

TEACHER GUIDE

1800 DOC. #1: Portrait of Thomas Jefferson

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Today photos of presidential candidates are seen regularly in newspapers and on TV newscasts, but in the 18th century, newspapers rarely included any illustrations. Although President John Adams and Vice President Thomas Jefferson were well known to most Americans in 1800, few voters had ever seen an image of either candidate.

The print you are about to see was one of the first pictures of Thomas Jefferson to be shared widely within the United States. Other portraits had been done of him but none had been made into a print for public sale. The print was based on an oil portrait done of Jefferson by his friend, the well-known painter Charles Willson Peale, in 1791. Peale founded the first museum for the arts and sciences in Philadelphia in 1789 and Jefferson's portrait was displayed there.

The *Philadelphia Aurora* published an advertisement noting that the print was for sale on January 11, 1800. *The Aurora*, like most of the newspapers of that time period, was owned and controlled by a political party, in this case the Republicans.

> **Project** the document.

QUESTION | **What messages are being communicated about Jefferson in this portrait? What is your evidence?**

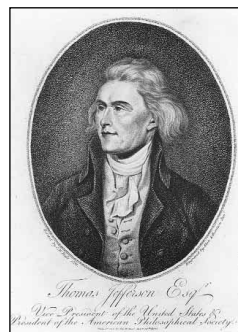
SUGGESTED ANSWER | He is a respected man and a deep thinker.

EVIDENCE | his suit coat and ascot, the Esq. after his name, his title as "Vice President of the United States," and the style of the portrait all suggest respectability; his reflective gaze suggests intelligence or deep thought, as does his title as President of the American Philosophical Society

QUESTION | **Why might the artist, C. W. Peale, have portrayed Jefferson in this manner?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER | He admired Jefferson, and this was a sign of friendship and/or a way to honor one of the founding fathers.

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National Portrait Gallery
Smithsonian Institution

Portrait of Thomas Jefferson

PowerPoint Slide

QUESTION **Why would *The Philadelphia Aurora* have published an advertisement for the print?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER The newspaper wanted to support the Republican candidate and perhaps make money in exchange for printing the ad.

EVIDENCE the *Philadelphia Aurora* was a Republican newspaper

FURTHER QUESTIONS

What are some of the main ways that people today get to know the faces of presidential candidates?

Can the face of a candidate tell you anything about whether or not he or she would make a good President?

How have the proliferation of modern image-making technologies, such as photography and television, changed presidential campaigning?

The **Connections** boxes in the kit will help teachers to link different documents through the thematic lists at the beginning of the kit. These lists connect documents dealing with specific campaign issues (***Race, Class/Labor, Foreign Policy, Economics***), documents using similar techniques or constructions (***Music, Cartoons, Attack, Fear, Hero, Family Man, Commoner***), documents geared towards a specific ***Target Audience***, documents illustrating a new campaign media or technique for ***Reaching Voters***, and documents useful for examining ***Media Bias***. Teachers may find it useful to present some contemporary documents, such as from the 2000 or 2004 election, when introducing early media. This may help students to see the connections and contrasts with today's campaigns and issues.

ADDITIONAL INFO

Charles Willson Peale had a great impact on art in the early United States. He painted more than 1,000 portraits, including those of George Washington and other founding fathers. He named 10 of his 17 children after artists and many of his descendants became fine artists themselves. He founded the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and his sons established art museums in Baltimore and New York.

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

Reaching Voters (portrait)