



## The Capitol Washington, D.C.

### Introduction and Instructions

At one point, the Capitol Building was the geographic center of Washington, D.C. Today, it remains as one of the most pristine examples of American neoclassical architecture, also called “Federal architecture.” In fact, the name “Capitol” (with an O) was first proposed by Thomas Jefferson, as a reference to Capitoline Hill in Rome. In addition to any prior knowledge you may have, use your research skills and the resources provided here to answer the questions below.



The Architect of the Capitol (AOC) is a government agency that maintains and preserves the Capitol. Watch this video to learn more about what they do.

WATCH: [https://www.capitol.gov/#THMESEC\\_2010061447464|THME\\_2010062211742](https://www.capitol.gov/#THMESEC_2010061447464|THME_2010062211742)



Get a sneak peak of the Capitol Building and explore its grounds here.

READ: <http://www.virtually-anywhere.com/portfolio/uscapitol/>

#### 1. What is the purpose of the US Capitol Building?

Answer: To serve Congress, preserve history, and sustain the home of American democracy.

#### 2. What government institutions does the Capitol house?

Answer: House of Representatives and Senate

#### 3. What does the Capitol building symbolize?

Answer: It symbolizes freedom and is a monument to the spirit and resilience of the American people and their democracy.

#### 4. When did construction on the Capitol begin?

Answer: 1793



Learn more about the history of the US Capitol Building.

WATCH: [https://www.capitol.gov/#THMESEC\\_2010061447464|THME\\_2010102715797](https://www.capitol.gov/#THMESEC_2010061447464|THME_2010102715797)

#### 5. Who was the first Architect of the Capitol (AOC)?

Answer: Dr. William Thornton, winner of the design competition for the new Capitol building.

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**6. What were the challenges in building the Capitol?**

*Answer: Primary challenges were in acquiring materials and hard labor.*

**7. Construction was difficult. In 1803, Congress allocated funds to continue the construction process. Who was appointed as the architect?**

*Answer: Benjamin Henry Latrobe*

**8. In 1811, what was added to the Capitol and what was its purpose?**

*Answer: The second wing of the Capitol was added. Its purpose was so the House of Representatives could occupy its own legislative chamber.*

**9. What happened to the Capitol on August 24, 1814?**

*Answer: British troops set fire to the Capitol during the War of 1812.*

**10. After Charles Bulfinch was appointed as Architect of the Capitol, what parts of the Capitol were finished?**

*Answer: Chambers for the Senate and House of Representatives, Supreme Court building, and the Center Building.*

**11. Why did President Fillmore hold a competition to change the Capitol in 1850? How was it changed?**

*Answer: With the expansion in the number of states, there was no longer enough room for all Senators and Representatives.*

**12. Why was the dome changed in 1855? How was it changed?**

*Answer: The dome no longer suited the building's proportions since the president expanded significantly to the wings – so a cast iron dome replaced it.*

**13. What is the name of the statue on top of the Capitol?**

*Answer: Statue of Freedom*

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One of the most notable paintings inside the Capitol is the fresco of George Washington located in the eye of the rotunda. Learn more about its symbolism and the artist who painted it.  
READ: <https://www.aoc.gov/art/other-paintings-and-murals/apotheosis-washington>

**14. What is the “Apotheosis of Washington?”**

Answer: This is the name of the painting on the inside dome of the Capitol depicting George Washington as a god-like figure.

**15. What are the six groups of figures that line the perimeter of the canopy?**

Answer: War, Science, Marine, Commerce, Mechanics, Agriculture

**16. Continue to explore this site. Find three other facts about the Capitol building and list them below.**

Answers will vary, but some examples listed below:

- The cast iron dome was designed in 1854 by Thomas Walter, who also designed the north and south extensions.
- Walter was the fourth Architect of the Capitol.
- The fresco underwent a thorough cleaning and restoration from 1987 to 1988.
- The rotunda fresco was painted by Constantino Brumidi in 1865.

**17. Which figures from your home state are represented by statues in the Capitol?**

Answers will vary; statues listed by state can be found here: <https://www.aoc.gov/the-national-statuary-hall-collection>

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## WHAT DO YOU THINK? *This is your chance to share your opinions, make connections, and apply what you've learned!*

1. Do you think the US Capitol Building should be considered the most important of all our government buildings? Why or why not?

Answers will vary.

2. Why do you think the architects chose to model the US Capitol Building after the buildings of Ancient Greece and Rome?

Answers will vary.



The Capitol is full of other important paintings that depict the history of the United States. See and read about them here.

READ: <https://www.aoc.gov/capitol-hill/paintings-and-murals>

3. What is the symbolism of the “Apotheosis of Washington”? Compare and contrast it to other paintings found in the Capitol Rotunda.

Answers will vary.