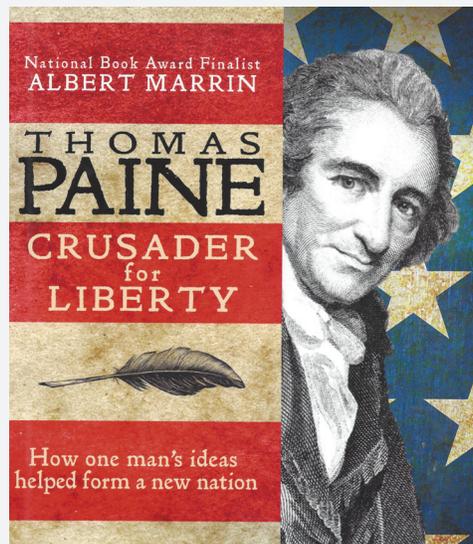


First Opinion: Thomas Paine: America's Father of Independence

Marrin, Albert. *Thomas Paine: Crusader for Liberty: How One Man's Ideas Helped Form a New Nation*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. Print.

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With *Thomas Paine: Crusader for Liberty*, Albert Marrin has written a book not solely about Thomas Paine, but, as he mentions in the dedication, a book that also serves as a tribute to many others who have stood up during difficult times in our world's history. The book's first chapter provides an overview of Thomas Paine's life. Marrin attempts to make Thomas Paine personable for the adolescent reader by portraying his awkwardness at an early age and detailing how he was bullied because of his appearance. The first chapter also provides an overview of the time period during which Thomas Paine lived—the Enlightenment Period—as well as the historical American figures that were his contemporaries such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson, to name a few. While not much is known of his private, early life, the book continues with a chapter that chronicles Paine's experiences growing up and provides a possible rationale for Paine's part in world history.

Thomas Paine was born in 1737 in England. However, due to several societal factors and many failed attempts at making a living for himself, he decided to go to America in 1774. During this time, America was at the cusp of transition. Within two years of his arrival, Paine penned his most famous document, *Common Sense*, a text that is studied even today. In the year 1776, his ideas took hold among the people and leaders and began to shape historical events in

America, starting with the American Revolution, later in France, with the French Revolution, and in England. Paine wrote many other documents such as *Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason*. His most famous and influential writings can be found and used as primary documents; however, others of his original writings, documents, and correspondences no longer exist. Paine's writing shaped doctrines, policies, and events around the world.

Though his ideas made him a hero for a while, during the French Revolution, Paine's ideas almost got him executed. Paine later returned to America and wrote some more, but his ideas were challenged and more of his struggles were revealed. Eventually, Thomas Paine died, alone, in New York, in 1809, at seventy-three years of age.

Thomas Paine: Crusader for Liberty begins with Lincoln's quote, "history is not history unless it is the truth." To determine any historical truth surrounding the life and times of Thomas Paine and the historical events that took place during his lifetime, readers should use Marrin's account along with other resources. Used in concert with other texts, this book could allow the reader to better understand the events and history surrounding the life of Paine. Marrin provides a list of books to read on the topic of Thomas Paine and other historical figures and world events of the same period, which is a great resource itself.

While the book is labeled for juvenile literature, the readability of the text is complex in sections, which might pose comprehension problems for some adolescent readers. There are pictures throughout the book, but they are not enough to compensate for those who are not strong readers and who might find the content difficult to access. There are many points throughout the book where the author deviates from the direct story of Thomas Paine and recounts the lives of other people or details historical events in order to provide context and background knowledge necessary to understand Paine's actions and life. This shift of focus, while necessary at times, requires that the reader maintain a great deal of historical information in short-term memory in the form of names, places, dates, and details to comprehend the text and understand the connection of these historical people and events to the life of Thomas Paine. A knowledgeable teacher who does further reading will be the best support for the ideas within Marrin's presentation.

The influence of Thomas Paine continues to present times. Paine was an inventor; his ideas created and ignited the spirit underlying the idea of a United States of America. His writings remain influential several hundred years after they were published, and thus, they are a testament to the power of the written expression of ideas.

About the Author

Adriana L. Medina is an associate professor of reading education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Her interests include adolescent literacy, teacher education, and educational program evaluation. A lifelong learner, Medina learned a great deal about world history from reviewing this book.