



Day 19 American Revolution
45-60 Minutes

Thomas Paine and Common Sense

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

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.

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?

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.

PowerPoint Script

Thomas Paine

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Slide 13 – Fall from Favor

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

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.

Slide 15 – Return to America

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

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.

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.

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?

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.

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