1800

Thomas Jefferson vs John Adams

A 20-minute lesson on the 1800 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA First Party System	ELECTORAL VOTES 138 total
WINNER Thomas Jefferson (Democratic-Republican) · 73 EV	RUNNER-UP John Adams (Federalist) · 65 EV
KEY ISSUE Federalist power vs. Democratic-Republican principles; Alien and Sedition Acts	TURNOUT 32.3%

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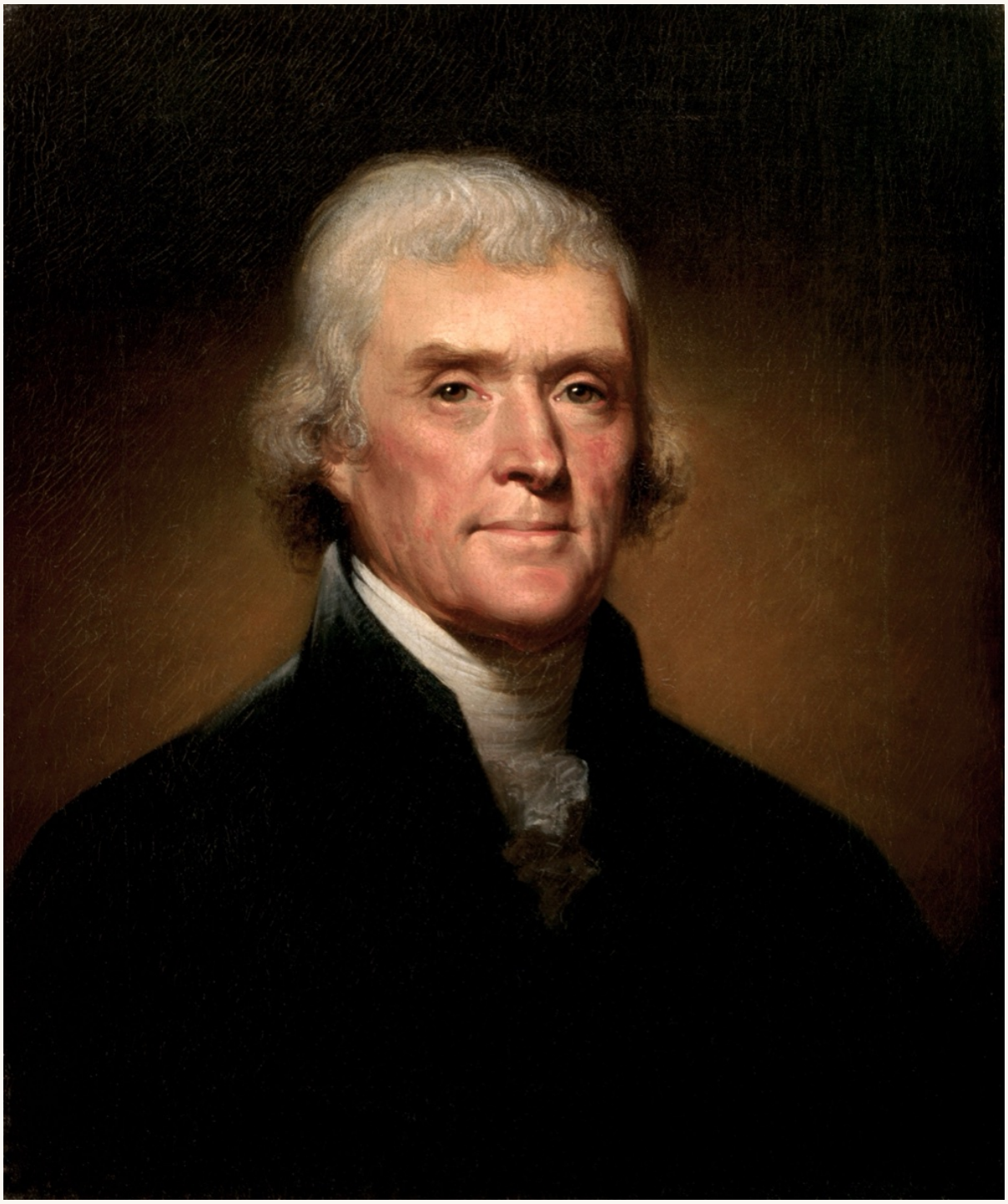
1800

A long time ago, the United States had only had two presidents. The first was George Washington. The second was John Adams. The country was new, and people were trying to figure out how their government should work.

In 1800, it was time to pick a new president. Two men wanted the job. One was John Adams, who was already president. The other was Thomas Jefferson. They did not agree on how the government should work. They had been friends, but during the election they argued a lot.

When people voted, Thomas Jefferson won. This was a very big deal. Why? Because for the first time in history, a country let one group of leaders give power to another group of leaders who disagreed with them. There was no fighting. There was no war. John Adams just packed up and left, and Thomas Jefferson took his place.

Look at the picture. That is Thomas Jefferson. He spoke softly. He liked books and gardens and inventions. He wrote the rules that gave Americans freedom to say what they think, to follow their own religion, and to vote.



Thomas Jefferson, painted by Rembrandt Peale in 1800 - the same year Jefferson won the election to become the third U.S. president.

REMBRANDT PEALE (1778-1860), WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Let's talk about the story

1.

Who became the third president of the United States in 1800?

2.

Why was the change from John Adams to Thomas Jefferson special?

3.

Name one thing Thomas Jefferson did before he was president that made him famous.

Warm-up (5 min)

Look at the picture. The man is Thomas Jefferson. He helped write the Declaration of Independence. In 1800 he became the third president of the United States.

Answer key

1.

Thomas Jefferson became the third president in 1800. He started the job on March 4, 1801.

Jefferson defeated John Adams in the election and was sworn in as president in early 1801. He served two four-year terms.

2.

It was the first time in history that a country let one group of leaders give power to a different group peacefully, without a war. John Adams left the job and Jefferson took it.

Many countries at the time changed leaders by war, revolution, or by the king dying. The 1800 election proved a constitutional democracy could swap leaders without violence.

3.

Accept any: He wrote (or helped write) the Declaration of Independence in 1776. He served as the first Secretary of State. He was vice president to John Adams. Award credit for any specific pre-1800 achievement.

Jefferson's pre-presidency resume was unusually long. Any specific item shows the child understood the reading.