

JONATHAN JENNINGS: INDIANA'S FIRST GOVERNOR

By Sheila Reed

GRADE LEVEL: Elementary

Prepared in partial fulfillment of requirements for  
"INDIANA AND THE NEW NATION, 1776-1876"  
a project of the Historic Southern Indiana Project  
of the University of Southern Indiana  
8600 University Boulevard  
Evansville, Indiana 47712  
(812) 465-7014

FUNDED BY THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

THIS DOCUMENT MAY NOT BE DUPLICATED WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION FROM  
THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN INDIANA

Lesson Plans for a Teaching Unit entitled:

JONATHAN JENNINGS

Indiana's First Governor

By Sheila A. Reed

Grade Level: 4 - 12

Time: 3-5 Class periods

This unit should be presented after students have studied the time period 1800-1816 in Indiana history.

Materials:

Teacher: for a detailed biography of Jonathan Jennings see Dorothy L. Riker's "Jonathan Jennings" in Indiana Magazine of History (December 1932): 223-239.

for a general overview of the political conditions in Indiana 1800-1816 see James H. Madison: The Indiana Way: A State History Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1986.

Student: Jonathan Jennings biography packet  
Timeline Activity  
Crossword Puzzle  
Sentence Completion Worksheet  
Map Activity  
Essay Test

Evaluation: Essay Test

Objectives:

Students will:

1. identify Jennings as the first governor of our state.
2. recognize Jennings's efforts in working for and securing statehood for Indiana.
3. become familiar with the major events in Jennings's life.
4. complete a variety of worksheets to reinforce basic facts concerning Jennings's life.

Activities:

1. Teachers should familiarize themselves with the background material and the information in the students' packet prior to leading a class discussion of the time period and events.
2. Students should read the Jennings biography packet. This can be done individually, in small groups or as a whole class.
3. Teacher-led discussion of information in the packet to ensure students understand events and activities in Jennings's life.
4. Several activities are included to reinforce main facts about Jennings. These can be done using the biography packet to locate answers, or without the packet, to act as a preliminary evaluation activity.
  1. Timeline Activity
  2. Crossword Puzzle
  3. Sentence Completion
  4. Map Activity
5. Evaluation of students' knowledge is measured by an essay activity.

## JONATHAN JENNINGS

Indiana's First

Governor

Jonathan Jennings was born in 1784, probably in Hunterdon County, New Jersey. His father, Jacob Jennings, was a doctor and a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church. His mother, Mary Kennedy Jennings, was the daughter of a doctor who was also a Presbyterian minister. She was well-educated for a woman of the time. Jonathan was the sixth child. He had four older brothers, one younger brother and two sisters.

In 1791, the Jennings family moved to Dunlap's Creek in western Pennsylvania, and soon Mrs. Jennings died. Jonathan attended elementary school at home and grammar school at Cannonsburg, Pennsylvania. One of his classmates was William Hendricks, who became Jennings's friend in Indiana and went on to become our second governor.

Jennings studied law with John Simonson (who may have been his brother-in-law) in Washington, Pennsylvania, and in 1806, was at Steubenville, Ohio, in his brother, Obediah's law office. He was 22 years old. He decided to challenge the exciting West, and in April 1807 was living in Vincennes, the capital of the Indiana Territory.

Jennings came to Vincennes and immediately tried to get into to the top of local society. Being young, educated and ambitious, he was partly successful. He was admitted to practice law during the April court term. He also took employment as a clerk in the land office of John Badollet and as an assistant clerk in the territorial House of Representatives. Jennings also worked for a very short time with Elihu Stout, publisher of the Western Sun, the first newspaper published in the territory. His level of education and his excellent handwriting, as well as his personality helped him secure those positions. While in Vincennes, Jennings came in close contact with many important people in the territory and he tried to become important in the town.

By late 1808, he had left Vincennes because he was not able to get that importance. He moved eastward to south central Indiana.

Jennings's active political career began in the election of the territorial delegate to Congress in 1809. The election was the first one in which the citizens of Indiana Territory directly chose their delegate. In a conversation, sometime in early 1809, with Nathaniel Ewing, his former employer at the Vincennes land office, Ewing said "Look us up a good candidate for Congress," and Jennings replied, "Why wouldn't I do?"

Jennings's opponent in this election was Thomas Randolph, a cousin to Thomas Jefferson and friend of Governor Harrison. In the campaign, Jennings began to show his genius as a politician. Jennings' campaign style was to visit with the frontier farmer on an equal basis. He joined in the political rally sporting activities and didn't hesitate to participate in the "common-folk" chores. As campaigning was considered to be in poor taste, Jennings would always "be on the way" somewhere and just "happen" to be in the neighborhood.

In the election Jennings received 428 votes and Randolph got 402. Jennings was the Indiana Territory delegate to Congress from 1809 until 1816. During that time he kept the common man's goals and problems before Congress. He presented a number of suggestions to Congress. Many of these had to do with changing the land sale system to make it easier to buy land and increasing frontier safety from Indian attacks. He helped create additional companies of Rangers. He continued to be an outspoken opponent of Governor Harrison.

Statehood had been promised under the Northwest Ordinance when an area had a population of 60,000. With the end of the War of 1812 in 1814, a flood of settlers moved to the territory. The land offices at Vincennes and Jeffersonville did a booming business, bringing a steady supply of money into the area. The next logical step was statehood.

The General Assembly ordered a census taken of the free people and the free white males over 21. In December of 1815, Jennings asked Congress to admit the state of Indiana. Congress sent the request to a committee, headed by Jennings, who

reported favorably on January 5, 1816. The House passed the bill on March 16 by a vote of 108 to 3 and sent it to the Senate on March 30. The bill was sent to President James Madison, who signed this Enabling Act on April 19, 1816. Indiana Territory now had the United States government's permission to organize a state government.

The original bill reported by the Jennings's committee in January set the boundaries of the state at an east/west line through the southernmost tip of Lake Michigan. In the final act signed on April 19, this line had been changed to run ten miles north of the original one. We don't know why the boundaries of Indiana were changed but it is likely that Jennings was involved in enlarging Indiana to include portage on Lake Michigan and the present day major industrial areas of Gary, Hammond, Michigan City, South Bend, Mishawaka and Elkhart.

The Enabling Act set May 13 as the day for the election of delegates to a constitutional convention. If a majority of the delegates agreed to statehood, a constitution was to be written that excluded slavery. Congress also offered us the salt licks; section sixteen of each township to further public education; money from the sale of public land in the state to be used to develop road systems to and inside the state; and free land to establish a state university and a capital city.

On June 10, 1816, forty-three men from Indiana's thirteen counties met in Corydon. On the first day, Jennings was elected as the president of the convention. The convention then decided whether or not to form a constitution and state government. On the afternoon of June 11, after several hours of discussion, the Convention voted 34-8 to proceed with the formation of the constitution. Each day the convention began by meeting to hear reports from committees on their parts of the constitution. When this was finished, they separated into committees to continue work on the sections assigned to them.

The convention met every day, except Sunday, for three weeks. On June 29, the Convention accepted the terms for statehood offered by Congress, the final constitution, and told Jennings to order county sheriffs to hold an election on the first Monday in August for state, county and Congressional offices. The

constitution was not given to the people of Indiana for their approval. During the five weeks between the close of the convention and the August 5th election, Jennings was busy campaigning for the governorship against Thomas Posey.

On November 4, 1816, the First General Assembly of the State of Indiana met in Corydon, reviewed the returns, and declared Jennings elected as the first governor of the state. Jennings got 5211 votes and Posey 3934. Jennings began his administration on November 7, 1816.

In Washington D.C. the United States Senate, on December 6, and the House, on December 9, approved Indiana's request for admission. William Henry Harrison introduced the House request for his former frontier home. On December 11, 1816 President James Madison signed the act and Indiana became the nineteenth state.

Jennings most unusual act while he was governor, was his part in getting the "New Purchase" Indian land. In 1818, Jennings was sent by President Monroe, to make a treaty to buy Indian land in central Indiana. Jennings, along with Benjamin Parke and Lewis Cass, met with representatives of the Delaware, Wea, Kickapoo, Miami and Pottawatomi tribes at St. Mary's, Ohio; and successfully purchased most of the land south of the Wabash River.

On October 3, 1818 Jennings wrote to Lt. Governor Christopher Harrison "that it may be necessary for you to attend the seat of government to discharge such duties as devolve on the executive of Indiana." Harrison claimed that Jennings had given up the office and, therefore, he was the legal governor. He took the state seal, opened his own governor's office, and refused to surrender either when Jennings returned. Indiana had two governors!

On December 12, a committee reported that Jennings had, indeed, accepted another position with the United States government and asked him to appear and be questioned about giving up the governorship. In a fit of anger, Jennings burned his commission and refused to appear before the investigation committee. He sent a lawyer and a said that he thought what he had done was right and that he only wanted to help the people of Indiana get more land to settle on. Since Jennings' commission could not be proven because he had burned it, and the treaty was quite

popular with the people, the House voted 15-13 to recognize him as the rightful governor. Harrison resigned his office in protest of the House's failure to support him. Jennings must have felt some pleasure at this political support and that he was still strong enough to withstand this attack.

Jennings first term of office was to expire in 1819, and he again was a candidate. In this race, his chief opponent was his former lieutenant governor, Christopher Harrison. Jennings won by over 9000 votes.

Jennings addressed the General Assembly twice in December 1819, and asked to appoint a commission to select the site of the new capital on the land he had helped the United States purchase in central Indiana. A commission of ten men was appointed and Jennings called them to meet on May 22, 1820 at William Connor's trading post. The commissioners remained in the area until June 7 and decided on the mouth of Fall Creek as the site of the capital city.

In 1822 Jennings became a candidate for Congress. He resigned as governor. The constitution limited him to two terms and he wanted to continue his political career. He was easily elected from the Second District and was re-elected in 1824, 1826, and 1828.

During his career in Congress, Jennings represented his district fairly and kept in mind the needs of the common people of Indiana. He was popular with the people in Indiana and they felt he did a good job for them in Congress.

Jennings was defeated in the Congressional elections of 1830. By this time, he was deeply in debt and had become a heavy drinker. His friends, in an effort to help him stop drinking, supported his opponents. Their efforts were successful in getting him defeated. Unfortunately, he continued to drink and lost much of his friends' goodwill. He retired to his home in Charlestown although he continued to be interested in public affairs. His last official act was when President Jackson appointed him to meet with the Pottawatomie and Miami Indians. Jennings traveled to the Treaty Grounds at Tippecanoe and met with the Indians during October 1832. The Indians there didn't want to deal with some of the commissioners, but about Jennings they said he was a good man and knew how to treat them.



Jennings returned to Charlestown and his farm. He was in debt and poor and only the efforts of his friends saved his home. He died on July 26, 1834 and was buried in a plain pine coffin in an unmarked grave overlooking Charlestown. The legislature, some years later, caused a marker to be erected on the grave of Indiana's first governor.

Jonathan Jennings was just fifty years old when he died. He spent his entire adult life working for the good of the people of his adopted home. He was popular with the ordinary, common people. They repeatedly returned him to office with large votes.

He seemed to have two basic beliefs in his political ideas. One was a great dislike of Governor William Henry Harrison and his friends, the other was an equal hatred of slavery.

As a politician, Jennings was very successful. After 1809, Jennings held no other job besides his elective offices. He was a professional office holder; and developed his campaign techniques to the fullest. He spent weeks touring the state on horseback, visiting the people of Indiana as they went about their daily affairs. He made great use of newspapers and their ability to keep his name well-known in a time before radio and television. He regularly wrote letters to newspapers and sent booklets to his people at the end of Congressional sessions.

From the time Jennings settled in the territory, he worked hard to make sure that Indiana would remain free from slavery. Once elected, he acted fairly and in the best interests of his people back home in Indiana. He is remembered as the first governor of a state that he helped to form. Jennings had made his way without the advantages of money and social standing. He was a self-made man in the frontier tradition.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Beside each date, fill in the correct event from Jonathan Jennings's life.

JONATHAN JENNINGS

Indiana's First Governor

Timeline

1784 \_\_\_\_\_

1791 \_\_\_\_\_

1806 \_\_\_\_\_

1807 \_\_\_\_\_

1809 \_\_\_\_\_

1815 \_\_\_\_\_

1816 June \_\_\_\_\_

1816 August \_\_\_\_\_

1816 December \_\_\_\_\_

1818 \_\_\_\_\_

1819 \_\_\_\_\_

1820 \_\_\_\_\_

1822 \_\_\_\_\_

1830 \_\_\_\_\_

1832 \_\_\_\_\_

1834 \_\_\_\_\_

Use these events to fill in the timeline for Jonathan Jennings.

- Re-elected as governor
- Introduced Indiana's request for statehood to Congress
- Studied law in Ohio
- Helped buy central Indiana from Indians with the New Purchase Treaty
- Born in New Jersey
- Defeated for re-election and retired to Charlestown
- Moved to western Pennsylvania
- Elected President of the Constitutional Convention in Corydon
- Moved to Vincennes
- Indiana becomes the 19th state
- Selected committee to locate land for the new state capital
- Died in Charlestown
- Met with Miami & Potawatami Indians at Tippecanoe
- Elected Indiana's first governor
- Elected Territorial Delegate to the United States Congress
- Resigned as governor

JONATHAN JENNINGS  
Timeline

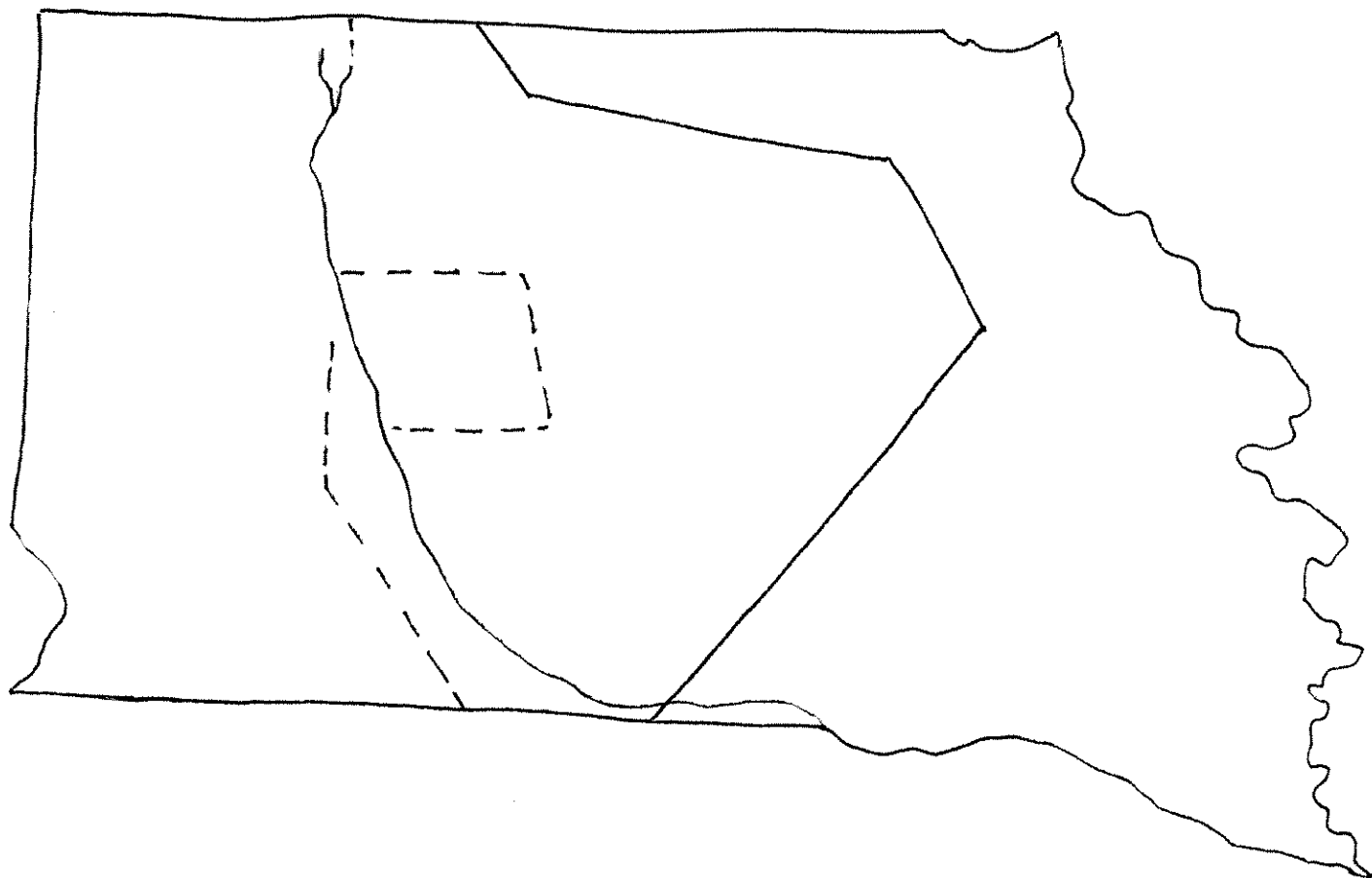
- 1784 Jonathan Jennings born in New Jersey
- 1791 Moved to western Pennsylvania, attended school and his mother died
- 1806 Studied law in Ohio
- 1807 Moved to Vincennes, capital of the Indiana Territory
- 1809 Elected Indiana's Territorial Delegate to the United States Congress
- 1815 Introduced Indiana's request for statehood to Congress
- 1816 June - Elected President of the Constitutional Convention in Corydon
- 1816 August - Elected Indiana's first Governor
- 1816 December - Indiana becomes the 19th state to join the Union
- 1818 Helped buy central Indiana from the Indians with the New Purchase land treaty
- 1819 Re-elected as governor
- 1820 Selected committee to locate land for the new state capital
- 1822 June - resigned Governorship to become a candidate for the United States Congress
- 1830 Defeated for re-election and retired to Charleston, Indiana
- 1832 Met with the Miami & Potawatami Indians at Tippecanoe Treaty Grounds. Last official act.
- 1834 July 26 - Died in Charleston, Indiana

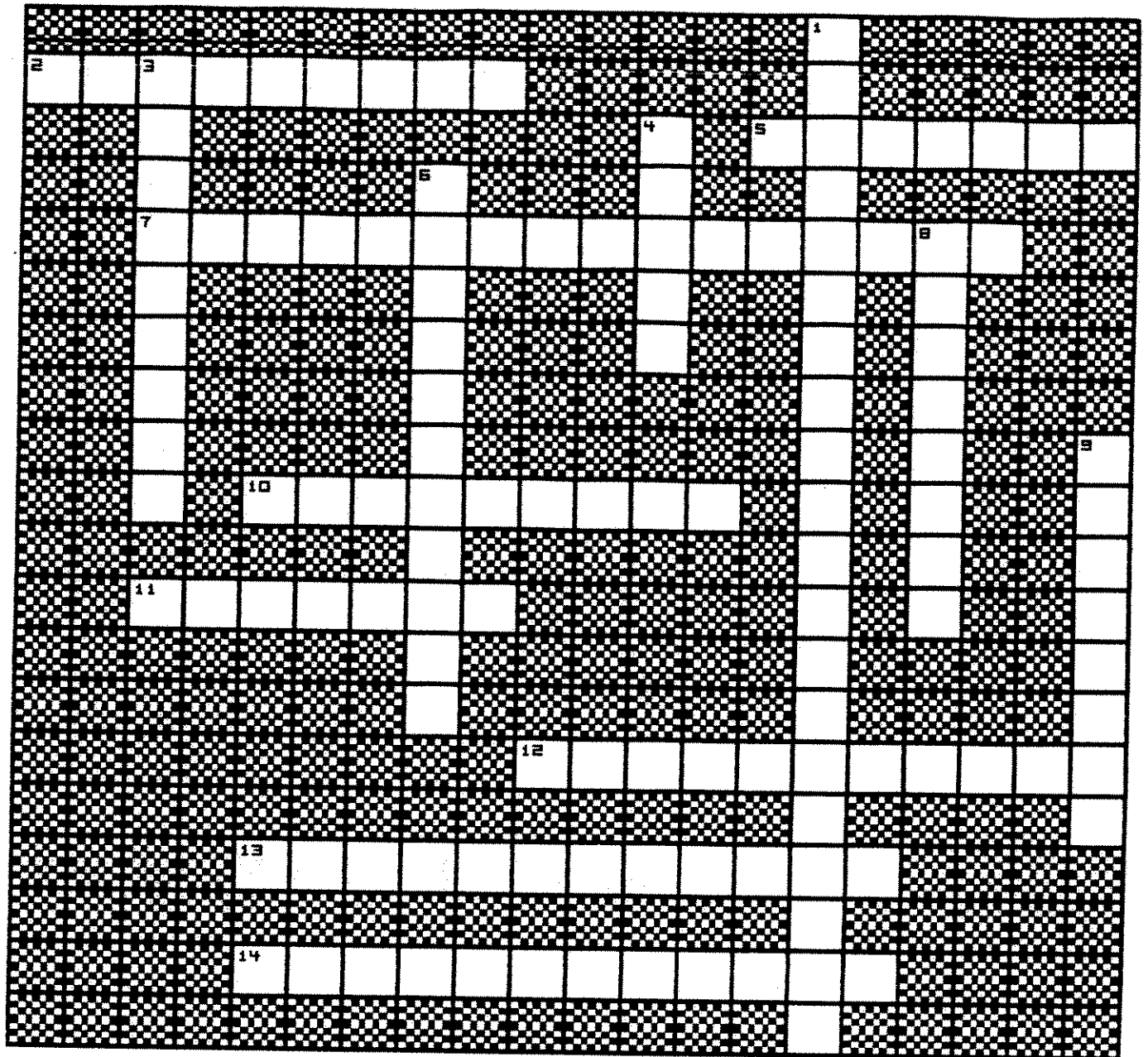
Jonathan Jennings  
Map Activity

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Follow the directions on the map below.

1. Locate and label these cities: Vincennes, Corydon, and Indianapolis.
2. Draw, label, and color these rivers: Ohio and Wabash.
3. Color the southern part of Indiana that was settled by whites in 1816, green.
4. Color the New Purchase land that Jonathan Jennings helped to buy from the Indian tribes, light brown.
5. Color the land that still belonged to the Indians, red.





ACROSS CLUES

2. When Jennings first moved to Indiana, this is where he lived.
5. Jennings was very much against this.
7. The first governor of the state of Indiana was this man. (2 words)
10. Jennings was elected as the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Constitutional Convention.
11. The first state capital was in this town.
12. In 1818, Jennings helped buy this land from the Indians. (2 words)
13. In 1820, Jennings chose men to select the site of the new state capital, \_\_\_\_\_.
14. A group of men wrote this in June 1816 in Corydon.

DOWN CLUES

1. Jennings was against this man. (3 words)
3. Jennings was born here. (2 words)
4. When Jennings was in Vincennes, this was his job.
6. The town where Jennings lived and where he retired to in 1830.
8. Jennings was elected as the first of these in the state of Indiana.
9. Jennings did this in 1822 so he could become a representative to Congress.

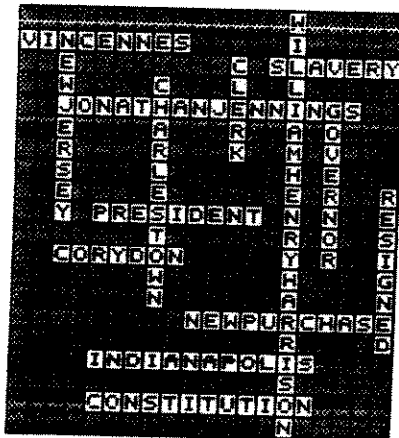
WORD LIST: JONATHAN JENNINGS

CHARLESTOWN  
CLERK  
CORYDON  
CONSTITUTION  
GOVERNOR

INDIANAPOLIS  
JONATHANJENNINGS  
NEWPURCHASE  
NEWJERSEY  
PRESIDENT

RESIGNED  
SLAVERY  
VINCENNES  
WILLIAMHENRYHARRISON

ANSWERS: JONATHAN JENNINGS



Indiana History Worksheet

Jonathan Jennings

Name \_\_\_\_\_

DIRECTIONS: Use the biography of Jonathan Jennings to find the word or words that will complete the following sentences correctly.

1. Jonathan Jennings was the first \_\_\_\_\_ of Indiana.
2. He was very much against \_\_\_\_\_.
3. He was born in the year \_\_\_\_\_ and died in \_\_\_\_\_.
4. When Jennings first moved to the Indiana Territory, he lived in the city of \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Most of his first jobs when he came to Indiana Territory were as a \_\_\_\_\_.
6. In 1809, Jennings was elected as the \_\_\_\_\_ to Congress.
7. He was elected as the president of the \_\_\_\_\_ in Corydon in 1816.
8. He is buried in the town of \_\_\_\_\_.
9. He helped add a strip of land to Indiana in the northern part of the state that includes the cities of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
10. President \_\_\_\_\_ signed the law that make Indiana a state.
11. Indiana became the nineteenth state on \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.
12. Jennings was elected as the governor \_\_\_\_\_ times.
13. In 1818, Jennings helped to buy a large part of central Indiana from the Indian tribes called the \_\_\_\_\_.



14. In 1822, Jennings resigned the governorship to be elected as a representative to \_\_\_\_\_.

15. Jennings knew how to win elections. He was a good \_\_\_\_\_.

1. governor
2. slavery
3. 1784 and 1834
4. Vincennes
5. clerk
6. territorial delegate (or similar answer)
7. Constitutional Convention
8. Charlestown
9. in any order: Gary, Hammond, Michigan City, South Bend, Mishawaka, Elkhart
10. James Madison
11. December 11, 1816
12. two
13. New Purchase
14. Congress
15. politician

Choose one of the following statements and write a paragraph about it. Remember to indent your paragraph, use complete sentences, capital letters and periods. Begin with a topic sentence. Write at least FIVE good sentences.

You are a newspaper reporter for the Western Sun newspaper. It is 1834. Write a newspaper article telling about the death of Jonathan Jennings. Be sure to include why he was "famous."

You are Jonathan Jennings. It is July 1816. Write a speech telling the people of Indiana why they should elect you as the governor of the new state.

You are Jonathan Jennings. It is 1819. Write a letter to the newspaper telling why you should be re-elected as the governor.

You are Jonathan Jennings. It is 1816. Write a speech telling the United States Congress why Indiana should become the 19th state.

You are Jonathan Jennings. It is 1830. Write your autobiography.