

Thomas Jefferson: A Man of Ideas

By Pat McCarthy

Summary

Thomas Jefferson made many contributions, first to the colonies and later to the United States. He was not a good speaker, being a bit awkward and shy, but his writing was clear and concise. His writings included *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, The Declaration of Independence, and the *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom*. Although he served in many capacities, including President and Secretary of State, Jefferson was most proud of his writing and the fact that he founded the University of Virginia.

Before Reading

Building Background

Build background for the book by allowing students to observe the book's art and predict what some of the topics covered will be. Make sure students are familiar with the key vocabulary and concepts. Encourage students to discuss and share what they may already know about Thomas Jefferson.

Vocabulary

council, direct democracy, governor, responsibility, candidate

Comprehension Skill: Summarize

A **summary** is a short statement that tells the main idea of an article or tells what happened in a story. When you summarize a paragraph, look at the details and the main idea. To summarize a book with many paragraphs, find the main idea of each paragraph. Then, tell in a sentence or two what the whole book is about. As you read, think about how you would summarize the main ideas of the book.

During Reading

Think Critically

1. What three things was Thomas Jefferson the most proud of doing? (Writing the Declaration of Independence, writing the Virginia Statue of Religious Freedom, and starting the University of Virginia.)
2. You have been learning to summarize. Summarize Thomas Jefferson's political jobs for the colony of Virginia. (Jefferson was a member of the House of Burgesses, represented Virginia at the Continental Congresses, and served as governor of Virginia.)

3. What did Thomas Jefferson mean when he said, "Never did a prisoner released from his chains feel such relief?" (Jefferson meant that he was very glad his time as president was over and he could go home to Monticello.)
4. How do you think Thomas Jefferson felt about his daughter Martha? Why do you think that? (He loved her very much. He took her to France with him, and he let her into his room when he wouldn't let anyone else in after his wife died.)

After Reading

Writing

Jefferson wrote about people's rights. Is there a right you think people should have? Write a paragraph about your ideas. Write your paragraph on a separate sheet of paper.

Organize Information

Graphic Organizer: Summarize Chart

Have students use the Summarize chart to summarize the main ideas of the book.

Name: _____

Summarize the main ideas of the book.

- ✓ Summarize the main ideas of the book.
- ✓ In the top three boxes, write three main ideas.
- ✓ In the bottom box, summarize the three main ideas.

Summarize

The diagram consists of three empty rounded rectangular boxes arranged horizontally at the top. Below each of these three boxes is a black arrow pointing downwards. These three arrows converge towards a single, larger empty rounded rectangular box centered at the bottom of the page. This layout is designed for students to write three main ideas in the top boxes and then summarize those ideas in the bottom box.

> Before his death, Thomas Jefferson left explicit instructions regarding the monument to be erected over his grave. In this document (undated), Jefferson supplied a sketch of the shape of the marker, and the epitaph with which he wanted it to be...¹ Nonetheless, this was clearly a man ahead of his time, deserving the praise of our nation and tremendous respect. He laid the foundation for many quintessential American ideals (and in many cases worldwide ideals). Related Questions.² Why did Thomas Jefferson think Alexander Hamilton's ideas of an industrial America were inadvisable? What are interesting facts about Thomas Jefferson? Will Jefferson become a new state in America? Thomas Jefferson requested that on his tombstone he should be remembered for three things. Author of the Declaration of Independence. Passing the statute of Religious Freedom in Virginia. Founding of the University of Virginia.³ Many of the ideas he wrote about were derived from the works of others, in particular, Locke's "The Rights of Man." He also received suggestions from Benjamin Franklin and John Adams. However, Jefferson's achievement was to bring together the best ideas and express them in a memorable, almost mantric style. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." However, Jefferson was also a man of many contradictions.⁴ The inscription suggests Jefferson's humility as well as his belief that his greatest gifts to posterity came in the realm of ideas rather than the realm of politics: "Here was buried Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of American Independence of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, and father of the University Of Virginia."