

# Thomas Paine: *An American Patriot*

Based on a manuscript by  
**Mae Kramer Silver**

## Introduction

By definition, the purpose of newspapers is to educate, to inform and to entertain.

We hope you will find this story of a courageous immigrant to America to be all of those things ... and more.

*Thomas Paine: An American Patriot* was donated to all daily and weekly newspapers in Pennsylvania and New Jersey by the New Jersey Newspaper Foundation and the Pennsylvania Newspaper Association Foundation.

Beginning today this newspaper will publish one chapter of this story each week for eight weeks.

The focus of this serialized version of the Thomas Paine biography is how his writing influenced the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution and its first 10 amendments ... the Bill of Rights.

The historical content of *Thomas Paine: An American Patriot* is factual; however, some of the characters and their dialogue are fictional.

Beyond the chapters of this story, families, students and teachers will find exercises and activities designed to bring the story of Thomas Paine (1737-1809) to life.

See the "Q & A" section of each chapter for a link to the online *Serialized Story Guide for Teachers, Students and Families*."

This story is based on a manuscript written by Mae Kramer Silver, president of the Thomas Paine Society of Bordentown, N.J., and adapted by the New Jersey Newspaper Foundation for school children to read as they study the U.S. Constitution and American history.

## Chapter 1 Common Sense Arrives

It was a chilly January day in 1776, the cold wind biting into the raw cotton coats and leggings of two men as they strolled down Front Street in Philadelphia.

John Weiss and Horace Schwartz were their names.

Like many of the others walking on the street that day, they were laborers brought into the growing city to make some sort of wage to support their families. Each one waved a thin paper pamphlet wildly in the face of the other.

Talking quickly back and forth, they could hardly hear what each other was saying because of the winter wind.

"Horace, have you read these pages called *Common Sense*?" John exclaimed. "I think this is great! What do you think?"

"Yes, yes, John. This is an enlightening message," Horace replied. "We should break with that island 'cross the water. We should. We must be free of English rule."

Before they spoke further, another excited man joined them. Walter Blau also carried a copy of *Common Sense* and waved it like a flag over his head.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, how are you today? Horace, I have not seen you much lately. I see you have a copy of the same work that I have," he said, gesturing toward the wrinkled papers he carried. "There is revelation in these papers, I swear. But, but, who is this 'Anonymous' who gave us this work? Who wrote these enlightening words?"

"Hello, Cousin Walter, it has been awhile since you have come to town from your farm," Horace responded, folding his hands under his coat to warm them. "Good day, and how is it with the family?"

"Good, good; and good with family," Walter said. "But who ... who, my cousin, wrote this *Common Sense*?" Horace replied, "He calls himself an Englishman."

"Ah, this Englishman wrote something good. I raise to him a toast, this Mister Englishman."

Walter said, "I'll give this to my son, Rudolph. He will read it all and then give it to his neighbor, Wilhelm. I got my copy from John Aitken's young son who sold it to me back there on the street corner, and I started to read it right away."

*Common Sense* was already becoming an uncommon hit in a city known for its fresh broadsheets that came from the small press of the well-known journalist and publisher, Benjamin Franklin. But who was the author? Who was this Englishman?

"I think it must be Dr. Franklin himself," Horace said.

"Oh, no," said John. "I do not think so for this. Maybe it's Dr. Benjamin Rush. He has such a mind."

"No. Maybe it was those firebrands from Boston. Those Adams men, John or Samuel?" asked Horace.

None of those men wrote *Common Sense*. The author was actually a new immigrant, an Englishman who arrived in Philadelphia just 14 months earlier, on November 30, 1774.

He came with no family. No friends to stay with. No house. Not much money. No job.

Yet, within the first 100 days of its printing—each page laboriously printed separately on heavy iron presses—*Common Sense*, the words of an unknown writer, had become the same as a modern-day best seller. In the towns and farms across the 13 colonies, the story spread. More than 120,000 copies were printed, sold, borrowed, or traded. The words were talked about and memorized.

This is the story of Thomas Paine, the uncommon man who wrote *Common Sense*.

## Q&A

**Comprehension Question:** Why was everyone excited as they walked down the streets of Philadelphia?

**NIE Activity:** *Common Sense* became the same as a "modern-day best seller" of its day. Look through the newspaper for book reviews and advertisements. What are some of today's best sellers?

**Essay Question:** Thomas Paine's pamphlet was titled *Common Sense*, and it made the argument for the American colonies to declare independence from England. What were some reasons for American independence? Were these reasons "common sense" to the colonists? Why did Paine give his pamphlet the name *Common Sense*?

**Serialized Story Guide for Teachers, Students and Parents:**  
[www.njreadforlife.org/paineguide.html](http://www.njreadforlife.org/paineguide.html)

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## Next week Chapter 2

**A Fresh Start in America** Thomas Paine arrives in America, bearing a letter of introduction from Benjamin Franklin.

Read more about Thomas Paine: [www.njreadforlife.org/paine.html](http://www.njreadforlife.org/paine.html)

