



Day 23 American Revolution

Thomas Jefferson

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## Thomas Jefferson: A Renaissance Man of the Early Republic

**Time:** 60–75 minutes

**Grade Range:** Upper elementary–middle school

**Unit:** American Revolution / Early Republic

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### Lesson Overview

This lesson explores the life and legacy of **Thomas Jefferson** through a teacher-led PowerPoint presentation, a supporting article, and an interactive digital module. Students examine Jefferson's many roles—as a writer, politician, scientist, architect, and educator—and apply their understanding through inquiry-based and evaluative writing activities.

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### Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe Thomas Jefferson's early life and education
  - Explain Jefferson's major political roles and achievements
  - Analyze Jefferson's contributions as a writer and thinker
  - Evaluate Jefferson's legacy, including contradictions
  - Apply historical knowledge through interactive and reflective tasks
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### Materials

- **Thomas Jefferson PowerPoint** (anchor)
  - Article: **Thomas Jefferson**
  - **Thomas Jefferson “Renaissance Man” Interactive Module**
  - Online or printable **scavenger hunt**
  - Writing prompts and reading comprehension activities
  - **Thomas Jefferson – Virtual History Teacher Activity**
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## **PART I: ANCHOR ACTIVITY**

### **PowerPoint Presentation (25–30 minutes)**

Below is a **slide-by-slide script** teachers may read or paraphrase.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/revwar/tj.pptx>

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#### **Slide 1 – Thomas Jefferson**

**Teacher Script:**

“Today we are going to learn about Thomas Jefferson, one of the most complex and influential figures in American history. Jefferson was not just a president—he was also a writer, architect, scientist, and educator.”

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#### **Slide 2 – Early Life**

**Teacher Script:**

“Thomas Jefferson was born in Virginia in 1743. When he was only fourteen years old, he inherited his father’s land and enslaved people. Jefferson later attended the College of William and Mary, where he studied subjects that shaped his thinking for the rest of his life.”

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#### **Slide 3 – Early Career**

**Teacher Script:**

“Jefferson became a lawyer and entered politics at a young age. By twenty-six, he was elected to the Virginia House of Representatives. Around this time, he began building Monticello, the home that reflected his interests in science, architecture, and design.”

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## **Slide 4 – Jefferson’s Timeless Writings**

### **Teacher Script:**

“Jefferson is best known as a writer. As a member of the Second Continental Congress, he drafted the Declaration of Independence. His words about equality and natural rights are still quoted today, even though Jefferson himself owned enslaved people—a contradiction we will examine.”

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## **Slide 5 – Declaration of Independence**

### **Teacher Script:**

“The Declaration of Independence explained why the colonies believed they had the right to break away from Great Britain. Jefferson’s ideas were influenced by Enlightenment thinkers who believed governments exist to protect natural rights.”

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## **Slide 6 – Governor and Diplomat**

### **Teacher Script:**

“Jefferson served as governor of Virginia and later as minister to France. During this time, he wrote the Statute for Religious Freedom, which helped establish the principle that government should not control religion.”

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## **Slide 7 – Secretary of State**

### **Teacher Script:**

“As secretary of state under George Washington, Jefferson disagreed strongly with Alexander Hamilton about the role of government. These disagreements helped lead to the creation of America’s first political parties.”

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## **Slide 8 – A New Political Party**

### **Teacher Script:**

“Jefferson and James Madison founded the Democratic-Republican Party. They believed in states’ rights, a farming-based economy, and close ties with France. Political debate during this time was often harsh and personal.”

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## **Slide 9 – Road to the Presidency**

### **Teacher Script:**

“Jefferson lost the election of 1796 but became vice president. In 1800, after a tie in the Electoral College, the House of Representatives chose Jefferson as president.”

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## Slide 10 – President Jefferson

### Teacher Script:

“As president, Jefferson oversaw the Louisiana Purchase, which doubled the nation’s size, and supported the Lewis and Clark Expedition. He also authorized America’s first overseas naval conflict against the Barbary Pirates.”

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## Slide 11 – Life After the Presidency

### Teacher Script:

“After serving two terms, Jefferson retired to Monticello, where he continued to read, write, and design. He remained active in shaping American ideas even after leaving office.”

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## Slide 12 – Monticello

### Teacher Script:

“Monticello was Jefferson’s lifelong project. It reflects his interest in architecture, science, and Enlightenment ideals, and it shows how he combined creativity with practical design.”

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## Slide 13 – Legacy

### Teacher Script:

“Jefferson’s legacy includes founding the University of Virginia, supporting separation of church and state, and building the Library of Congress from his own books. He is remembered as a brilliant thinker whose ideas still influence the United States today.”

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# PART II: ARTICLE READING (10–15 minutes)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/lewis-and-clark-home/lewis-and-clark-expedition-biographies/thomas-jefferson>

Teachers may:

- Read the **Thomas Jefferson article** aloud
- Assign independent reading

- Use partner or guided reading

**Suggested Focus Questions:**

- How did Jefferson's education influence his beliefs?
  - What roles did Jefferson play beyond being president?
  - What contradictions exist in Jefferson's life?
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## **PART III: INTERACTIVE EXPLORATION**

### **Thomas Jefferson “Renaissance Man” Module (15–20 minutes)**

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/lewis-and-clark-home/lewis-and-clark-expedition-biographies/thomas-jefferson>

Students explore Jefferson's life through themed sections:

- Writing
- Politics
- Science
- Architecture
- Education

Students complete the **online or printable scavenger hunt**, locating key facts and evidence from each category.

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# PART IV: APPLICATION ACTIVITIES

## Recommended Activity: Thomas Jefferson – Virtual History Teacher (20–25 minutes)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/revolutionary-war/revolutionary-war-writing-activities/virtual-history-teacher-thomas-jefferson>

### Activity Description:

Students role-play as a history teacher grading a poorly completed student test on Thomas Jefferson.

### Student Instructions:

You are playing the role of a history teacher who is grading the test below.

See the questions and your “student’s” answers. Grade the quality of each answer on a scale of 1–4, with “1” being poor and “4” being excellent.

For each answer, use your knowledge of Thomas Jefferson—or reference the [mnrussbaum.com](http://mnrussbaum.com) online biography—to add the missing details and improve the response.

### Teacher Purpose:

This activity reinforces:

- Content knowledge
- Evaluation and explanation skills
- Historical accuracy
- Written elaboration

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## Additional Options (Teacher Choice)

- [Thomas Jefferson Printable Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 800
- [Thomas Jefferson Online Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 800
- [Thomas Jefferson and the University of Virginia Printable Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 1000
- [Thomas Jefferson and the University of Virginia Online Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 1000

Other reading comprehension and writing activities are available at:

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/lewis-and-clark-home/lewis-and-clark-expedition-biographies/thomas-jefferson>

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## Closure (5 minutes)

Discussion prompts:

- Why is Thomas Jefferson considered a “Renaissance Man”?
  - How should historians evaluate leaders who made important contributions but also had serious flaws?
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