Notebooks in His Pockets, Liberty on His Mind

Biography

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It might seem unusual to see a teenager always reading and studying, but that's what the young man with the red hair and freckles always seemed to be doing. He studied science, politics, history – anything that was interesting and engaging.

Thomas Jefferson was born in 1743 on a tobacco plantation in Virginia. Tom worked on the farm and liked to swim, fish, and ride fast horses in his spare time. He also loved to spend time with his father.

Tom's father wanted his son to have a good education and he provided Tom with many opportunities to learn. He taught Tom to read and write when he was very young. By the time Tom was six-years-old, he had already read all of his father's books. He wrote in small, neat letters using sharp quill pens. He got in the habit of writing his thoughts in notebooks that he kept in his pockets.

As a young man, Tom went to college in Williamsburg, Virginia. He filled his days with the study of math, science, history, and languages. He continued to fill his notebooks with all kinds of thoughts and ideas. After college, he decided to study law.

Even as an adult, Thomas Jefferson kept on using notebooks. When he started his law practice, he made notes about his cases. Later, he kept notes and plans for Monticello – his home on the top of a mountain. He kept notebooks for lists of things to do and his various accounts. He even kept a garden book with lists of things he grew at Monticello.

Thomas Jefferson was also busy with politics. At that time, Virginia was one of the thirteen colonies ruled by King George III of England. The king had begun to tax books, paint, glass, tea, and other things the colonists

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needed. The king let soldiers search the colonists' homes. Thomas knew that the king was overstepping his authority and he used his eloquent writing to let congress know his thoughts and opinions.

Thomas Jefferson's ideas surprised many members of congress, but they wanted to find a peaceful way to resolve the issues with England. Over time, however, it was clear that a peaceful resolution would never be reached. Thomas Jefferson and four other men were asked to write a document called the Declaration of Independence. It would clearly and firmly inform the king and the rest of the world why Americans would fight for the right to govern themselves.

All of the men involved expressed their opinions, but Thomas Jefferson did all of the writing. He chose each word carefully. He wrote that everyone had a right to liberty. He said that all people are created equal. Even though Thomas Jefferson owned slaves, he thought slavery should end. He wrote that the king was wrong for allowing the slave trade. After 17 days of writing and revising, he was pleased with the final result.

The men in congress reviewed every word in the Declaration of Independence. They discussed anything that made them uncomfortable. John Adams wanted the declaration to be unchanged. But, in the end, they decided to make a few changes. They made it a little less wordy and they took out the part about ending slavery. It was signed on July 4, 1776. The colonies were free from England thanks, in part, to the brilliant work of Thomas Jefferson. The people were so impressed by Thomas Jefferson that he was eventually made the third President of the United States.

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Name: _____ Date: _____ Score _____.

Notebooks in His Pockets Questions

Directions: Mark your answers. Using the specified code colors, underline or shade the text evidences that justify the answers you selected.

1. According to the article, what main issue was upsetting the citizens of the thirteen colonies?

CODE RED

2. What conclusion can you make about Thomas Jefferson's father?

CODE ORANGE

(A) He was always trying to help Thomas learn and succeed.
(B) His father was a good farmer, but not a good father.
(C) He had a poor relationship with Thomas and rarely saw him.
(D) His father was a great speaker and writer.

3. Based on the text, what word best describes Thomas Jefferson?

CODE GREEN

(A) friendly **(B)** stubborn **(C)** intelligent **(D)** brave

4. Read this sentence from page 2, paragraph 2 of the story.

Even though Thomas Jefferson owned slaves, he thought slavery should end.

What resulted from Thomas Jefferson's anti-slavery language in the Declaration of Independence?

CODE PURPLE

5. Based upon the text, why did they ask Thomas Jefferson to write the Declaration of Independence?

CODE BLUE

(A) He had all the necessary writing supplies in his office.
(B) Most of the other men didn't know how to write.
(C) Thomas Jefferson was a very skilled speaker and writer.
(D) He was ordered by Congress to write it.

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