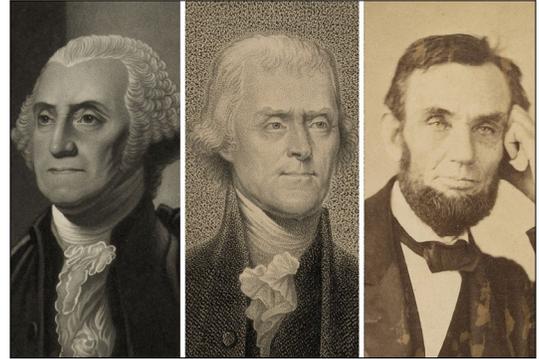


# WASHINGTON, JEFFERSON, AND LINCOLN

The United States has had a number of remarkable leaders. Three early presidents are especially notable for their contributions and their impact on the nation's future: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln.



Composite image. Source images are available in this set.

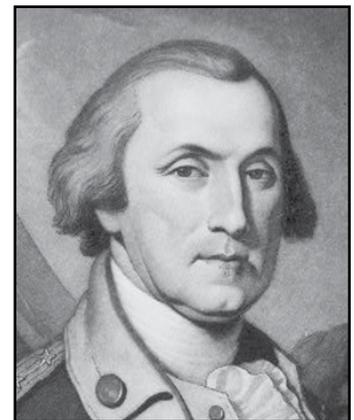
## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This set includes a portrait and four additional primary sources for each of these presidents. The items include documents illustrating the presidents' early lives, families, achievements, and personal interests, and can help students explore various aspects of these presidents' lives.

**George Washington** (1732-1799) was an American hero long before he became president. After early years working as a surveyor, soldier, farmer, and legislator, he served as the commander of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. During eight years of 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 his position might have tried to seize national power, Washington 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

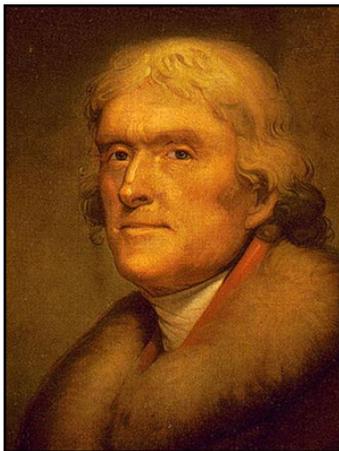
overly-powerful executive. Washington again stepped up to serve his country—first as the president of the 1787 Constitutional Convention and then as the nation's first president in 1789. He



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

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 primary author of the Declaration



Th. Jefferson  
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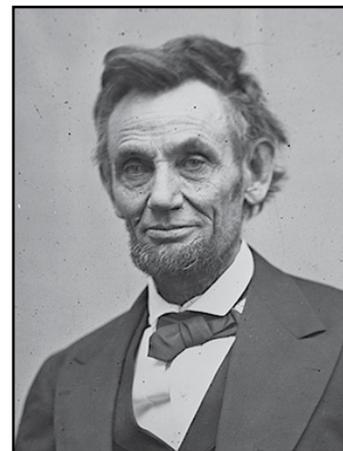
of Independence. Jefferson did not take part in the Constitutional Convention because he was then serving as ambassador to France. However, he and James Madison corresponded frequently during the months of the convention. Jefferson was the first secretary of state, the second vice president, and the third president of the United States (1801-09).

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 one of the Library's buildings bears Jefferson's name. Jefferson also designed his own home, 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.

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



Abraham Lincoln  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/98504569/>

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. Beginning with the portrait of George Washington, ask students what they notice about the picture and encourage them to describe the details they see. 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 each man.

Focus on one prop in each picture—for example, the sword in Washington’s portrait, the device on the table in the Jefferson portrait, or the book in the Lincoln portrait. Explain that artists sometimes use props to provide a special insight the person in the portrait. Encourage students to speculate why the artists included these three props, and what they might have wanted to say about the presidents. Ask students to think of new props to add to the portraits and explain how that prop represents a quality or character trait associated with that President.

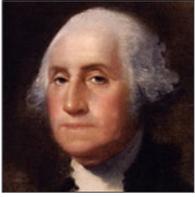
Analyze the family photographs of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. Discuss or list similarities and differences. Ask students to compare their family to George Washington’s or Abraham Lincoln’s, either orally, in writing, or by drawing.

Select one of the documents created by Washington, Jefferson, or Lincoln for students to analyze using the primary source analysis tool. Ask students to reflect on what they think they have learned about the man, and what they wonder about. If the president were alive now, what questions would they ask him? Alternately, ask students to think like young Washington, Jefferson, or Lincoln, and draw or write what they want to do or be when they grow up.

President Thomas Jefferson is well known for writing the Declaration of Independence, one of the most important documents in U.S. history. His draft was edited by other statesmen. Allow time for students to examine the draft of the Declaration of Independence in Jefferson’s handwriting and then discuss what they notice from comparing Jefferson’s writing to their own writing processes.

Create a presidential timeline. As you introduce each president, ask students to add him to the presidential timeline. Add primary sources and any relevant dates or facts. You may also expand the timeline to include other presidents, historical figures, or events.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



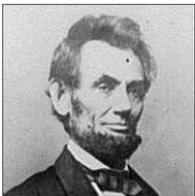
**George Washington**

[http://www.americaslibrary.gov/aa/wash/aa\\_wash\\_subj.html](http://www.americaslibrary.gov/aa/wash/aa_wash_subj.html)



**Thomas Jefferson**

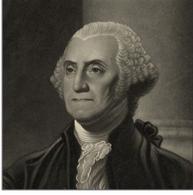
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**Abraham Lincoln**

[http://www.americaslibrary.gov/aa/lincoln/aa\\_lincoln\\_subj.html](http://www.americaslibrary.gov/aa/lincoln/aa_lincoln_subj.html)

## PRIMARY SOURCES WITH CITATIONS



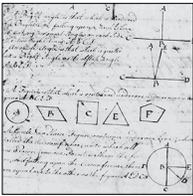
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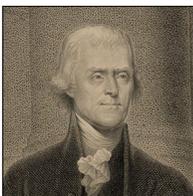
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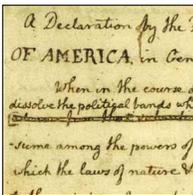
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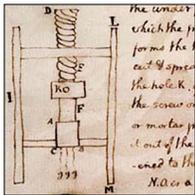
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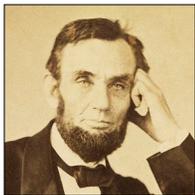
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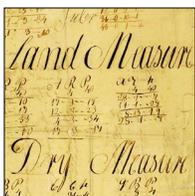
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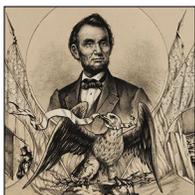
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