

Who was Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet?

Name _____ Class · period _____ Date _____

THE SHORT VERSION

Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet (1787–1851) helped found the first permanent school for Deaf students in the United States. His work with one Deaf child in Hartford led to a journey to Europe, a partnership with Laurent Clerc, and a school that is still open today.

DO YOU KNOW THOMAS GALLAUDET?

Why his name deserves more attention than it usually gets

Ask any American if they know the name Gallaudet and its claim to fame and sadly you may not get the responses this legendary individual deserves. If there is one name that is particularly prominent in Deaf history and should receive more attention in standard American History books, it is Thomas Gallaudet.

As with any record over 200 years old, differences spring up in various accounts of his life. Yet, the core details of his work, its purpose and outcome are consistent and speak to his significant impact on the world around him.

01 EARLY LIFE

- 01 Born in Philadelphia, PA. His parents then moved to Hartford, CT.
- 02 At age 14, he was a student at Yale. He graduated at age 17, and later returned to earn a Master of Arts.
- 03 It is said that Thomas had an interest in studying law and becoming a traveling salesman or trader.
- 04 Ultimately, he pursued his desire to enter the seminary by enrolling in the Andover Theological Seminary.

02 MEETING ALICE COGSWELL

- 01 The ministry did not remain Thomas Gallaudet's primary path for long.
- 02 Though it is not confirmed how Alice Cogswell and Thomas met, it is agreed that it changed the course of his life.
- 03 While staying with his parents, Thomas noticed that the local children were not playing with a neighbor girl, Alice.

- 04 He soon realized that Alice was Deaf due to having meningitis as a toddler.
- 05 Though Alice's family found ways to communicate with her, there was no uniform language or schools for the Deaf in America at the time.
- 06 Thomas then began tutoring Alice with the encouragement of her father, Mason Cogswell.

03 FINDING A NEW WAY

- 01 Frustrated with the difficulty to communicate and teach Alice, along with her father's drive to provide education for individuals like his daughter, Thomas decided to travel in Europe.
- 02 He hoped to find an opportunity to learn what methods were being used to educate the Deaf overseas.
- 03 The first attempts to engage with a school in England were very unfruitful.
- 04 Thomas then traveled to the Royal Institution for the Deaf in Paris, and was rewarded with a more successful outcome.
- 05 During his visit, Thomas convinced Laurent Clerc, a Deaf faculty member, to accompany him back to the US to establish a school for the Deaf.
- 06 On the return trip, Laurent taught Thomas sign language, and Thomas taught Laurent English.

04 THE AMERICAN SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

- 01 Once they were back in America, Thomas, Laurent, and Mason Cogswell raised funds to launch the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut (1817).
- 02 Thomas Gallaudet served as the principal of the school for 13 years.
- 03 He also married one of the graduates and raised a family of 8.
- 04 One of his children, Edward Miner Gallaudet, was integral to the creation of Gallaudet College, named in honor of his father.
- 05 This college later became known as Gallaudet University (1986), a college for Deaf students that still remains in operation today.

THE LATER YEARS

What became of Alice, and what Gallaudet did with the rest of his life

05 ALICE COGSWELL

- 01 Alice Cogswell became one of the first students to study at the American School for the Deaf.
- 02 She is also credited with being a key figure behind the creation of American Sign Language (ASL), which is originally based on the French version brought to America by Laurent Clerc.
- 03 Alice died at the young age of 25, less than 2 weeks after the loss of her father, Mason, who had been a loving and supportive force in the era when Deaf children were unfortunately often overlooked.

06 THOMAS GALLAUDET

- 01 It is noted that Gallaudet spent his later years writing children's books, acting as an advocate for women's higher education, setting up teacher training schools, and returning to ministry.
- 02 What remains clear is that the curiosity, open mind and open heart which established Thomas Gallaudet's journey in life positively reverberates throughout the world today.

America is a better place because of the inclusiveness and devotion of individuals like Thomas Gallaudet, which is best illustrated in his own words.

All of the children of silence must be taught to sing their own song.

THOMAS HOPKINS GALLAUDET

Thanks to Thomas Gallaudet, there are now more voices in the chorus.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer in complete sentences using what you read

07 WRITTEN RESPONSE

- 01 What did Thomas notice about Alice Cogswell that changed the direction of his life?
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02 Why did Thomas travel to Europe, and what did he bring home with him?

03 Three people raised funds to launch the American School for the Deaf. Who were they, and what year did the school open?

04 Laurent Clerc taught Thomas sign language on the voyage home, and Thomas taught Laurent English. Why does that exchange matter to the story of ASL?

05 In your own words, what do you think Gallaudet meant by “children of silence must be taught to sing their own song”?

06 Alice’s family found ways to communicate with her, but there was no uniform language and no school for Deaf students in America. What difference do you think the American School for the Deaf made for children like her?

08 PEOPLE TO KNOW

NAME	WHY THEY MATTER IN THIS STORY
Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet (1787–1851)	Tutored Alice Cogswell, traveled to Europe to learn how Deaf students were taught, and served as principal of the American School for the Deaf for 13 years.
Alice Cogswell	The Deaf neighbor girl Thomas began tutoring, one of the first students at the American School for the Deaf, and a key figure behind the creation of ASL.
Mason Cogswell	Alice's father. He encouraged Thomas to tutor her and helped raise the funds to launch the school.
Laurent Clerc	A Deaf faculty member at the Royal Institution for the Deaf in Paris who returned to the US with Thomas and brought French Sign Language with him.
Edward Miner Gallaudet	Thomas's son, integral to the creation of Gallaudet College — later Gallaudet University.

09 WHERE THIS INFORMATION COMES FROM

Gallaudet University gallaudet.edu

North East Historical Society northeasthistoricalsociety.org

Laurent Clerc: Apostle to the Deaf People of the New World Loida R. Canlas

Funk & Wagnall's New World Encyclopedia 2017

My Heart Glow: Alice Cogswell, Thomas Gallaudet, and the Birth of American Sign Language Emily Arnold McCully · Hyperion Books for Children, 2008