

Thomas Jefferson and the Barbary Pirates Printable Reading Comprehension
Name _____

Most people know that Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence and was America's third president. Some people know that he was responsible for America doubling its size through the Louisiana Purchase. Very few people know, however, that Thomas Jefferson sent America into its first overseas war - against pirates!

In 1801, the United States joined with several European countries in a war against the Barbary Pirates. The Barbary Pirates operated in the Mediterranean Sea, from ports in the north African countries of Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and Algeria. The pirates demanded a payment called a tribute from foreign governments in exchange for the safe passage of their ships in the Mediterranean Sea. If no tribute was paid, the pirates would attack and capture the crews of foreign ships and sell them for a ransom or force them into slavery.

When Thomas Jefferson became president, the pirates increased the cost of the tribute and Jefferson refused to pay it. Instead, he sent United States warships to the Mediterranean Sea, which eventually began bombarding the pirate bases. The pirates surrendered in 1805 in what came to be known as the First Barbary War. Although the pirates were finished for the time being, they'd start capturing American ships again in 1807. This led to the Second Barbary War where the pirates were defeated for a second time.

1. Which is not true about Thomas Jefferson?

- A. He wrote the Declaration of Independence
- B. He was the third president of the United States
- C. He sent America into a war against pirates
- D. Thomas Jefferson agreed to pay the increase tribute to the pirates

2. Why did Thomas Jefferson declare war on the Barbary Pirates?

- A. The pirates were threatening to attack in the United States
- B. The pirates increased the cost for the United States ships to sail safely in the Pacific Ocean
- C. The pirates increased the cost for the United States ships to sail safely in the Mediterranean Sea
- D. Because he knew there would be a second Barbary War.

3. The Barbary Pirates...

- A. were defeated forever in 1805.
- B. attacked the crews of foreign ships unless a tribute was paid
- C. operated from ports in Europe
- D. defeated America in the the Second Barbary War.

4. Which of the following is not answered in the passage?

- A. How many Barbary Wars were there?
- B. Did Thomas Jefferson agree to pay the increased tribute?
- C. What countries did the Barbary Pirates operate from?
- D. Who was president during the Second Barbary War?