

The Integrity of Our Founders

Developed by Melissa Andersen, Friends School of Minnesota
Thomas Jefferson: Personality, Character, and Public Life
2013 NEH Summer Institute

Description of Unit and Theme:

This past year, in my 7th and 8th grade Humanities class, I added a unit on race at the end of the year (after Slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction), as a way to connect present-day race relations to events and ideals throughout American history.

As part of the unit, I showed the film, *Race: The Power of An Illusion*, had students answer questions, and we talked about it in a class discussion. Afterwards, I remember thinking back on that discussion and how I hadn't done progressive education justice. I should've let my students' curiosity take us further into the subject. They were able to see inconsistencies between the words in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights and what really happened to the civil rights of African Americans after slavery was abolished. They were interested in the part of the video that mentioned Thomas Jefferson and his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in which he mentions his "scientific" justification for slavery. We talked about it a little bit, but I should've let us go deeper, especially since my school's social studies curriculum is centered around Quaker values, such as Justice, Peace, and Integrity.

During the Slavery and Civil War unit, my students read Julius Lester's *To Be a Slave*, which includes a collection of firsthand accounts by slaves, including slaves from Jefferson's Monticello. I remember students bringing up how different the slave accounts at Monticello were from other slave accounts. This, coupled with my students' questions about *Notes on the State of Virginia*, was something that kept coming back to me throughout the NEH Jefferson Institute. I wanted to develop some thoughtful lessons that would let my students explore these ideas more deeply. I also wanted to connect the unit to the Quaker values, especially Integrity.

Description of Students and Setting:

I teach in a unique school. The Friends School of Minnesota is a K-8 Quaker school with a progressive focus. Quaker education integrates the core Quaker values (Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, and Equality) into the curriculum and daily life of the school. I teach Humanities, a class that combines reading, writing, and social studies, and I see my students for 90 minutes each day. In my 7th and 8th grade Humanities class (a mixed-age class with a two-year curriculum cycle), I teach American government, the American Revolution, and Slavery and the Civil War in one year. These lessons were designed to be a part of my final unit of the year on race in the U.S.

Most of my students come to me with above-grade-level reading ability. I teach lessons on how to use primary sources at the beginning of each year, and I give frequent opportunities for class discussion. Being an independent, progressive school not tied to state standards, I have the freedom to let student interest and inquiry guide much of my instruction.

Purpose:

The purpose of this unit is to show students how to take into account multiple sources of information to formulate their own balanced opinions about people we often hold as heroes without question. Another purpose is to connect Jefferson's views and practice as a prominent founding father to race issues in the U.S. today.

Learning Objectives:

Students will

1. Compare present-day attitudes toward race with the attitudes of Thomas Jefferson as found in his writings.
2. Read and interpret primary sources.
3. Recognize bias in news articles.
4. Present and support their opinions with evidence gained from reading through speaking and writing.

Instructional Resources:

California Newsreel film, *Race: The Power of an Illusion*. To purchase the film, go to <http://newsreel.org/video/RACE-THE-POWER-OF-AN-ILLUSION>.

Additional resources for teachers to use with the film, *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, available on the PBS website at http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm

Ten Things Everyone Should Know About Race (Referred to as “Ten Statements About Race” in the lesson plan) – found at http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_01_a-godeeper.htm

Transcripts from Ken Burns Interviews with Gore Vidal, Joe Ellis, Clay Jenkins, Lewis Simpson, and Daniel Boorstin, found at <http://www.pbs.org/jefferson/archives/interviews/frame.htm>

The following letters between Jefferson and John Jordan (Found in the Massachusetts Historical Society’s Thomas Jefferson Papers: An Electronic Archive at <https://www.masshist.org/thomasjeffersonpapers/index.php>)

John Jordan to Thomas Jefferson, 4 October 1805

Thomas Jefferson to John Jordan, 21 December 1805

John Jordan to Thomas Jefferson, 7 January 1806

Thomas Jefferson to John Jordan, 9 February 1806

Excerpts from *Notes on the State of Virginia* by Thomas Jefferson, particularly from Query XVIII, “Manners” and Query XIV, “Laws”. For excerpts, use the following: <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/notes-on-slavery/>

Using Socratic Seminars in the Classroom - For teachers new to using this strategy, visit <http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/socratic-seminars-30600.html> (National Council for Teachers of English), or <http://www.facinghistory.org/resources/strategies/socratic-seminar> (Facing History and Ourselves)

Smithsonian Magazine article titled “Founding Fathers and Slaveholders”, by Stephen Ambrose (2002)– Found at http://www.smithsonianmag.com/historyarchaeology/Flawed_Founders.html?c=y&story=fullstory

Time Magazine article “Was the Sage a Hypocrite?” by Annette Gordon-Reed (July 5, 2004) – found at <http://classicalpursuits.com/blog/2011/02/25/thomas-jefferson-was-the-sage-a-hypocrite/>

Instructional Process/Lessons

Days 1 & 2: Race: The Power of an Illusion

Materials:

- DVD titled *Race: The Power of an Illusion*
- The words “Agree” and “Disagree” on paper to post on opposite sides of the room.
- Ten Statements About Race (See http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_01_a-godeeper.htm)
- *Time* Magazine article “Was the Sage a Hypocrite?” by Annette Gordon-Reed

Procedure:

1. Ask students to stand up. On one side of the room, have the word “Agree” posted on the wall, large enough for everyone to see. On the opposite side of the room, have the word “Disagree” posted. Explain to students that they will be making a line from one side of the room to the other showing where they fall in agreement or disagreement with some phrases. Explain that you will be reading ten statements about race out loud and that they should move to a spot on a straight line depending on whether or not they agree or disagree with the statement (it may help to have a line on the floor already). Students can move around between statements, as their opinions might change between statements. Keep track of where most students are going for each statement, as you can use this in the discussion later on. Read each fact, but not its explanation. After reading each statement and giving students a chance to find their spot on the “spectrum”, you could ask one student to explain their position on the line to encourage participation and discussion. Once you’ve read all ten statements, tell the students that they are all true and read them the descriptions. Let them discuss it a little bit, and make notes of their points. Then, introduce the film, *Race: The Power of an Illusion*.
2. Show the California Newsreel film, *Race: The Power of an Illusion*. To purchase, go to <http://newsreel.org/video/RACE-THE-POWER-OF-AN-ILLUSION>. For more resources to use with the video, check out the PBS website at http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm. As they view the film, have students answer the following questions as they watch the video and collect at the end of class. Note---this video will take a couple of class periods to show, but you can also choose the excerpted version on the DVD to show the parts you’d like.

Questions for students to answer as they watch the video:

Episode 1 - The Difference Between Us

How is race an ideology rather than a biological reality?

How was science used to justify unequal treatment of different races?

Why is it so hard to categorize people into different races?

Episode 2 - The Story We Tell

How did classification of people into races evolve into the idea of white superiority?

How does popular culture promote racial ideas and a national white identity?

Explain the “white man’s burden” and how it affected 20th century race relations.

Episode 3 - The House We Live In

How does the evolution of racial categories and the idea of “whiteness” reflect changing social attitudes or historical events?

How does the wealth gap translate into performance differences?

What’s wrong with “colorblind” policies?

3. Assign for homework the *Time* Magazine article “Was the Sage a Hypocrite?” by Annette Gordon-Reed (July 5, 2004). Briefly explain Jefferson’s relationship with his slave, Sally Hemings, so students have the reference as they read. Assign students to come up with one discussion question based on the article and write it down. Also, assign students to write a written response to their discussion question, giving examples and details to support their statements.

Day 2: All men are created equal?

(Note: Some teachers may wish to break this lesson up over the course of two days)

Materials:

- Excerpts from *Notes on the State of Virginia*, particularly from Query XVIII, “Manners” and Query XIV, “Laws”. For excerpts, use the following:
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/notes-on-slavery/>
- The following letters between Jefferson and John Jordan (Found in the Massachusetts Historical Society’s Thomas Jefferson Papers: An Electronic Archive at <https://www.masshist.org/thomasjeffersonpapers/index.php>)
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John Jordan to Thomas Jefferson, 7 January 1806
Thomas Jefferson to John Jordan, 9 February 1806
- Transcripts from Ken Burns Interviews with Gore Vidal, Joe Ellis, Clay Jenkins, Lewis Simpson, and Daniel Boorstin, found at <http://www.pbs.org/jefferson/archives/interviews/frame.htm>
- Placemat worksheet (See Handout #1 at the end of this lesson plan.)
- Socratic Seminar Preparation Worksheet (See Handout #2 at the end of this lesson plan.)

Procedure:

1. Have students get out the *Time* article and their homework assignment. In small groups of 4-5 students, have students take turns sharing and answering their discussion questions. Allow 10-15 minutes for this.
2. Discuss bias, and ask students if this article could’ve been written with bias from another perspective.
3. Have students read the primary sources (excerpts from *Notes on the State of Virginia* & letters between Jefferson and John Jordan). As students read, have them record a statement or quote from one of the sources that stands out to them and put it in the middle box on the placemat worksheet. In one of the four outer spaces on the placemat, they should record their reaction to the statement or quote from the text and pass it around the group, so all members contribute a response in a different space. In their small groups, have students take turns presenting the statement or quote they chose to their group along with the group members’ reactions.
4. If time permits, you can have each group share one of their placemats with the class, in order to further discussion. You may also wish to hang up the placemats, as they may provide for good discussion prompts for the Socratic Seminar.
5. Assign for homework excerpts of the Transcripts from Ken Burns Interviews with Gore Vidal, Joe Ellis, Clay Jenkins, Lewis Simpson, and Daniel Boorstin, and complete the Socratic Seminar Preparation Worksheet.

Day 3: What do you think?

Materials:

- Socratic Seminar Student Reflection (See Handout #3 at the end of this lesson plan.)
- Completed Placemat worksheets from previous day

Procedure:

***Note: For teachers new to using Socratic Seminars in the classroom, please refer to the resources in the “Instructional Resources” section of this unit plan. It is important to keep in mind that the role of the teacher is to pose questions, record the discussion, but not be an active participant.

1. Seat students in a circle, and direct them to take out their homework (Socratic Seminar Preparation Worksheet). Have students complete part one of the Socratic Seminar Student Reflection.
2. Review the rules for Socratic Seminar (found on the Socratic Seminar Student Reflection).
3. Begin discussion. You can keep the discussion open, use the Placemat worksheets from the previous day, and/or the following prompts:
 - Should we judge our past leaders by our standards today? Is this fair, since they come from a different time?
 - Do you think it's important for Americans to learn about our founding fathers' attitudes and ideas in regards to race?
 - Is there a connection between how U.S. founding fathers led their lives and issues of race in the U.S. today? Should we hold them responsible?
 - How differently would U.S. history have turned out if slavery had been abolished during the American Revolution, with the Declaration of Independence?
4. When there are 5-10 minutes left, wrap up the discussion, and direct students to complete part two of the Socratic Seminar Student Reflection. Collect these at the end of class.

Day 4: What should we learn about the founding fathers?

Materials:

Copies of (or online access to) the article, "Founding Fathers and Slaveholders", by Stephen Ambrose (see link under resources)

Student journals

Procedure:

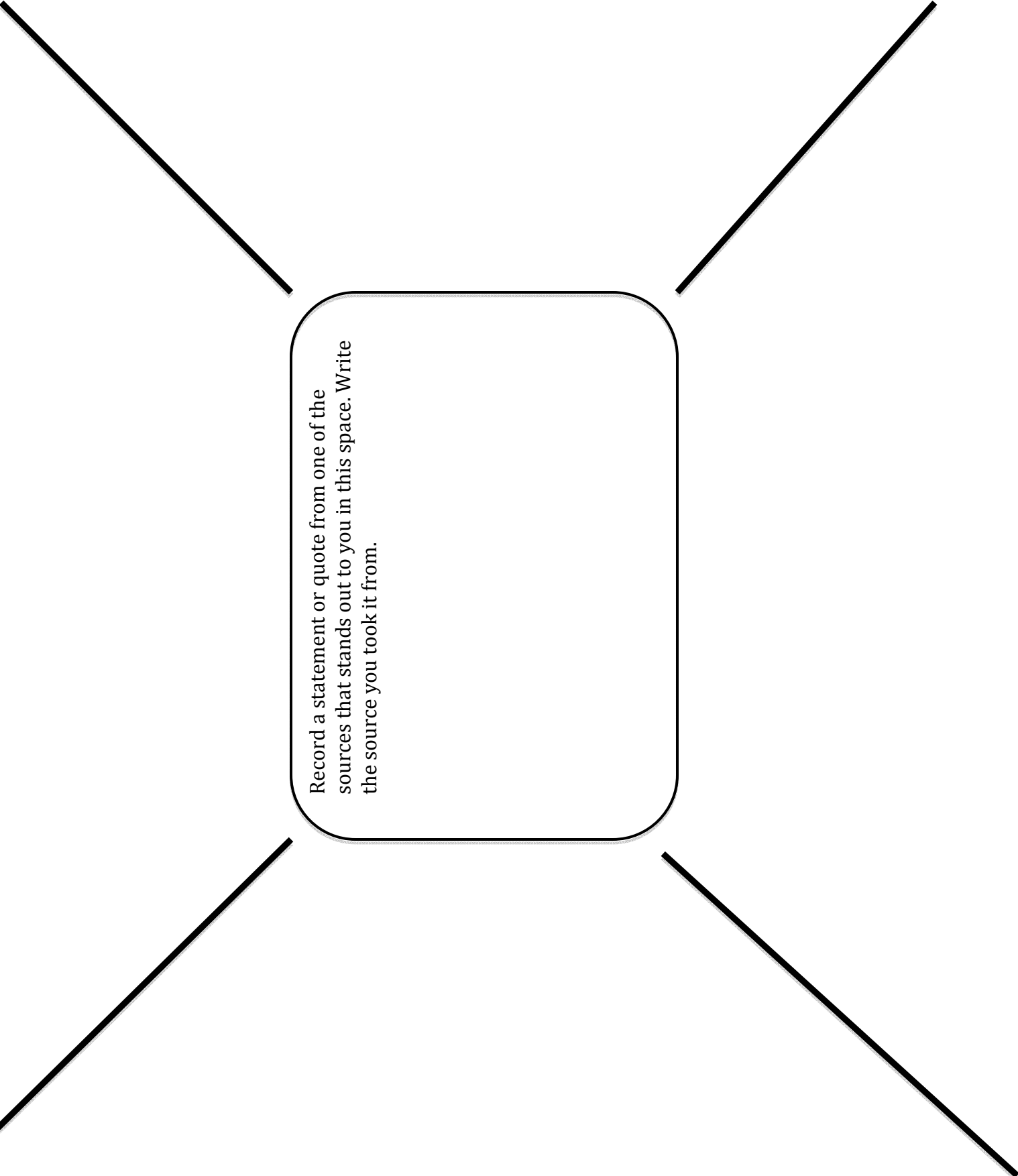
1. Distribute, and have students read "Founding Fathers and Slaveholders", by Stephen Ambrose (see link under resources). You may want to take excerpts from the article for some students or allow them to read it in groups, as it is rather long. Be available for students as they read to answer questions or help with reading. Ask students to write a journal entry answering the questions below.
 - a. To what degree do the attitudes of founders, such as Jefferson, toward race and slavery shape their integrity?
 - b. Do you feel it is important for schools to teach these aspects of our founders' characters? Should textbooks include details about their views on race and slavery, or should they be portrayed only as great heroes? Provide at least 3 details to support your opinion.
2. Collect journals at the end of class, or open up a discussion with students.

Extension ideas:

1. Have students use their journal entries as a starting place for a persuasive essay.
2. Have students rewrite a chapter of a history textbook to include the information they felt necessary to know about Jefferson and race/slavery.

Handout #1: Placemat Worksheet

Student Name:	Group Members:
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Record a statement or quote from one of the sources that stands out to you in this space. Write the source you took it from.

Handout #2: Socratic Seminar Preparation Worksheet

Name: _____

1. Read the Ken Burns Interviews with Gore Vidal, Joe Ellis, Clay Jenkins, Lewis Simpson, and Daniel Boorstin, found online at <http://www.pbs.org/jefferson/archives/interviews/frame.htm>
2. As you read, record any questions you have below. These can be about things in the interviews or bigger questions to discuss during Socratic Seminar in class.

3. Choose 5 statements from at least 3 different interviews that you found interesting and would like to discuss in class. Record them in the table below (continued on the other side), along with your reaction or opinion in 2-3 sentences.

Person being interviewed	Statement or quote from the interview	Your reaction or opinion (in 2-3 sentences)

Person being interviewed	Statement or quote from the interview	Your reaction or opinion (in 2-3 sentences)

Handout #3: Socratic Seminar Student Reflection

Name: _____

Socratic Seminar Rules

1. Participate.
2. Respect the opinions of others.
3. One person speaks at a time.
4. Don't engage in side conversations.
5. After you speak, wait at least three people before speaking again.

Part 1: To be completed before discussion begins

1. Write down one thing you'd like to make sure you say during today's discussion, whether it is a question, opinion, or fact you'd like the group to hear.

2. Give yourself a goal for today's discussion. What is it you'd like to accomplish in today's class to contribute to our discussion?

Part 2: To be completed after discussion (at the end of class)

3. List one thing that was said during today's discussion that made you think about the topic in a different way. Explain why and what you thought.

4. What went well for you in today's Socratic Seminar? Did you meet your goal for today? Explain.

5. What would you like to improve on for our next Socratic Seminar?

6. Rate your level of positive participation in today's discussion. (1 being the lowest, 10 being the highest) Explain your rating.

Rating: _____

Explanation:
