

Thomas Jefferson

By Jane Runyon

Europe experienced a new way of thinking in the fifteenth century. This was called the Renaissance. Renaissance is a French word that means a rebirth or time of starting again. Europeans became more interested in art and literature. They saw more value in educating themselves. It was a rebirth of thoughts and ideas.

Thomas Jefferson was sometimes called a Renaissance Man in early America. He could speak five different languages and was able to read two others. He wrote thousands of letters during his lifetime. He was a lawyer, an author, a musician, an inventor, and a scientist. He studied farming and was an expert on growing all kinds of plants. Most people, however, think of him as a statesman in the early growth of America.



Thomas Jefferson was born in the spring of 1743 in Virginia. He started his study of Greek, Latin, and French languages when he was only nine. He began his studies at William and Mary College when he was sixteen. As a student at the college in Williamsburg, he was able to see for himself the changes that were being debated in the New World. He was present at the House of Burgesses the day Patrick Henry made his famous "Give me liberty, or give me death" speech. This speech was given in response to the Stamp Act imposed by King George III. The colonists were tired of paying taxes to the king. It was here that Thomas Jefferson's desire for freedom began.

Jefferson was not a speaker who could move people with his words. He was a quiet man who used his talent with the written word to make his point. While a member of the House of Burgesses, he confined himself to working on committees and writing volumes of information to back the cause of freedom.

In 1775, Thomas Jefferson replaced Payton Randolph at the meeting of the Continental Congress. Some of the papers he wrote concerning the rights of British citizens in the colonies were published throughout the colonies. These papers also made it across the Atlantic and were distributed in England.

In 1776, the time had come to declare independence from England. Thomas Jefferson was asked to put the thoughts and desires of the colonists onto paper. His work was changed a little by James Madison and Benjamin Franklin. The congress made a few changes also. Jefferson was not totally happy with the changes made, but on July 4, 1776, his Declaration of Independence was adopted.

Jefferson did not participate in the Revolutionary War as a soldier. He returned to his Virginia home to care for his wife and two of his children who were very ill. Three years after returning home, Jefferson succeeded Patrick Henry as governor of Virginia. Thomas's wife, Martha, died while he was governor. He went into a deep depression over her death. According to family reports, the only thing that drew him out of this depression was that he, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin were sent to France. It was their job to make friends with the French and secure France's support in the war against England.

After the Revolutionary War, Jefferson returned to America and was appointed Secretary of State by the first President of the United States, George Washington. After Washington's two terms as president, Jefferson ran for the office himself. He was defeated by John Adams. In those days, two men ran for president. The man who received the most votes became president. The loser became vice president. Jefferson no longer agreed with John Adams on how the new country should be run. They hardly spoke to each other the entire time they served together. Jefferson ran again for the office of president in 1801. This time he won and served two terms. One of the first things he did as president was to change the way the vice president is elected. Perhaps his most remembered accomplishment as president was the purchase of land west of the Mississippi River. He doubled the size of the existing country with this \$15 million land deal. The Louisiana Purchase is considered a real bargain today. As it turns out, the land ended up costing about four cents an acre.

His terms as president were complete, but he was not finished with his projects. He was responsible for beginning the University of Virginia. He also helped start the Library of Congress, selling his own books to the new library.

Name _____



Date _____

Thomas Jefferson lived until 1826. He died on the day of the year for which he is most remembered, July 4.

Thomas Jefferson

Questions

_____ 1. The Renaissance first occurred in Europe.

- A. true
- B. false

2. Why do you believe Thomas Jefferson was called a Renaissance Man?

_____ 3. Thomas Jefferson wrote speeches to convince the colonists to revolt against England.

- A. true
- B. false

_____ 4. Who inspired Thomas Jefferson to fight for freedom?

- A. George Washington
- B. Patrick Henry
- C. William and Mary
- D. John Adams

_____ 5. Where did Jefferson go during the Revolutionary War?

- A. England
- B. France
- C. New York
- D. Washington, D.C.

6. Thomas Jefferson changed the way a vice president is elected. What problems might have arisen using the original way?

7. What do you think Jefferson's greatest contribution to America was? Why?

Name _____



Date _____

8. What did Thomas Jefferson do after his presidency?

Thomas Jefferson was called a Renaissance Man. What does that mean?

What special talents do you have? How do you use your talents?
