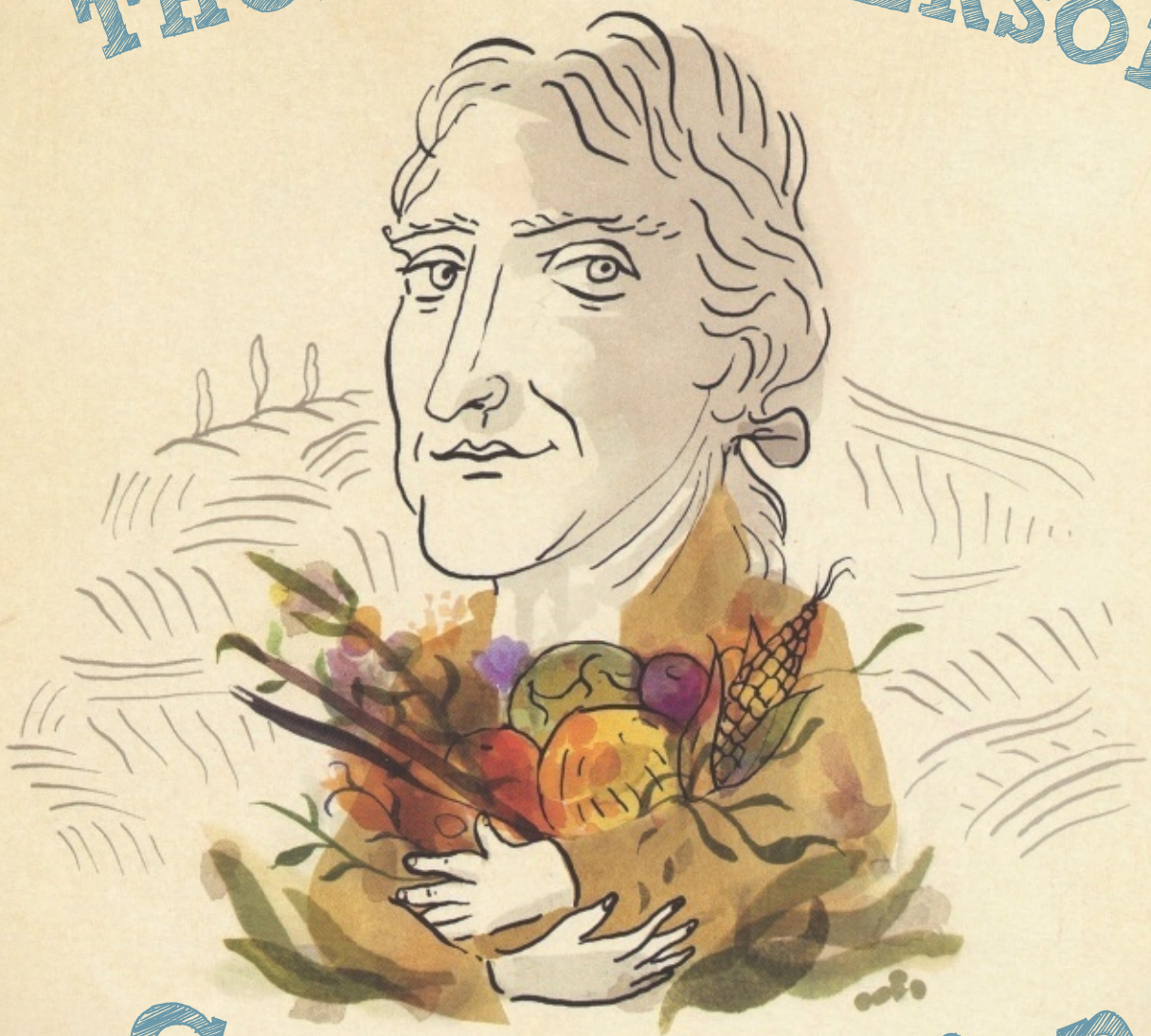


**Genre** Informational Text/Biography

**Essential Questions**

Why is the geography of the United States an important part of the country's identity? Which parts are especially beautiful or meaningful to you?

# THOMAS JEFFERSON



# Grows a Nation

by Peggy Thomas  
illustrated by Stacy Innerst



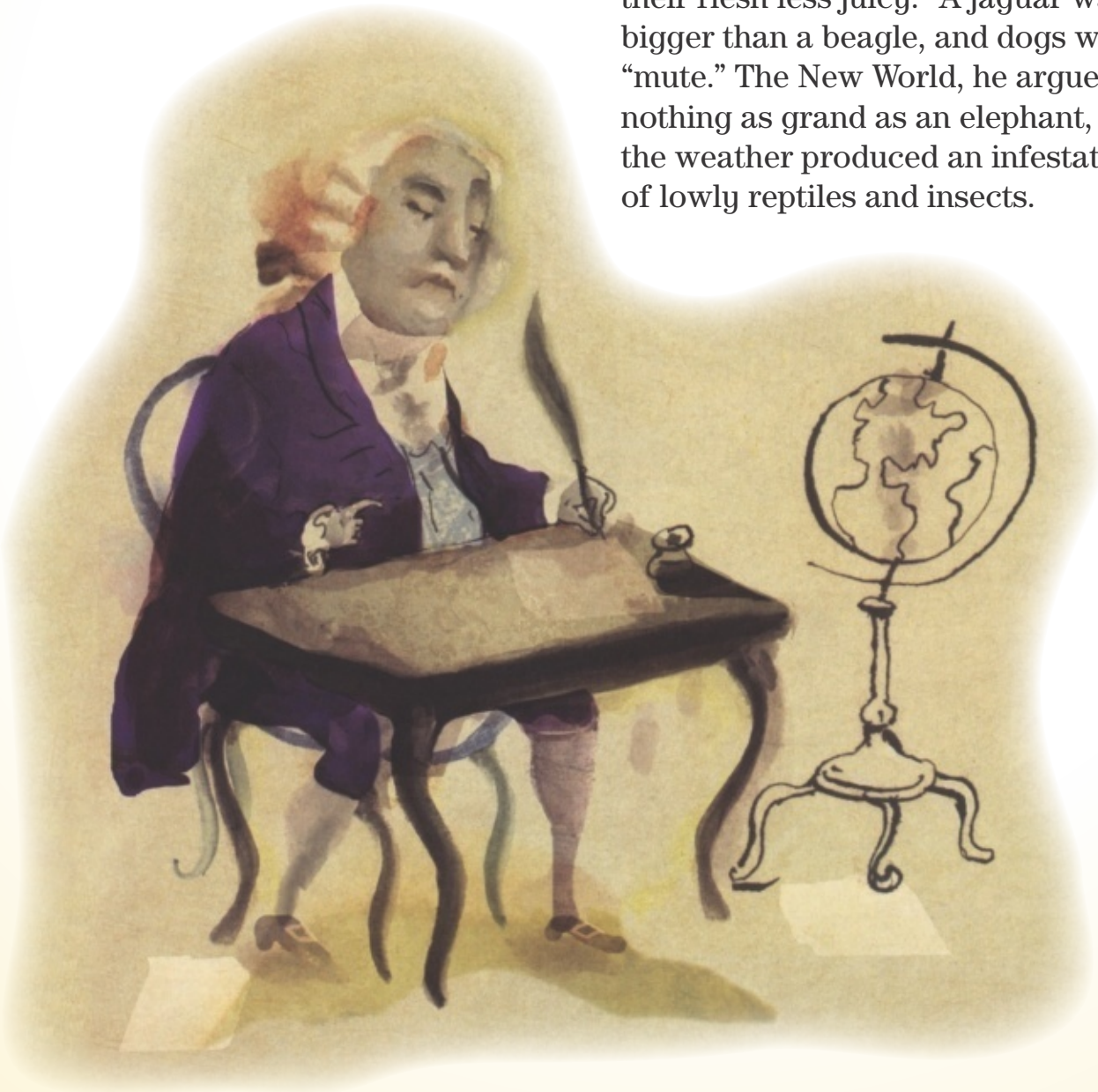
Thomas Jefferson loved to grow things. At Monticello, his home in Virginia, he grew potatoes, peppers, pippins, peaches, juniper, larkspur, and peas. Flowers hugged his house, fruit trees dotted the orchard, and wheat marched down the mountainside. And throughout his lifetime, he scattered seeds, like a brisk wind, around the world.

After planting the seed of freedom writing the Declaration of Independence, Thomas had something new to nurture. And like any farmer imagining the harvest of a newly tilled field, Thomas envisioned a nation of farmers.

But one weed threatened Thomas's vision.

For years, famous French naturalist Count Buffon had been belittling America. The wildlife was inferior, he said, "Shrivelled."

"Diminished." Sheep were "meagre, and their flesh less juicy." A jaguar was no bigger than a beagle, and dogs were "mute." The New World, he argued, had nothing as grand as an elephant, and the weather produced an infestation of lowly reptiles and insects.







If readers believed Buffon's lies, who would trade with the states or travel across the Atlantic to become a new citizen? So Thomas did what he did best.

He pulled out his pen, uprooted every mistake in Buffon's books, and planted the truth in his own book called *Notes on the State of Virginia*. "The skeleton of the mammoth . . . bespeaks an animal of five or six times" the size of an elephant, he said. And relying on scientific evidence, he showed that one South American tapir weighed more than Buffon's entire list of animals unique to Europe. Thomas also boasted about American mountains, especially his view of the Blue Ridge range. "This scene is worth a voyage across the Atlantic."



Thomas's job as minister to France was to grow America's economy. Before the Revolutionary War, Americans had to rely on Great Britain to sell their products. Now the United States had to cultivate its own commerce, and Thomas was perfect for the job. He established trade agreements to help New Englanders sell whale oil and Southerners sell tobacco. But, Thomas noticed, many Europeans knew little about what his country had to offer.

Soon, Thomas was patriotically passing out persimmon plants and pecans. He scattered sumac seeds among his friends, as well as sweet gum, sassafras, and sorrel. In Thomas's garden on the corner of Rue de Berri and the Champs-Élysées, Cherokee corn stalks waved over swelling watermelons and cantaloupes.

While Thomas tutored the French in American produce, he harnessed his curiosity to benefit farmers back home. On trips through France and Italy, Thomas sketched windmills and wheelbarrows, visited vineyards and villages. He measured mules in Marseille, cheese in Rozzano, and bricks in Bordeaux.

*"Every discovery which multiplies the subsistence of men,  
must be a matter of joy to every friend to humanity."*





Wandering among market stalls looking for new and better crops, Thomas noticed that the French preferred dry rice. But U.S. farmers grew “swamp” rice and often suffered from mosquitoes and malaria. If they switched to dry rice, Southern growers would be healthier and wealthier.

Thomas began searching for the right kind. He asked ship captains for rice from far-off lands and appealed to the child prince of Cochin China where, it was said, the whitest rice grew.

On April 13, 1787, Thomas celebrated his forty-fourth birthday riding a mule over the Alps to find the highly prized dry rice of Italy. It was illegal to export grain without permission, so Thomas stuffed his pockets full. Risking the death penalty, he smuggled it out.

Back in Paris, Thomas shipped sacks of rice to farmers in South Carolina and Georgia. Although the dry rice helped family farmers, it failed as a cash crop. But Thomas was not discouraged.

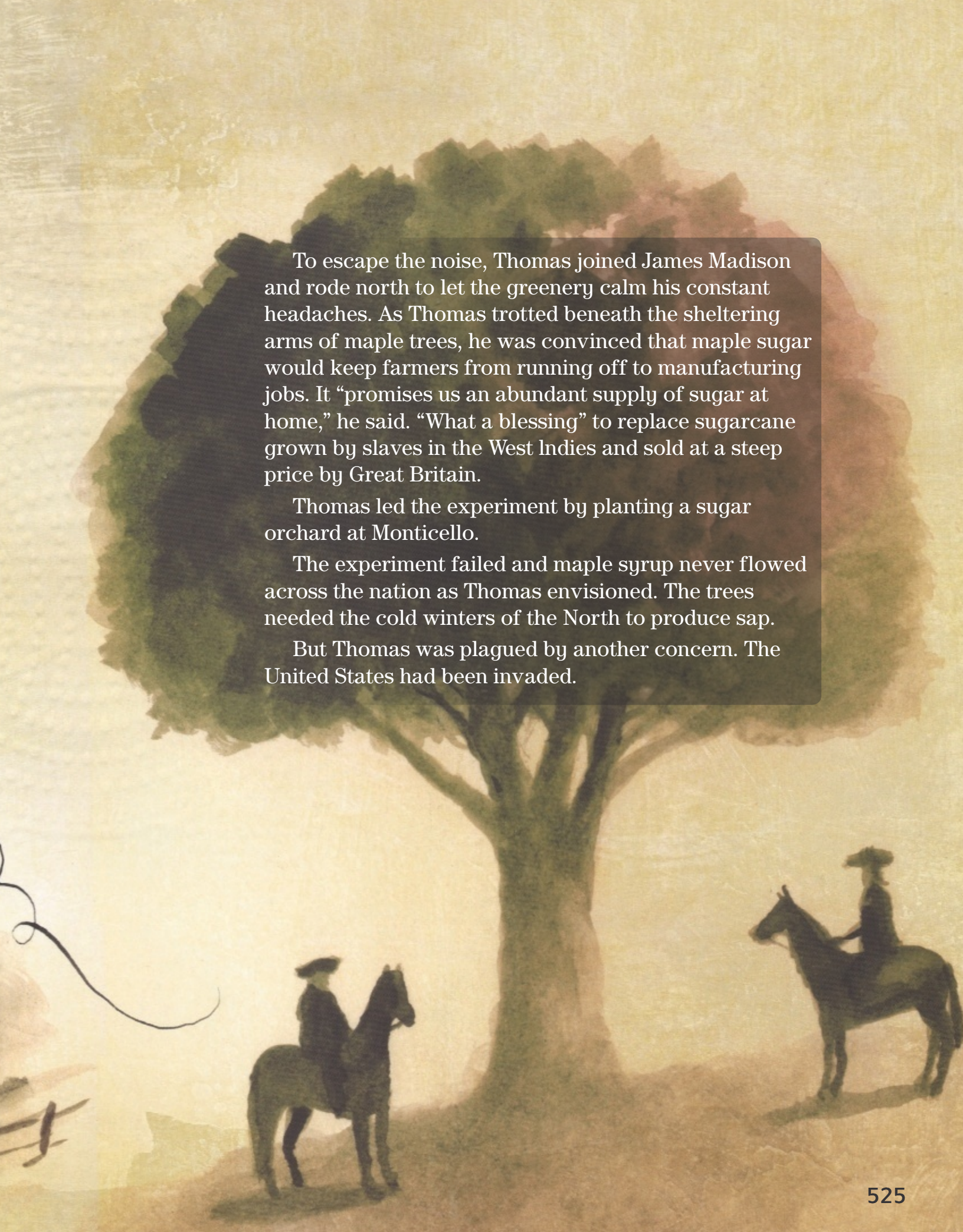
Olive trees! he said, “should be the object of the Carolina patriot.” Soon, hundreds of olive saplings set sail for America, where he hoped olive oil would “be the source of the greatest wealth and happiness.”

It wasn't. The climate was wrong and the plants died. But Thomas remained optimistic.

In 1789, Thomas also set sail for America and soon became secretary of state for President George Washington. New York City, the nation's capital, was a hothouse of dispute. The once united Founding Fathers were growing apart. Treasury secretary Alexander Hamilton's vision of a nation of cities and factories tangled with Thomas's vision of small towns and family farms.







To escape the noise, Thomas joined James Madison and rode north to let the greenery calm his constant headaches. As Thomas trotted beneath the sheltering arms of maple trees, he was convinced that maple sugar would keep farmers from running off to manufacturing jobs. It “promises us an abundant supply of sugar at home,” he said. “What a blessing” to replace sugarcane grown by slaves in the West Indies and sold at a steep price by Great Britain.

Thomas led the experiment by planting a sugar orchard at Monticello.

The experiment failed and maple syrup never flowed across the nation as Thomas envisioned. The trees needed the cold winters of the North to produce sap.

But Thomas was plagued by another concern. The United States had been invaded.



Farmers named the invader the Hessian fly. It had devoured wheat fields on Long Island and turned south to chew through New Jersey, leaving nothing more than shriveled stalks in its wake. The pest was so destructive that England, afraid the fly would hitch a ride and eat its way across Europe, banned American shipments of the grain.



Thomas set up a committee to study “the best means of preventing or destroying the Insect,” and on his trip north he quizzed farmers about the fly’s habits. What time in the season did the fly appear? What part of the plant did it eat? How long was it in “*Worm-State*”?

On his desk in Philadelphia, the nation’s new capital, Thomas witnessed flies hatching from their chrysalises, examined their bodies under a microscope, and watched as a female, “between the size of a gnat & musketoe,” laid its eggs.



Thomas advised farmers to plant late, manure well, and burn the stubble after harvest. But still the fly moved south. And so did Thomas.

In 1794, Thomas left Philadelphia, eager to live at Monticello again. But overgrown fences and weedy fields greeted him. “A 10. years abandonment of them . . . to the unprincipled ravages of overseers, has brought on a degree of degradation far beyond what I had expected.” Thomas plowed ahead. “I return to farming with an ardour which I scarcely knew in my youth,” he wrote. “Instead of writing 10. or 12. letters a day, which I have been in the habit of doing . . . I put off answering my letters now, farmer-like, till a rainy day.”



Builders knocked down walls to enlarge his house while Thomas inspected his fields. He hoped that all the changes he made would be “more productive . . . and perhaps [be] of some utility to my neighbors.” While others still grew one crop year after year and plowed in straight lines over hills and valleys, Thomas rotated his crops to nurture the soil, plowed along the contours of the mountain to catch the rainfall, and fertilized with cartloads of manure.

Thomas also had time to tinker. He built the new plow device he had described in his travel journal from France. Called “the mould-board of least resistance,” it was a wedge that cut into the earth, lifted the clod, and turned it over with ease.

Thomas’s mathematical precision also assured “that it may be made by the most bungling carpenter.” Thomas shared his design with other farmers and sent a model to the British Board of Agriculture and the French Society of Agriculture, which later awarded him a gold medal for his achievements.

While his moldboard churned up the soil at home, disputes between the Federalists and Republicans churned up the capital.





Thomas returned to politics, and after serving as John Adams's vice president, he became the third president of the United States in 1801. With an unfinished White House and the rutted roads of Washington, D.C., Thomas felt right at home. Dressed in his usual farmer attire, he spent each morning meeting with cabinet members and writing letters. In the afternoon, Thomas didn't even have to change his clothes before jumping onto a horse to ride through the countryside and collect plants.



Thomas didn't have a garden at the White House, but he visited the open-air markets that he established in the city. He shared seeds with the farmers and recorded when new vegetables were harvested. He even ordered poplar trees to plant along Pennsylvania Avenue.

Through the geraniums growing on the windowsill, Thomas could watch cattle graze in the distant meadow. How many times did his imagination look even farther west across an entire continent to picture "a rising nation, spread over a wide and fruitful land"?

The United States could never expand as Thomas envisioned while other nations controlled territory west of the Mississippi River. In the fall of 1802, France closed its port of New Orleans, leaving U.S. flatboats filled with tobacco, cotton, furs, feathers, beef, bacon, and beans stranded along the Mississippi River. That was nearly half of what America produced.

To free up the port and prevent France from establishing a colony in the West, Thomas sought a peaceful solution by sending James Monroe to France to negotiate the purchase of New Orleans.



To Thomas's surprise, France offered to sell the entire Louisiana Territory. Could a president purchase land on behalf of a nation? No one was sure. Some said it was not in his power. Others complained it was a waste of money.

But Thomas's bold action reaped a country twice its original size. For fifteen million dollars, the United States grew more than eight hundred thousand square miles in one day. Now it reached to the Rocky Mountains, stretched north to Canada, and dipped its toe in the Gulf of Mexico.

It also guaranteed Thomas's vision. "The fertility of the country, its climate and extent, promise . . . a wide-spread field for the blessings of freedom and equal laws."





For years, Thomas had yearned to discover what lay in the vast wilderness to the west. What was the soil like? What plants grew there? Did the mammoth still exist? Soon, he and the entire nation would learn the answers.

Thomas had been organizing an expedition led by his private secretary, Meriwether Lewis, to “explore the Missouri river, & . . . the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent.” Lewis and his partner, William Clark, prepared to travel over foreign land. But now with the Louisiana Territory, the explorers would ford *American* streams and climb *American* mountains.

With each shipment Lewis and Clark sent back, the knowledge of the country blossomed. Thomas pored over each report and displayed skins of antelope, deer, prairie dog, and fox. Boxes of seeds arrived: snowberries, Pani corn, currants, peas, and beans. Soon, farms in the East were fenced with prickly Osage orange, and fashionable gardens featured Oregon grape holly.





In 1809, after two terms in office, Thomas retired. Finally, he could improve his home at Monticello, just as he improved his country. "I am constantly in my garden or farm," he wrote, "as exclusively employed out of doors as I was within doors when at Washington, and I find myself infinitely happier in my new mode of life." Always humming, Thomas inspected his farm fields and followed his grandchildren as they ran ahead to check for new blooms in the flower garden.

He continued to send seeds to friends, but now he could test his own in his one-thousand-foot-long kitchen garden—lettuce from France, dry rice from Italy, gooseberries from the banks of the Missouri, and corn from the Mandan Indians—all fruits of his labor as minister to France, secretary of state, vice president, and president.

Thomas had watched a nation sprout and grow, and only one thing remained to be done—prepare the soil for the future.

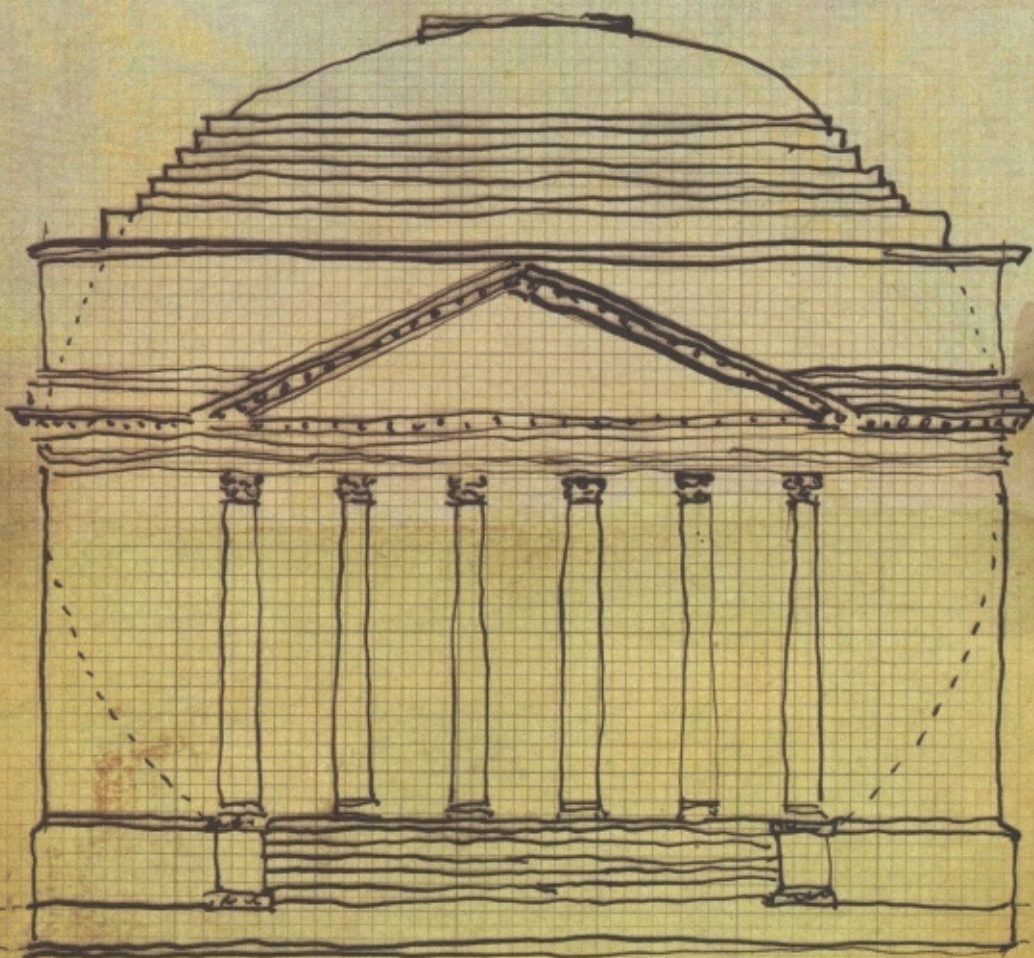
*"The field of knolege is the common property of all mankind."*





In a worn-out field six miles northwest of Monticello, Thomas measured out the foundation for the University of Virginia and struck the first peg into the ground in 1817. Later, he wrote, "I am closing the last scenes of life by fashioning and fostering an establishment for the instruction of those who are to come after us."

For the next eight years, Thomas plotted out classrooms and dormitories, made a list of plants for the school's botanical garden, and watched his "academical village" grow.

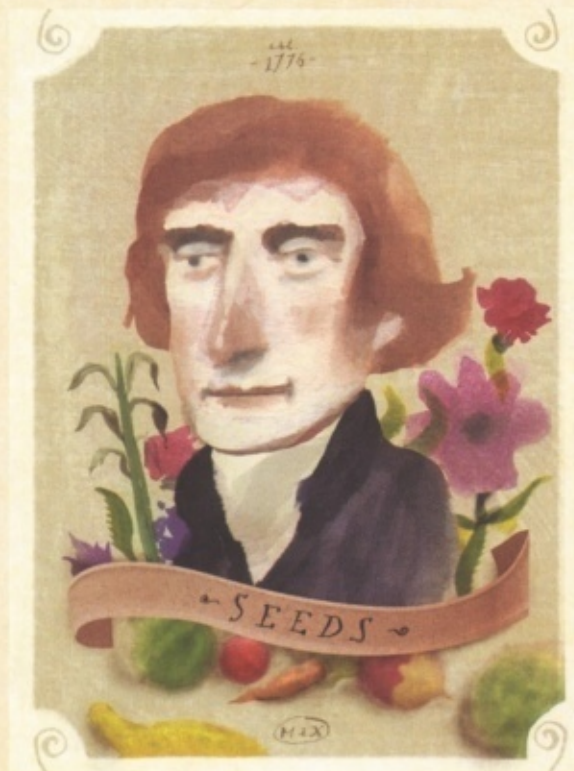




On July 4, 1826, at the age of eighty-three, Thomas Jefferson died. It was the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, nearly forty years since he had smuggled fistfuls of rice, and twenty-three years from the moment he celebrated that the United States had grown twice its size.

Thomas loved to grow things. He grew seeds and science, liberty and learning, farmers, freedom, and democracy.

*"Planting a new world with the seeds of just government,  
will produce a remarkable era in the history of mankind."*





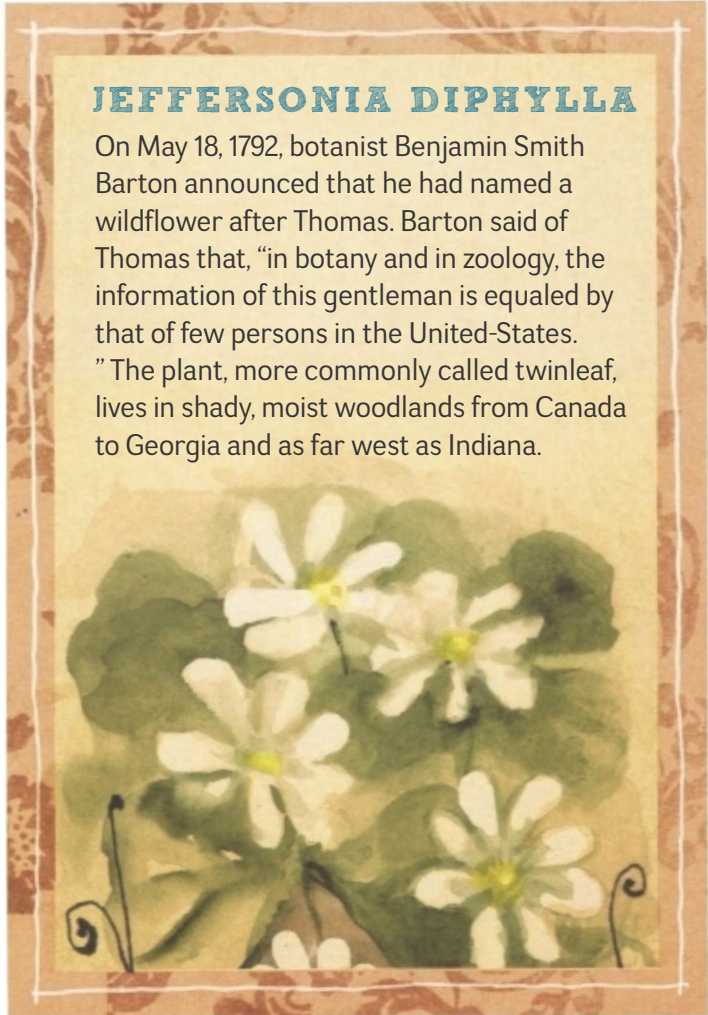
# THOMAS TODAY

Thomas once wrote: "When I first entered on the stage of public life. . . I came to a resolution never . . . to wear any other character than that of a farmer." He meant that he would always be sensible, honest, and plainspoken, attributes he admired in people who, like him, made their living off the land. Thomas loved seeds and soil and pondered ways to improve agriculture, but he rarely dug in the earth. At Monticello, hundreds of slaves plowed, weeded, pruned, and harvested. In the 1700s, owning slaves was common among landowners, including Thomas. But today it is difficult to understand how the writer of the Declaration of Independence could own slaves. How could he treat another man as property and still write the phrase "all men are created equal"? Thomas proposed the first laws against the importation of slaves and supported the ban of slavery in the Northwest Territories, yet over his lifetime he owned six hundred people.

We must decide for ourselves how slavery taints the legacy of Thomas Jefferson. Fortunately, his words spoke louder than his actions. Slavery was finally abolished in 1865, yet Thomas's inspirational writings live on and continue to affect the way we live today. From "all men are created equal" grew the civil rights movement, and it will remain the kernel of hope for those who struggle for equality in the future.

## JEFFERSONIA DIPHYLLA

On May 18, 1792, botanist Benjamin Smith Barton announced that he had named a wildflower after Thomas. Barton said of Thomas that, "in botany and in zoology, the information of this gentleman is equaled by that of few persons in the United-States." The plant, more commonly called twinleaf, lives in shady, moist woodlands from Canada to Georgia and as far west as Indiana.

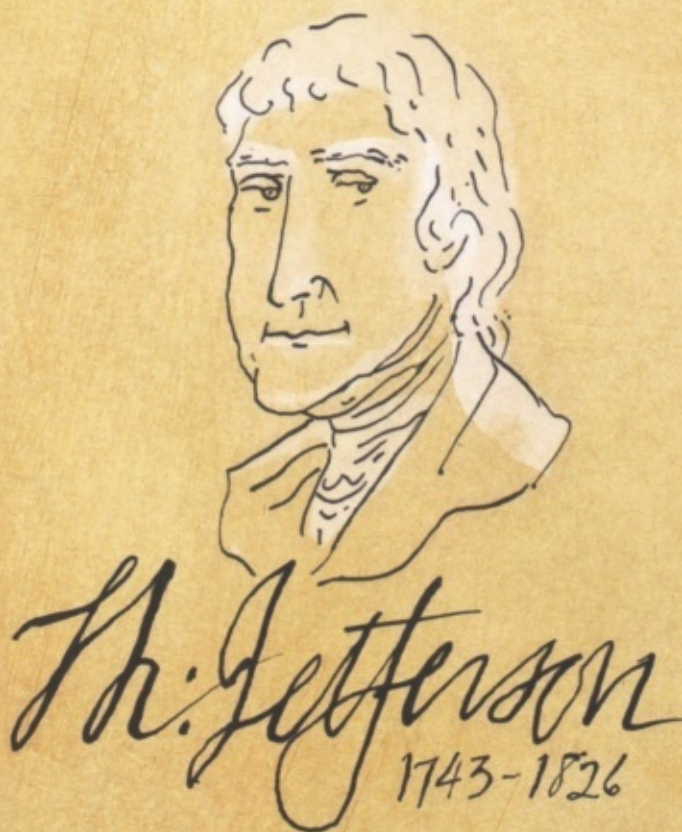


One struggle the Founding Fathers faced was defining the United States. The Republicans saw a nation based on agriculture and farmers, while Federalists envisioned a country of merchants and industry. Eventually this split became the two parties that dominate our modern democratic system.



Thomas wasn't entirely against commerce. "They admit me a friend to agriculture," he said, "and suppose me an enemy to the only means of disposing its produce." However, Thomas did all he could to promote his ideal—encouraging the use of different crops and spreading the news of agricultural innovations.

He succeeded in several ways. Many of the rare and novel plants that Thomas experimented with in his garden are now common products on grocery store shelves: tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, okra, sesame oil, kale, chickpeas, and cayenne pepper. American farmers continue to feed the nation and produce more each year for export to other nations; and with better technology, they can produce more on less land.



## TIMELINE

- 1743 Thomas is born on April 13.
- 1775–76 Member of Continental Congress.
- 1776 Drafts the Declaration of Independence.
- 1779–81 Governor of Virginia.
- 1784–89 Commissioner and minister to France.
- 1787 Publishes *Notes on the State of Virginia*.
- 1790–93 U.S. secretary of state for George Washington.
- 1794 Retires to Monticello.
- 1797–1801 Vice president under John Adams.
- 1801–09 U.S. president.
- 1803 Louisiana Purchase concludes. Lewis and Clark Expedition begins.
- 1809 Retires to Monticello.
- 1817 Surveys land for the University of Virginia.
- 1826 Thomas dies on July 4 at Monticello.



You will answer the comprehension questions on these pages as a class.

## Did You Know?

The United States had to borrow money from two European banks to pay for the Louisiana Purchase. The loans were not paid in full until 1823. The total cost for the Louisiana Purchase had risen to over \$23 million because of the interest on the loan.

## Text Connections

1. Why was President Thomas Jefferson worried about what people thought of the United States?
2. Why did Jefferson want to purchase the Louisiana Territory? Give specific reasons.
3. How did the Hessian fly cause problems for the American farmer?
4. In "The Starving Time," you read about the challenges that colonists faced when they tried farming. What farming challenges did Jefferson try to overcome in this selection?
5. How do you think Jefferson's emphasis on agriculture is still reflected in American society today?





## Write

Early America was a time of experimentation. Research and write about other experiments that happened in America's early years.

## Look Closer

### Keys to Comprehension

1. Why did Count Buffon belittle America? Quote details from the text to support your answer.
2. How did Jefferson's strong feelings about farming guide his decisions as a government leader? Use details from the text to support your inference.

### Writer's Craft

3. In "The Starving Time," farming played an important role in Jamestown's struggles and eventual recovery. Compare and contrast farming in "The Starving Time" with farming as it is described in "Thomas Jefferson Grows a Nation."

### Concept Development

4. Infer how the author feels about Jefferson's lasting influence on the United States. Use specific details from the text to support your answer.





Read this Social Studies Connection. You will answer the questions as a class.

### Text Feature

**Maps** are drawings of an area of land or sea that show important physical features.

## Kinds of Maps

The Louisiana Purchase was one of the most significant territorial acquisitions in United States history. At the time of the purchase, it nearly doubled the size of the country. To explore the new territory, President Thomas Jefferson asked Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to lead an expedition into the region. One of the goals Jefferson set was for the men to draw a detailed map of the territory that captured the country's new boundaries.

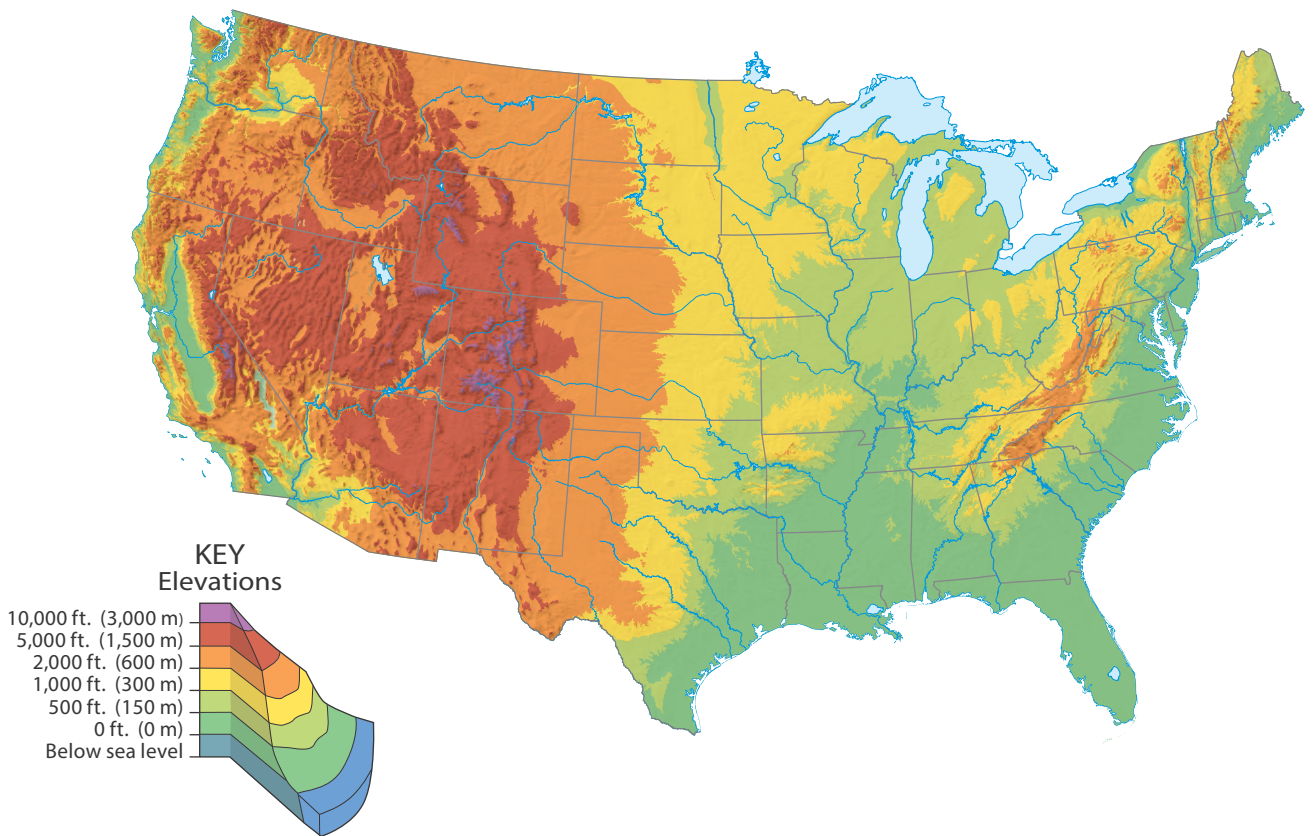
The kind of map Jefferson wanted was a physical map. A physical map (as shown to the right) shows physical features such as rivers, mountains, forests, and lakes. Jefferson wanted to know more about the terrain and features of the land. Understanding the locations of mountains, rivers, forests, and grasslands would help Americans prepare to settle the West. To Jefferson's great pleasure, the maps, diagrams, and journals that Lewis and Clark brought back bespoke of territory that was filled with many different kinds of plants and animals.

Like physical maps, topographic maps show the physical features of an area. However, differences in elevation and changes in landscape are shown on a topographic map with the help of contour lines, not colors. Topographic maps are useful for defining hills and mountains that are not easily represented on a two-dimensional map.

Political maps are another important type of map. They show the boundaries of countries, states, counties, and even cities. After the Louisiana Purchase, the political map of the United States had to be redrawn to show the new territory. Unlike a topographical map, a political map does not show physical features.

Different kinds of maps serve different purposes. Each can teach us about features of geography and can help us understand more about landscapes.





1. How do maps help us understand people, places, and environments?
2. Why do you think people decide to live where they do or move to other places?
3. Think about the features Lewis and Clark mapped in the West: rivers, forests, and mountains. How might these physical characteristics have led to the creation of regions?



## Go Digital

Search for more information about different kinds of maps. What can you learn about a place by looking at different kinds of maps, such as political, topographic, physical, climate, and road maps?