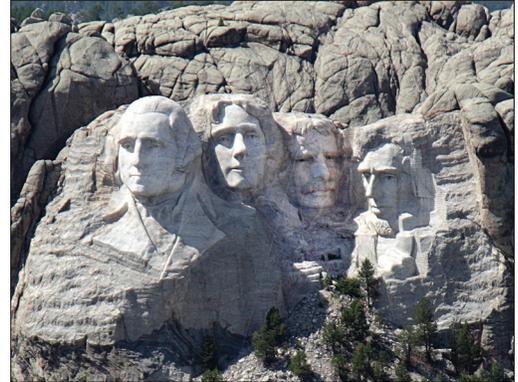


# WASHINGTON, JEFFERSON AND LINCOLN: THREE GREAT PRESIDENTS

In its first 100 years as a nation, the United States was fortunate to have a number of remarkable presidents. Even now, three of those early presidents are consistently ranked as among the nation's greatest: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln.



Aerial View, Mount Rushmore, near Keystone, South Dakota  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010630783>

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This primary source set includes four documents for each of these great presidents. These documents can help students explore various aspects of these presidents' lives. One document shows something about the president's home or family life, the next one represents one of his great achievements, a third item is a portrait of the president, and the fourth is a photograph of the monument or memorial dedicated to his memory.

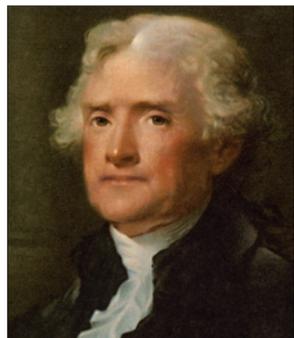
Below is a brief overview of the life and major accomplishments of each president.

**George Washington** (1732-1799) was an American hero long before he became president. As the commander of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War, he led colonial troops through many dire situations, including a long, difficult

winter encampment in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. After the colonies emerged victorious over the British, when many in Washington's position might have tried to seize national power, he instead returned to private life at his plantation at Mount Vernon, Virginia.

However, the U.S. Government soon experienced a number of problems brought on, in part, by the lack of a single strong leader. Having experienced life under the British monarchy, Americans feared an overly-powerful executive. Washington again stepped up to serve his country—first as the president of the 1787 Constitutional Convention and then as the nation's first president in 1789. He kept the United States out of European wars, helped to unite the nation, and established the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government.

Like Washington, **Thomas Jefferson** (1743-1826) played a major role in the American colonies' struggle to gain independence from Britain. He is perhaps best known as the main author of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson did not take part in the Constitutional Convention because he was then serving as ambassador to France. However, he and James Madison corresponded frequently during the months of the convention. Jefferson was the first secretary of state, the second vice president, and the third president of the United States (1801-09).



Thomas Jefferson  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/93500130/>

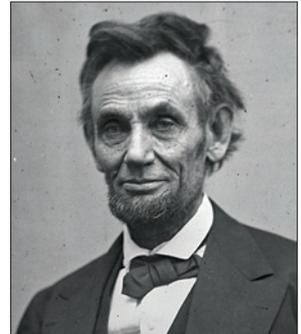
During Jefferson's two terms in office, the United States doubled in size, due in large part to the 1803 purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France. Jefferson sent Lewis and Clark on an expedition to explore this newly purchased land. After the British burned the U.S. Capitol in 1814, Jefferson offered the

Congress his personal collection of books for purchase. These books became the core of the Library of Congress, and today the Library's main building bears Jefferson's name. Jefferson also designed his own home, called Monticello, and founded the University of Virginia in 1819--one of his proudest accomplishments.

**Abraham Lincoln** (1809-65) came from a very different background than that of the Virginians Washington and Jefferson. Born in Kentucky, the 16th president had a frontier childhood that involved much hard work and little schooling. As a young adult, he moved to Illinois, where he owned a general store that eventually went bankrupt. He served as postmaster and also was elected to the state legislature and the U.S. House of Representatives.

He studied law and eventually became a successful attorney.

Lincoln made speeches that opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act--which he believed would result in the spread of slavery. These speeches brought him national attention and he played an important role in forming the Republican Party. In 1860, he became its candidate for president.



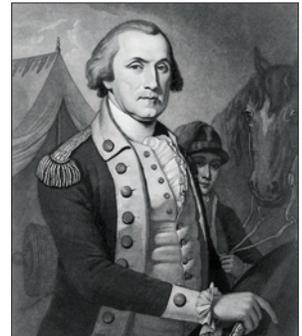
Abraham Lincoln  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/cwp2008000004/PP/>

After Lincoln won the election, Southern states began to secede, fearing that he would abolish slavery. Lincoln had to confront two of the most difficult tasks ever faced by a U.S. president--attempting to hold the nation together in the face of secession and then leading it through four years of civil war. He was assassinated in 1865, just days after General Robert E. Lee surrendered on behalf of the Confederacy.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

Compare and contrast the lives of the three presidents by examining their portraits and the background objects in the photographs. Begin by passing out the portrait of George Washington. Ask students what they notice about the picture and encourage them to move from generalities (e.g., he was old and had white hair) to specifics (e.g., he is holding a sword). Record their responses on a chart or a Venn diagram. Repeat the process with the portraits of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln. After the students have looked closely at all three pictures, ask them to identify similarities and differences among the portraits and what they might reveal about the three men.

Focus on one prop in each picture—for example, the sword in Washington’s portrait, the device on the table in the Jefferson portrait, and the bust of George Washington on the table in the Lincoln portrait. Explain that artists sometimes use props to show something about the person in the portrait. Encourage students to speculate on why the artists included these three props, and what they might have wanted to say about the presidents. Ask students to think about one prop that they would want an artist to include in a portrait of them. Then, have students draw a self-portrait, including the props.



George Washington...  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/95503825/>

President Thomas Jefferson is well known for writing the Declaration of Independence, one of the most important documents in U.S. history. His draft also was edited by John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, among other statesmen. Have students look at the draft of the Declaration of Independence in Jefferson’s handwriting. Topics for discussion might include:

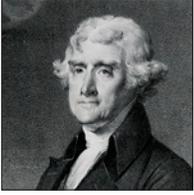
- What does this draft show about the process that Jefferson used to write the Declaration of Independence?
- How is Jefferson’s process similar to your writing process?
- How do you feel about changing your writing? About other people suggesting changes to your writing?

Teachers can also introduce editing symbols and give students practice using editing symbols on each other’s writing or on a class writing draft.

Explain that a monument or memorial is a special building that helps us to remember important people. Focus on the pictures of the monuments to these three great presidents. People see these buildings when they visit the city of Washington, D.C. They remember Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln and the services that they performed. Ask students what they notice about each memorial. Lead from their observations into a discussion about the characteristics of the monuments. Invite students to choose someone who is historically important and draw or create a monument for that person.

Create a presidential timeline that begins with the number 1 and ends with 16. For this exercise, they will be studying three great presidents—George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln. As you introduce each president, add him to the presidential timeline. Also add primary sources, any relevant dates, or facts. You may also expand the timeline to include other presidents, historical figures, or events.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



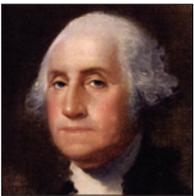
### **By Popular Demand; Portraits of the Presidents and First Ladies, 1789-Present**

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/odmdhtml/preshome.html>



### **"I Do Solemnly Swear..." Presidential Inaugurations**

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/pihtml/pihome.html>



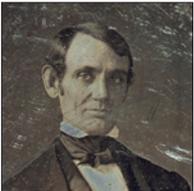
### **George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799**

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/gwhome.html>



### **Thomas Jefferson**

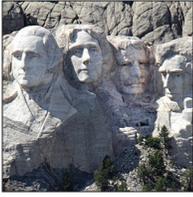
<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/>



### **Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) Slide Show - Selected Images from the Collections of the Library of Congress**

[http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/608\\_lincoln\\_slide.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/608_lincoln_slide.html)

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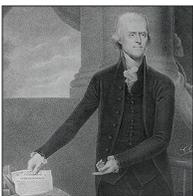
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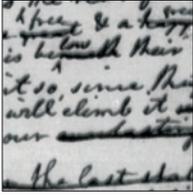
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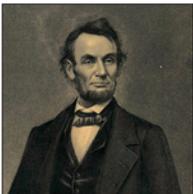
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