

Was Jefferson a Hypocrite?

Introduction: Jefferson famous words ‘all men are created equal’ contradict his views of African Americans and his role as a slave owner. This statement has created controversy regarding his intention and meaning and helped sparked the cry for equality for women and African Americans in the late 1800s and 1900s. What did he mean and did he live up to the ideals he wrote? These are the questions students will explore over the course of this lesson.

Students and Setting: The lessons are intended for 8th grade students in an urban school district that is almost 100% African American. A large majority of these students are reading below grade level, some multiple grade levels below. The lessons are intended for a Social Studies class that uses primary source documents and argumentative writing to align with the Common Core. Classes are on a block schedule and are 77 minutes in length.

Big Idea: History, and historical figures, can be complex and complicated. Thomas Jefferson is an excellent example. He is the author of the famous line “all men are created equal” in the Declaration of Independence yet he was a slave owner. Jefferson had expressed his desire to see slavery ended but died without freeing most of his slaves. Students need to question his actions and determine why he might have said one thing but did another.

Day One: Declaration of Independence and Monticello

Learning Objectives:

- Students will:
 - Analyze the phrase “all men are created equal” to infer Jefferson’s meaning in 1776 compared with modern interpretations.
 - Compare and contrast Jefferson’s views regarding slavery over the course of his lifetime.

Resources:

- Image of Declaration of Independence
- Thomas Jefferson and slavery reading (source: www.monticello.org)
- Cornell Notes outline

Learning Strategies:

- Stand-up hand-up pair-up: After explaining the directions, students will stand up from their seats with their hand up. They will walk towards a classmate (preferably not their immediate neighbor) and exchange a high-five. They will then discuss the question for a selected amount of time. Repeat if desired to have more interaction and discussion. For more information refer to Kagan Cooperative Learning Strategies.

- Cornell Notes provide the students with a systemic way to take notes. The left column is for questions students have, key words or points while the right column is for notes. Students should avoid writing long sentences. Refer to http://lsc.cornell.edu/LSC_Resources/cornellsystem.pdf for more information.

Instructional Process:

- Bell Ringer/Do Now: Display the first two paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence and have students write down what they know about this document, its purpose, intent, etc.; give a time limit. Share with shoulder/face partner and discuss.
- Display the phrase “all men are created equal” and ask students to write down what this statement means to them. Give a time limit and when ready use the strategy stand up, hand up, pair up. Discuss as a class and then repeat the strategy again by asking students what they think Thomas Jefferson meant by that phrase in 1776 and then discuss.
- Distribute Thomas Jefferson and Slavery reading, have students read with a partner and take notes using Cornell Notes. Explain that students will pause after each paragraph to answer guiding questions (display if possible):
 - Do Jefferson’s views on slavery support what you know about him? Why or why not?
 - Do you agree with Jefferson that if the government had insisted upon emancipation it would have gone against the ideals of the American Revolution? Why or why not?
 - If needed, brief discuss on what the ideals of the American Revolution were.
 - Do you agree or disagree with Jefferson’s plan to end slavery? Explain.
 - Based upon Jefferson’s beliefs about black people is he a racist? Why or why not?
- Exit Card: What new information did you learn? What surprised you about Jefferson? What upsets you about Jefferson?

Day Two: Monticello and slavery

Learning Objectives:

- Students will:
 - Evaluate the role of enslaved people at Monticello and explain their contributions.
 - Examine Jefferson’s role as a slaveholder and compare with his ideals pertaining to slavery.

Resources:

- Image of Monticello
- Monticello website, www.monticello.org
- Placemat template and directions: Plantation Life and Slavery at Monticello

Learning Strategies:

- Placemat is a learning strategy that allows for each group member to participate and be heard. Refer to <http://midterm-eme2040.wikispaces.com/Cooperative+Learning+Strategy-Placemat+and+Round+Robin>

Instructional Process:

- Bell Ringer/Do Now: Have students respond to the following prompt—I believe that Jefferson was a supporter of slavery because OR was against slavery because... Have students share with classmates and briefly discuss.
- If you have access to computers use www.monticello.com for students to research Plantation life and Slavery at Monticello. Students will work with a group of four and create a placemat of the major ideas and concepts. Assign each group a perspective for the center box, explain that they will either draw Monticello from the perspective of an enslaved person living there OR from Thomas Jefferson's perspective. Each group will share their placemat with the class (specifically the image they chose to draw in the center of their placemat.) Discuss.
- Exit Card: What new information did you learn? What surprised you about Jefferson?

Day Three and Four: Monticello and slavery, cont.**Learning Objectives:**

- Students will:
 - Analyze letters written by Thomas Jefferson and two of his slaves, Hannah and John Hemings, to explain the contradiction between Jefferson's ideals as expressed in the Declaration of Independence and his owning of human beings.

Resources:

- The following letters can be found at <http://www.masshist.org/>
 - Agreement with James Hemings, September 15, 1793
 - John Jordan to Thomas Jefferson, October 4, 1805
 - Thomas Jefferson to John Jordan, December 21, 1805
 - John Jordan to Thomas Jefferson, January 7, 1806
 - Thomas Jefferson to John Jordan, February 9, 1806
 - Hannah to Thomas Jefferson, November 15, 1825
 - John Hemings to Thomas Jefferson, August 11, 1825
 - John Hemings to Thomas Jefferson, September 18, 1825
 - Farm Book, page 46
- Document Analysis Sheet

Learning Strategies:

- Snowball: This strategy provides an opportunity for review and summarization of main ideas and allows for active engagement and movement. Students will answer the teacher's prompt or question on a piece of paper and then crumple it up. When directed (the teacher can shout snowball) the students will throw their crumpled up piece of paper across the room. Students will then pick up a "snowball" and share with their shoulder partner/face partner. For more information refer to <http://www.leadership4asp.org/files/resources/engagement%20ring%206.11.pdf>

Instructional Process:

- Bell ringer/Do Now: Snowball—write down one thing you learned about Monticello and one question you have about the enslaved people living on Monticello. Have students locate a partner and share; repeat if desired. Allow for whole class discussion.
- Display Agreement with James Hemings from September 15, 1793 and model for students how to answer the Document Analysis sheet. Discuss.
- Divide class into groups of three or four and distribute to half of the groups the Jordan/Jefferson letters and to the other half of the groups the Hannah and Hemings letters to Jefferson. Each group will present their summary to the class.
- Display the page from the Farm Book that shows the names of slaves at Monticello (before assigning the writing prompt) and discuss with students what they see and feel about the document.
- Writing Prompt: What are your feelings about Thomas Jefferson the slaveholder? Does this new knowledge make you feel differently about our third president? Why or why not?

Day Five: Writing Assignment

Learning Objectives:

- Students will:
 - Write an argumentative essay questioning whether Jefferson lived up to the ideals he wrote in the Declaration of Independence—if all men are created equal why did he continue to own slaves?

Resources:

- Argument/Counter Argument Essay
- Outline with sentence starters

Learning Strategies:

- Refer to <http://depts.washington.edu/owrc/Handouts/Argumentative%20Paper%20Format.pdf> for more information on how to write an argumentative essay.

- For more information on writing in the history classroom google Dr. Bob Bain of the University of Michigan or go to <http://www.licss.org/BainLICSS2011handouts.pdf>
- The Writing Process has five key parts: pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. For more information refer to <http://www.time4writing.com/writing-resources/writing-process/>

Instructional Process:

- Share writing prompt: What are your feelings about Thomas Jefferson the slaveholder? Does this new knowledge make you feel differently about our third president? Why or why not? Then distribute essay directions. The essay topic is: If you were to grade Thomas Jefferson based upon his words and actions regarding slavery what grade would you assign? Refer to the handout for the format and sentence starters.
- Next, students should begin pre-writing (create lists, webs, charts, etc.). Provide feedback as students are working. The first draft can be written in class or assigned as homework depending upon the time restraints and structure of the class.

Thomas Jefferson and Slavery

Thomas Jefferson was a consistent opponent of slavery his whole life. Calling it a “moral depravity” and a “hideous blot,” he believed that slavery presented the greatest threat to the survival of the new American nation. Jefferson also thought that slavery was contrary to the laws of nature, which decreed that everyone had a right to personal liberty. These views were radical in a world where unfree labor was the norm.

At the time of the American Revolution, Jefferson was actively involved in legislation that he hoped would result in slavery’s abolition. In 1778, he drafted a Virginia law that prohibited the importation of enslaved Africans. In 1784, he proposed an ordinance that would ban slavery in the Northwest territories. But Jefferson always maintained that the decision to emancipate slaves would have to be part of a democratic process; abolition would be stymied until slave owners consented to free their human property together in a large-scale act of emancipation. To Jefferson, it was anti-democratic and contrary to the principles of the American Revolution for the federal government to enact abolition or for only a few planters to free their slaves.

Although Jefferson continued to advocate for abolition, the reality was that slavery was only becoming more entrenched. The slave population in Virginia skyrocketed from 292,627 in 1790 to 469,757 in 1830. Jefferson had assumed that the abolition of the slave trade would weaken slavery and hasten its end. Instead, slavery only became more widespread and profitable. To try to erode Virginians’ support for slavery, he discouraged the cultivation of crops heavily dependent on slave labor—tobacco—and encouraged the introduction of crops that needed little or no slave labor—wheat, sugar maples, short-grained rice, olive trees, and wine grapes. But by the 1800s, Virginia’s most valuable commodity and export was neither crops nor land, but slaves.

Jefferson’s belief in the necessity of ending slavery never changed. From the mid-1770s until his death, he advocated the same plan of gradual emancipation. First, the

transatlantic slave trade would be abolished. Second, slaveowners would “improve” slavery’s most violent features, by bettering (Jefferson used the term “ameliorating”) living conditions and moderating physical punishment. Third, all born into slavery after a certain date would be declared free, followed by total abolition. Like others of his day, he supported the removal of newly freed slaves from the United States. The unintended effect of Jefferson’s plan was that his goal of “improving” slavery as a step towards ending it was used as an argument for its perpetuation. Pro-slavery advocates after Jefferson’s death argued that if slavery could be “improved,” abolition was unnecessary.

Jefferson’s belief in the necessity of abolition was intertwined with his racial beliefs. He thought that white Americans and enslaved blacks constituted two “separate nations” who could not live together peacefully in the same country. Jefferson’s belief that blacks were racially inferior and “as incapable as children,” coupled with slaves’ presumed resentment of their former owners, made their removal from the United States an integral part of Jefferson’s emancipation scheme. Influenced by the Haitian Revolution and an aborted rebellion in Virginia in 1800, Jefferson believed that American slaves’ deportation—whether to Africa or the West Indies—was an essential consequence of emancipation.

Jefferson wrote that slavery was like holding “a wolf by the ear, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go.” He thought that his cherished federal union, the world’s first democratic experiment, would be destroyed by slavery. To emancipate slaves on American soil, Jefferson thought, would result in a large-scale race war that would be as brutal and deadly as the slave revolt in Haiti in 1791. But he also believed that to keep slaves in bondage, with part of America in favor of abolition and part of America in favor of perpetuating slavery, could only result in a civil war that would destroy the union. Jefferson’s latter prediction was correct: in 1861, the contest over slavery sparked a bloody civil war and the creation of two nations—Union and Confederacy—in the place of one.

*Source: www.monticello.org

Cornell Notes: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery

Directions: As you and your partner read the handout Thomas Jefferson and Slavery take notes that reflect his beliefs regarding slavery and if it changed over time. Pause after each paragraph to answer the guided reading questions displayed on the board.

Key points and Main Ideas after reading:	Notes during reading:
Summary:	

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Placemat Activity

Directions: Open www.monticello.org and click on Plantation and Slavery from the top menu. Each group member will research and take notes in the placemat about their selected topic. Notes should fully summarize the topic. When finished each group must draw an image in the center of the placemat of Monticello from the perspective of :

(assigned by the teacher).

Topics:

- Mulberry Row at Monticello
- Plantation Agriculture
- Industry on the Plantation
- People of the Plantation

Center of Placemat: Each group member is responsible for creating a “group” image of Monticello for the assigned perspective. Voice bubbles or captions can be included to clarify meaning. Images will be shared with the class, select a spokesperson who is comfortable sharing with the class.

Argumentative Essay

Prompt: If you were to grade Thomas Jefferson based upon his words and actions regarding slavery what grade would you assign and why?

Thesis statement: In my opinion, Thomas Jefferson deserves an _____ (insert grade) because...	Provide evidence to support the grade assigned. Cite specific sources (letter, Declaration of Independence, etc.)

Counterargument: List reasons, facts, events, etc that could raise or lower the “grade” assigned.	Provide evidence to support the raising or lowering of the assigned grade. Cite specific sources (letter, Declaration of Independence, etc.)

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Essay Format: Respond to the prompt using facts, details and examples from the readings and letters, Monticello website, and placemat.

1 st Paragraph: Introduction	If I were to grade Thomas Jefferson based upon his words and actions regarding slavery I would give him an ____ because of _____, _____, and _____ (supporting ideas for paragraph 3).
2 nd Paragraph	Explain why you believe Thomas Jefferson meant when he said “all men are created equal” in 1776 and the connection this statement has to the institution of slavery.
3 rd Paragraph	Restate the three reasons why you gave Thomas Jefferson the grade of ____ and discuss each separately.
4 th Paragraph	Provide three reasons why another person might give him a higher or lower grade.
5 th Paragraph	In my opinion, Thomas Jefferson deserves an ____ for his actions regarding slavery because...

