



Day 19 American Revolution  
45-60 Minutes

Thomas Paine and Common Sense

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# Thomas Paine: Life, Ideas, and Revolutionary Documents

## Detailed Lesson Plan with PowerPoint Script

**Grade Level:** 6–9

**Time:** 60–75 minutes

**Unit:** Ideas and Voices of the American Revolution

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## Lesson Overview

This lesson explores the life and writings of Thomas Paine and explains how his words helped transform colonial anger into a movement for independence. Using a teacher-led PowerPoint presentation as the anchor, students learn about Paine's background, major documents, and complicated legacy.

Students then engage with the Thomas Paine article and a **Famous Documents of the Revolutionary War interactive module**, followed by targeted literacy activities focused on figurative language and reading comprehension.

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## Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe Thomas Paine's life and political development
- Explain the historical importance of *Common Sense* and *The Crisis*
- Analyze figurative language in a primary source

- Distinguish between literal and figurative meaning
- Evaluate Paine's lasting influence and controversial legacy

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## Essential Question

How can words change the course of history?

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## Materials

- PowerPoint presentation: *Thomas Paine*
- Thomas Paine main article
- Famous Documents of the Revolutionary War interactive module
- Integrated online or printable scavenger hunt
- Literal vs. figurative language activity
- Reading comprehension activities

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## PowerPoint Anchor Instruction (25–30 minutes)

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

Use the PowerPoint presentation as the instructional anchor.  
The following script aligns directly with the slides.

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## PowerPoint Script

**Thomas Paine**

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**Slide 1 – Thomas Paine**

Thomas Paine was one of the most influential writers of the American Revolution. His ideas helped convince many colonists that independence was not only necessary, but possible.

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## **Slide 2 – Early Life in England**

Thomas Paine was born in England in 1737 to poor, uneducated farmers. He began working at a young age and had little formal schooling.

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## **Slide 3 – Early Adulthood**

Paine worked in several jobs and faced repeated failures. The death of his first wife during childbirth deeply affected him and added to his personal struggles.

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## **Slide 4 – Political Awakening in England**

While living in Lewes, England, Paine became involved in politics. His first pamphlet argued for fair pay and treatment of tax collectors, showing his concern for ordinary people.

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## **Slide 5 – Meeting Benjamin Franklin**

Paine met Benjamin Franklin in 1772. Franklin recognized Paine's talent and encouraged him to move to America, providing a letter of recommendation.

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## **Slide 6 – Journey to America**

Paine arrived in Philadelphia in late 1774. He nearly died from typhoid fever but recovered and soon became involved in colonial politics.

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## **Slide 7 – Common Sense**

In January 1776, Paine published *Common Sense*. Written in clear language, it argued strongly for independence and challenged the idea of monarchy.

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## **Slide 8 – Impact of Common Sense**

*Common Sense* spread rapidly and influenced both ordinary citizens and colonial leaders. It became the most widely read political pamphlet of the century.

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## Slide 9 – The Crisis

Paine later wrote *The Crisis*, a series of essays meant to inspire Americans during the war. These writings were read aloud to soldiers to boost morale.

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## Slide 10 – Famous Quote from The Crisis

“These are the times that try men’s souls...” This line encouraged perseverance and condemned those who abandoned the cause during difficult moments.

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## Slide 11 – Work in France

After the American Revolution, Paine supported the French Revolution. He continued to write about democracy and the rights of the people.

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## Slide 12 – The Rights of Man

In *The Rights of Man*, Paine defended revolution and criticized monarchy. The book made him famous in Europe but also controversial.

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## Slide 13 – Fall from Favor

Political changes in France led to Paine’s arrest and imprisonment. He narrowly escaped execution during the French Revolution.

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## Slide 14 – The Age of Reason

While imprisoned, Paine wrote *The Age of Reason*, criticizing organized religion. This work alienated many former supporters in America.

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## Slide 15 – Return to America

Paine returned to America largely forgotten and politically isolated. Despite his earlier influence, he no longer held public support.

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## Slide 16 – Death and Legacy

Thomas Paine died in 1809 with few people attending his funeral. His ideas, however, helped shape democratic movements around the world.

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## Article and Interactive Module (15–20 minutes)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/revolutionary-war/causes-of-the-revolutionary-war/thomas-paine-and-common-sense>

### Teacher Directions

Students read the **Thomas Paine article** and explore the **Thomas Paine Pamphlets interactive module**.

Important note:

- The module includes *Common Sense* and *The Crisis*
- It also features pamphlets from **later in the unit timeline**
- Teachers may use the module with discretion depending on pacing

Students complete the **integrated scavenger hunt**, online or printable.

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## Literacy Activity: Literal vs. Figurative Language (10–15 minutes)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/revolutionary-war/fun-printables-of-the-revolutionary-war/the-summer-soldier-and-sunshine-patriot-figurative-and-literal-meaning-in-the-crisis>

Students analyze the following quote from *The Crisis*:

“These are the times that try men's souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country...”

### Student Task

- Draw or describe the **literal meaning** of a “sunshine patriot”
- Explain the **figurative meaning** Paine intended

- Discuss why Paine chose figurative language instead of literal language

Discussion prompt:

How does figurative language make Paine's message stronger?

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## Reading Comprehension Activities

Students complete selected **reading comprehension exercises**

- [Thomas Paine Printable Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 1100
- [Thomas Paine Online Reading Comprehension](#) - Lexile 1100
- [Thomas Paine Cloze Reading \(Contextual Vocabulary\)](#) Grades 5 +

These may be used for independent work, homework, or assessment.

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## Closure (5 minutes)

Discussion prompt:

Why do Paine's words still matter even though his reputation faded during his lifetime?

Exit ticket options:

- One reason *Common Sense* was effective
- One example of figurative language used by Paine