

19. “Thomas Jefferson”

by Core Knowledge Staff

Our third president, Thomas Jefferson, was a wonderful writer. He wrote about nearly everything, because nearly everything interested him. One time, Jefferson was trying to write a very important paper about liberty. Like his friend George Washington, Jefferson thought the king of England was not being fair to the colonists in America, so it was time to start a new country. Not everyone in the colonies felt that way, though. Jefferson, Washington, and their friends needed to give good, strong reasons to make this big change. Leaders from all over America met to talk about what to say. They chose five people to work on a document explaining the reasons for a new nation, including Thomas Jefferson.

John Adams worked with Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson and Adams were great friends, though Adams was as different as he could be from Jefferson. However, they were alike in one thing: they agreed it was time to start a new nation. Since John Adams was older, Jefferson suggested, “John, you should write the paper explaining our ideas.”

“No, Thomas,” Adams replied. “I have angered many people by arguing for a new country and some of them do not like me. Everyone likes you, though, so they will be more likely to help. Besides, you are a better writer than I am.”

Jefferson wanted to make this document the best thing he had ever written. He would call it the “Declaration of Independence.” Jefferson’s declaration said that every person should feel safe to live, to be free, and to decide what to do in order to be happy. Jefferson’s declaration said that this was the reason to start a new nation: the United States of America. His friend John Adams smiled and said, “I told you, Thomas; you were the man to write it.”

Two days after Jefferson finished the Declaration of Independence—on the Fourth of July—the other leaders voted to officially begin our country, independent from England. That is why we call the Fourth of July “Independence Day.”

After the new nation was born, Americans read Thomas Jefferson’s document again and again whenever they were deciding how the country should work. People in other countries said, “We want to be free, too,” and followed America’s example by making changes in their countries. Jefferson’s words about liberty changed people’s lives all over the world.

Word Count: 391

NAME: _____

QUESTIONS

DATE: _____

Comprehension Questions

“Thomas Jefferson”

Assess each student’s comprehension of the selection by asking him or her to respond orally to the following questions one on one with you:

1. **Literal** What did Jefferson think of the king of England?
 - » that he was not being fair to the colonists in America
2. **Literal** Why did John Adams insist that Jefferson write a paper explaining the Founding Fathers’ ideas?
 - » because he knew Jefferson was a better writer and because he thought more people would listen to Thomas Jefferson because everyone liked him
3. **Inferential** What effect did Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence have on people in America and all around the world?
 - » It served as a guide when Americans were deciding how their new country should work. It changed people’s views of liberty all over the world.