

Name _____



Thomas Jefferson

1743 – 1826

Thomas Jefferson was born on April 13, 1743 in Shadwell, Albemarle County, Virginia. His Father was Peter Jefferson, a well-to-do landowner, and his mother was Jane Randolph Jefferson, whose family was one of the original settlers of Virginia. Jefferson was a very tall, lanky young man with freckles and reddish, sandy hair. He attended the College of William and Mary and studied law.

Upon his father's death, Jefferson inherited 5,000 acres of land. At the age of 26, Jefferson began building his Monticello estate. The mansion took several years to complete but a section of it was livable by the time he married Martha Wayles Skelton at age 29. They had 6 children but only two, Martha and Mary, lived to adulthood. Jefferson owned approximately 200 slaves he divided among three homes, Monticello, Albemarle County Plantation, and the Poplar Forest estate. Some of the slaves he inherited from his father and father-in-law. At one point, two of his slaves escaped and Jefferson did not attempt to recover them. By the time of his death, Jefferson freed 7 slaves, all of whom were members of the Hemings family.

Jefferson was not only a lawyer and plantation owner, but also a scientist and inventor. His daily life revolved around the ideal of “Whether I retire to bed late or early, I rise with the sun.” No matter where his travels took him, each morning, Jefferson rose from sleep and followed a daily routine. He would measure the temperature, direction and speed of the wind, amount of rain, migration of birds and the appearance of the flowers. He noted all of these things in a small notebook to be transferred into a larger tablet later. He always carried his notebook, a compass, thermometer, drawing instruments, scale, level, and a small globe.

He designed his Monticello estate for comfort and convenience. He installed space saving beds that recessed into the walls. His closets were sometimes built over the beds requiring a ladder to reach them. In other closets, he designed a turning mechanism that had several extending arms from top to bottom to hang clothes on. He utilized several skylights throughout the house and hung mirrors to reflect natural and candle light in order to brighten rooms. His dining room had a dumbwaiter that allowed access to the wine cellar and revolving doors leading to the kitchen. In his study were many early inventions of office equipment such as a swivel chair, a wheel cipher for interpreting codes, and a copy machine. Although his estate may portray an elaborate picture, Jefferson dressed simply. Instead of wearing the latest fashion of the 1700s or 1800s, Jefferson mixed various styles of fashion in order to be comfortable. He was even known to sometimes receive visitors in his bathrobe and nightshirt.

In the political arena of the 13 colonies, Jefferson was known as an eloquent writer and not a strong public speaker. His character portrayed the ideal of “Never abandon a plan, principle, or a friend.” In 1769, Jefferson was elected to his first political post. He served six years in the Virginia House of Burgesses. Soon after, he was elected as a delegate to the 2nd Continental Congress in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. On June 11, 1776, Jefferson, at the age of 33, was requested to draft the *Declaration of Independence* with the support of John Adams and Benjamin Franklin. Jefferson then published an article stating that colonial loyalty toward the King of England should be voluntary.

Upon his return to Virginia in 1776, Jefferson served 4 years in the Virginia House of Delegates. In 1779, he was elected Governor of Virginia. His time in office was spent supporting the Revolutionary War efforts. He provided supplies to the Virginia militia and defense for the cities and coast of Virginia. At this time there was controversy on whether Jefferson enabled the defeat at Richmond by failing to provide the defense that was necessary to protect the city. After reviewing the charges of misconduct against Governor Jefferson, the Virginia Assembly not only dismissed the charges but praised Jefferson with great appreciation for all his efforts during the war. In spite of the charges being cleared, a bitter Jefferson resigned as Governor in 1781 and he returned home to Monticello. This trying event was followed by more heartache for Jefferson when his wife died in 1782.

1784 proved to be a year of change for Jefferson. He was called upon to serve in Congress and was appointed Trade Commissioner. He designed a proposal for the establishment of a Money Unit and Coinage as well as a decimal system. The idea for a new unit of money would establish a symbol, an identity for the newly formed United States and help guarantee financial independence for the US. His proposal for the U.S. dollar was not adopted until 1792. As Chairman of the Western Land Committee, Jefferson proposed an ordinance for the Western Territory to be self-governing until the time in which the area was large enough to join the Union. This ordinance also recommended that slavery not be allowed in the Western Territory. Although a slave owner himself, Jefferson declared that “... slavery was evil” and should not be allowed to spread into new Territories”. As a member of Congress, Jefferson was 1 of 5 delegates requested to attend the signing of the Treaty of Paris, which attempted to settle differences between Britain and the Colonies, end the Revolutionary War, and allow the Colonies to be self-governing.

Jefferson returned to France in 1785 in order to replace his ailing friend, Benjamin Franklin, as Ambassador to France. Although he remained in France until 1789, he remained involved in the events occurring in the United States. Jefferson witnessed the beginning of the French Revolution and became very supportive of France.

When Jefferson returned to the United States in 1789, he found that he was appointed to the position of Secretary of State under President George Washington. As Secretary of State, Jefferson found himself in conflict with Alexander Hamilton, Secretary of the Treasury, over several issues. The strong leadership of Jefferson and Hamilton caused political divisions to

develop around their personal differences. Soon they developed into the first United States political party system. Jefferson's political party was Republican. Hamilton headed the Federalist Party. The two debated over political, international, and monetary affairs. Another way that the two disagreed was that Hamilton favored the British and Jefferson favored the French. As time went on, Jefferson realized that President Washington favored many of Hamilton's ideas. This discouraged Jefferson and he resigned from his post on December 31, 1793.

In the election of 1796, Jefferson was nominated as the Presidential candidate for the Democrat-Republican Party. Jefferson lost the election by 3 electoral votes to John Adams, a Federalist. Jefferson had hoped that he and Adams would be able to work well together especially since they both were Anti-Hamiltonians.

The election of 1800 brought the first change of political power in the office of President. This was the first peaceful turnover of government from one political party to another in modern western history. Jefferson became the third President of the United States. He served 2 terms. Jefferson's first term is marked by the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Jefferson doubled the size of the United States by purchasing 827,000 square miles of land from Napoleon Bonaparte for 15 million dollars. During Jefferson's second term, he organized the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1805, to explore the new territory and find a way to transport goods from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. He sent his childhood friend, Meriwether Lewis, who later became his private secretary and William Clark who was an experienced hunter and tracker. This expedition strengthened the United States' interest in the Oregon Territory, since the Pacific could be reached by crossing Oregon.

Jefferson's second term was marked by difficulties both foreign and domestic. He struggled to keep the U.S. neutral during the conflict between France and Britain. His efforts in this cause did not change the course of the War of 1812. Jefferson imposed the Embargo Act of 1807, which prohibited all exports and most imports in an effort to gain recognition of American rights from Britain and France. This was seen as a failure by most people, especially those who were struggling for supplies they could not acquire within the United States. Jefferson repealed the Embargo Act before his retirement from the office of President.

Jefferson spent the last 17 years of his life at his Monticello estate but continued to find ways to better the lives of the American people. He sold his collection of books to the U.S. government to begin what is known today as the Library of Congress. At age 76, Jefferson established the University of Virginia of Charlottesville, Virginia in 1819. He chose the location, designed and supervised the construction of the buildings, developed the curriculum, aided in the hiring of the teachers and secured its charter.

On July 4, 1826, the author of the *Declaration of Independence* died on its 50th anniversary. Thomas Jefferson was 83 years old and passed away only hours before John Adams, who remained his lifelong friend despite various disagreements.

Jefferson wanted to be remembered for three things, Freedom from Britain, Freedom from conscience, and Freedom maintained through education.

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Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways do you think Jefferson's inventions have impacted today's society?
2. Why do you think Jefferson was a slave owner if he was against the idea of slavery?
3. Jefferson was Vice-President of the United States under President John Adams. What role do you think Jefferson played in this position?
4. What do you think Jefferson meant by "Never abandon a plan, principle, or friend"?
5. What major accomplishment do you think Jefferson was most remembered for?

6. Name the three major political roles that Jefferson fulfilled.

7. What important event took place during Jefferson's first term as President?

8. What important event(s) took place during Jefferson's second term as President?

9. Was there any significance to the date of Jefferson's death?

10. Name the three things that Jefferson wanted to be remembered for. List how he accomplished each.

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Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways do you think Jefferson's inventions have impacted today's society?

A) *Many of his ideas have been improved upon and make our lives easier (copier, sky light, swivel chair)*

2. Why do you think Jefferson was a slave owner if he was against the idea of slavery?

A) *He had always been taught that slavery was normal. He believed Africans to be inferior.*

3. Jefferson was Vice-President of the United States under President John Adams. What role do you think Jefferson played in this position?

A) *President of the Senate, Tries to work with Adams against Hamilton.*

4. What do you think Jefferson meant by "Never abandon a plan, principle, or friend"?

A) *Jefferson considered loyalty to be the highest virtue*

5. What major accomplishment do you think Jefferson was most remembered for?

A) *Answers will vary*

6. Name the three major political roles that Jefferson fulfilled.

A) *Ambassador to France, Secretary of State, Vice-President, President*

7. What important event took place during Jefferson's first term as President?

A) *Louisiana Purchase*

8. What important event(s) took place during Jefferson's second term as President?

A) *Lewis and Clark Expedition*

9. Was there any significance to the date of Jefferson's death?

A) *He dies on the same day as John Adams and on the 50th anniversary of the **Declaration of Independence***

10. Name the three things that Jefferson wanted to be remembered for. List how he accomplished each.

A) *Answers will vary; Declaration of Independence, Louisiana Purchase, etc.*