miranda's love for hip-hop), and in online comedy sketches and podcasts.



<sup>20</sup> Off-Broadway theaters are smaller and usually show less expensive performances than what is available on Broadway. Many shows that play off-Broadway later go on to be performed on Broadway.

<sup>21</sup> **flair (noun):** a natural ability or talent

## Hamilton

25 While all this was going on, however, Miranda was working on a big project. In 2008, he read Ron Chernow's biography of American founding father Alexander Hamilton. The book inspired him to write a song about Hamilton's rise to political power from a humble childhood in the Caribbean. Miranda performed the song, "Alexander Hamilton," at the 2009 White House Evening of Poetry, Music, and the Spoken Word. He began work on a second song about Hamilton called "My Shot" and then spent almost an entire year writing and rewriting it because he wanted every word to capture Hamilton's intelligence and strong personality.

26 Miranda also kept writing new songs about different parts of Hamilton's life, until he had what he called the *Hamilton Mixtape*. He performed selections from the *Mixtape* at a theater workshop in 2013, where he found some performers who joined him in transforming the *Hamilton Mixtape* into *Hamilton* the musical and taking it to an off-Broadway theater.

27 Miranda played the role of Alexander Hamilton, the lead character, in the off-Broadway production, which opened in January 2015. The show received incredibly high reviews, and all tickets sold out. In August 2015, *Hamilton* opened on Broadway. Miranda continued to play the lead for the next year. He also had the opportunity to play a minor role in Broadway's *Les Miserables*, fulfilling a lifelong dream.

28 *Hamilton* earned Miranda a new level of fame, as tickets for all the Broadway shows sold out every night for hundreds of dollars each and reviewers across the country gave the show their highest praise. The production won 11 Tony awards in 2016, including Best Musical.

## 2016 and Beyond

29 While putting the finishing touches on *Hamilton* in 2014 and 2015, Miranda collaborated with some writers at Disney to write the music for the movie *Moana*. That soundtrack also became very popular, and the movie was a big box office hit when it opened in late 2016. He also contributed to the soundtrack for J.J. Abrams' new 2015 Star Wars film, *The Force Awakens*.

30 In 2016 Miranda and several other *Hamilton* cast members performed several of the show's songs live at the White House, and at the end of the afternoon, Miranda performed freestyle rap based on prompts from President Obama.

31 In May of 2016, Miranda won the Drama League Distinguished Performance Award, an honor someone can only receive once in their life, but his career is far from over. He starred in the movie *Mary Poppins Returns* in 2018, and he has other plans and aspirations to create more movie soundtracks in the future.

**9. Describe Lin Manuel Miranda's teenage years. How do they differ from those of the average teenager?**

**10. Which of the following is NOT a true statement about *Hamilton*?**

- A. It is a popular and expensive Broadway musical.
- B. Miranda always knew it would make him famous.
- C. Miranda performed pieces of the show before it became a hit musical.
- D. Miranda spent years writing it before it was produced.

**11. Which of the following would Lin-Manuel Miranda most likely agree with?**

- A. His career is just beginning because he does not feel successful yet.
- B. Artists can be successful in more than one art form.
- C. Artists should eventually make films so they can be more successful.
- D. Receiving awards for your work is the best way to feel successful.

**12. PART A**

**Which of the following best identifies a central idea in the text?**

- A. Miranda started a new genre of musicals that is very popular on Broadway.
- B. Miranda saved Broadway's decline by creating a hit musical called *Hamilton*.
- C. Miranda used his experiences and passions to create notable Broadway musicals.
- D. Miranda created a completely new way to use hip-hop to teach history to children.

**PART B**

**Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?**

- A. "his unique combination of hip-hop and Broadway-style music to tell stories." (Paragraph 1)
- B. "The book inspired him to write a song about Hamilton's rise to political power" (Paragraph 7)
- C. "as tickets for all the Broadway shows sold out every night for hundreds of dollars" (Paragraph 10)
- D. "he has other plans and aspirations to create more movie soundtracks in the future." (Paragraph 13)

**13. How does the characterization of Miranda's childhood in paragraph 2 contribute to the author's description of his life?**

- A. It shows that his upbringing influenced his art.
- B. It suggests that his parents were not musically inclined.
- C. It explains why Miranda used hip-hop in *Hamilton*.
- D. It provides information on the Latin American experience.

**14. Which of the following best describes the progress of Miranda's career?**

- A. After achieving success with *Hamilton*, he created more hip-hop productions.
- B. He wrote jingles as a teen and became more and more famous for his singing.
- C. Once he was successful with *In the Heights*, he craved more attention.
- D. He wrote and edited his scripts many times before producing his musicals.

**15. How does the section on *In the Heights* contribute to the main idea of the article? Use evidence from the text to support your answer and be sure to elaborate thoroughly.**

**Use both texts to answer the following question.**

**16. Why do you think Lin Manuel Miranda was so inspired to write about Alexander Hamilton's life and legacy? Use evidence from both texts to support your answer. In addition, be sure to elaborate thoroughly in order to receive full credit.**