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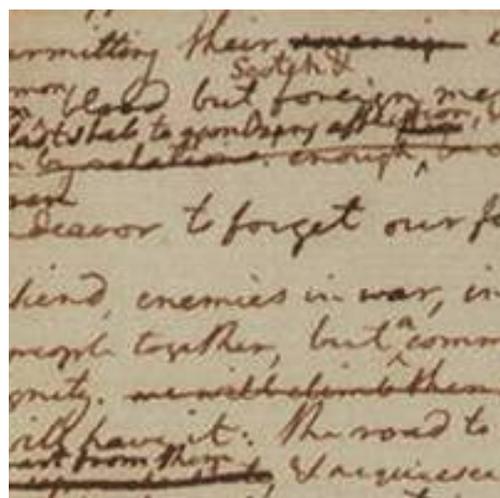
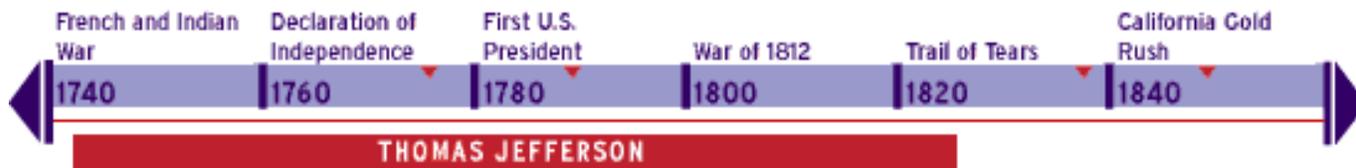
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U.S. Presidents ▶ Thomas Jefferson



### The Declaration of Independence

Almost everyone knows that Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. However, did you know that, like most people who write something, he wrote at least one rough draft? This is an example of what's left of the earliest known draft of the Declaration. You can see that Jefferson heavily edited his first draft before he prepared a clean, or "fair," copy that became the basis of the "original rough draught." The other representatives from the 13 colonies selected Jefferson to write the Declaration because they all agreed he was the best writer. Do you know any of the words of the Declaration of Independence by heart?

A section of Jefferson's earliest known draft of the Declaration of Independence



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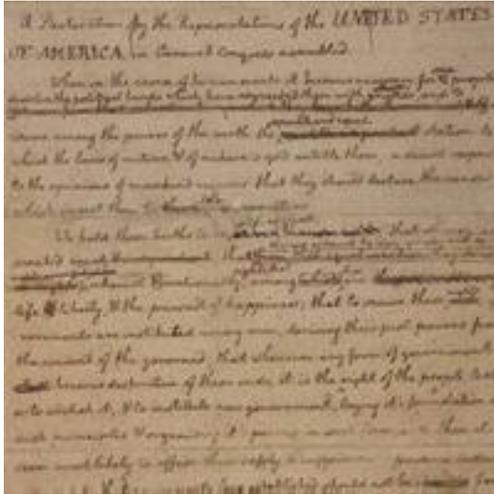
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Jefferson's "original Rough draught" of the Declaration of Independence

### The Declaration of Independence

"We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness ... " These words may be the best known part of the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration explains why the 13 colonies wanted independence from Great Britain. However, the Declaration is not the law of the land. Do you know what is?



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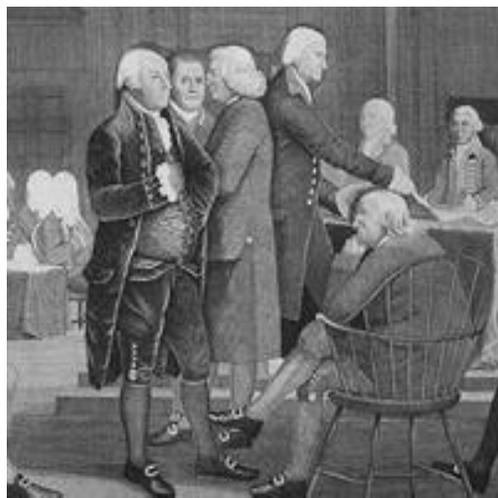
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Jefferson places the Declaration before the Continental Congress

### The Declaration of Independence

The Constitution, which wasn't written until 1787, outlines our form of government and explains what kinds of laws we can make. The Declaration is more about the ideals of our country. Do you know who some of the other committee members of the Continental Congress were? In this painting, Jefferson is the tall man placing the Declaration on the table. Benjamin Franklin sits to his right, and John Hancock sits behind the table. How do you think Jefferson felt about the Declaration at the end of his life?



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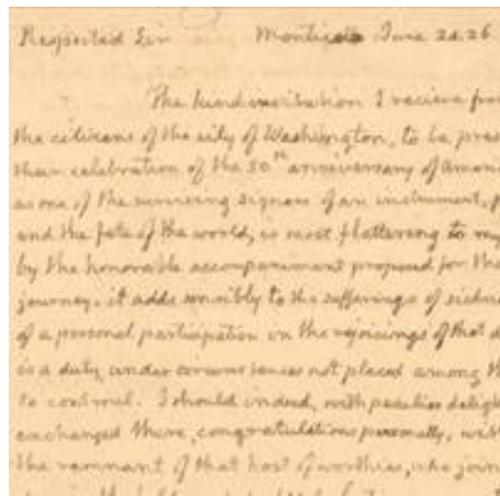
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### The Declaration of Independence

Thomas Jefferson contributed greatly to the development of the United States, but the single most important item was the Declaration of Independence. His belief that each generation has the chance to remake the country's laws and constitutions was truly visionary. As you can see from this letter, written 10 days before he died, even at the end of his life, Jefferson believed in the blessings of self-government and an ever-changing society in which the people through their elected representatives continue to make new laws. Can you think of some laws that have been made recently?

A letter Jefferson wrote 10 days before he died about the benefits of self-government



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