

Thomas Jefferson's Racial Paradoxes Unit

Description of Students and Setting

This curriculum unit is designed for freshman and sophomore students taking Humanities at the Margarita Muñiz Academy, a dual language high school located in Boston, MA. Margarita Muñiz Academy implements a college preparatory, culturally relevant two-way bilingual curriculum that provides students with the 21st century skills necessary for success in higher education and beyond. The Muñiz Academy has three critical platforms for dual language learning that share the core value of social justice through authentic connections to the community: expeditionary learning, the arts, and technology.

Purpose

This unit exposes students to the personal and political life of Thomas Jefferson from 1760s-1800s. Students will understand the fundamental causes that initiated the American Revolution as well as Thomas Jefferson's views regarding slavery and Native Americans. This unit begins with a basic study of Jefferson's life while exposing students to a close examination of primary sources such as the *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, *the Declaration of Independence*, and *the Notes on the State of Virginia*. This unit focuses on analyzing Thomas Jefferson as a statesman, Founding Father, and author of the Declaration of Independence who penned the words "all men are created equal". Students will examine how Jefferson laid a lasting foundation that pushed for the emancipation of slaves and challenged racist ideology. Yet, as a plantation owner, he possessed hundreds of slaves who he closely managed and exploited as economic resources.

Cited Sources

- Ellis, Joseph. *American Sphinx* (1997). Alfred A. Knoff, Inc: New York
- Bernstein, Richard B. *A Biography of Thomas Jefferson* (2003). Oxford University Press: New York.
- <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/teachers/lesson2.html>
- <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/jefferson/view/>
- <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/era.cfm?eraID=4&smtID=11>
- <http://www.Monticello.org>
- Bernstein, Richard B. *Thomas Jefferson and the Power of Words*.

Lesson #1: Thomas Jefferson: A diligent student, a statesman, Founding Father and a slave-owner.

Instructional Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Read and organize notes from brief biography of Thomas Jefferson.
- Identify major political and personal accomplishments of Thomas Jefferson.

Guiding Questions

- How different is our modern society from the one where Jefferson grew up?
- How has Jefferson been presented to you? (Think about school, media, family members etc).
- How do think Jefferson wanted to be remember by future Americans?

Instructional Resources

- K-T-W (handout #1).
- Copies of Thomas Jefferson's Brief Biography (handout #2).
- Thomas Jefferson's letter: Habits of "A hard student" To Dr. Vine Utley. (handout #3)
- Teacher's Notes and Understandings

Instructional Process

1. Distribute K-T-W to students. Ask students to share with the class information that they already know or think they know about Thomas Jefferson.
2. Describe Thomas Jefferson's early life as well as his influential writings and historical figures in his personal and public life.
3. Students will compare and contrast the living conditions of the colonies to our modern society. (This will help students analyze Jefferson with a historical context).
4. Students will read Thomas Jefferson's brief biography during class (handout #2). Students should write at least one marginal note per paragraph.
5. As a class, students will create a timeline of Thomas Jefferson. Students are encouraged to use notes from reading assigned during class.
6. Handout #3 will be distributed to all students to be completed for homework.

Homework/Assessment

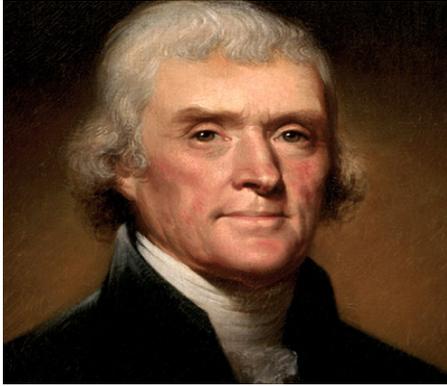
Read Thomas Jefferson's letter *HABITS S OF "A HARD student" To Dr. Vine Utley*, and answer the following questions. Write 3-4 sentences for each response.

1. Based on this letter, what can you conclude about Thomas Jefferson's studying habits and life style? Use specific citation to support your answer.
2. Among the many characteristics of Jefferson, he was an aristocrat, a man fascinated with reading and writing, and a talented lawyer. Do you agree with his statement of " my life has been so much like that of other people" Using evidence from previous readings, explain why you agree or disagree with his statement.
3. Highlight at least two unfamiliar words found in the letter. Search for the definitions in the dictionary and be prepared to share it in the class.

Teacher's Notes and Understandings

(The following notes had been taken from the biography of Thomas Jefferson by R.B. Bernstein)

- Thomas Jefferson was the son of Jane Randolph Jefferson, the daughter of one of Virginia's planter elite.
- His father Peter Jefferson was a surveyor and mapmaker and a descendant of immigrant from Wales.
- In 1757, when Thomas Jefferson was fourteen, his father Peter Jefferson died. Peter Jefferson appointed in his will two of his friends to oversee the family finances and to serve as guardians and mentors to his children.
- Jefferson was Peter's oldest son. Therefore, Jefferson inherited most of his father's estate, including his birthplace
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- In 1760, at the age of seventeen, Jefferson attends the College of William and Mary at Williamsburg.
- William and Mary was the second oldest institution of higher learning after Harvard College in the United States.
- Jefferson attended William and Mary College for two years.
- In 1762, began to work closely with Professor William Small who introduced him to George Wythe, a prominent lawyer.
- Jefferson was an extremely diligent law student, who had a fascination for reading and purchasing books.
- Wythe was a very influential lawyer, who had prepared three generations of Virginian lawyers, but Jefferson was his favorite students.
- Wythe suffered a tragic death after being poisoned in 1806 by one of his nephews angered by his decisions of cutting him out of his will and for choosing an enslaved young male over him.
- One of the first law cases that Jefferson won is known as *Bolling v. Bolling*.
- In 1768, Jefferson is elected by his neighbors to represent them in the House of Burgesses. During this year, Jefferson is only 25 years old. He has attended college. He has a very successful law career and began his political life by representing members of his community in Virginia legislature's lower house.
- During his mid 20s, Jefferson began to plan and supervise the construction of his new home known as Monticello, from the Italian word for little hill.
- On January 1, 1772, Jefferson married Martha Wayles Skelton, a recent widow, who was one of Virginia's wealthiest women.
- Jefferson was a Virginian planter and farmer who borrowed money to buy land and seed to grow the crops.



THOMAS JEFFERSON

Name: _____

Date: _____

K What I Know	T What I Think I know	W What I Want to learn

Thomas Jefferson, A Brief Biography

(Born April 13, 1743, at Shadwell, Virginia; died July 4, 1826, Monticello)

Thomas Jefferson -- author of the Declaration of Independence and the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, third president of the United States, and founder of the University of Virginia -- voiced the aspirations of a new America as no other individual of his era. As public official, historian, philosopher, and plantation owner, he served his country for over five decades.

His father Peter Jefferson was a successful planter and surveyor and his mother Jane Randolph a member of one of Virginia's most distinguished families. Having inherited a considerable landed estate from his father, Jefferson began building Monticello when he was twenty-six years old. Three years later, he married Martha Wayles Skelton, with whom he lived happily for ten years until her death. Their marriage produced six children, but only two survived to adulthood. Jefferson, who never remarried, maintained Monticello as his home throughout his life, always expanding and changing the house.

Jefferson inherited slaves from both his father and father-in-law. In a typical year, he owned about 200, almost half of them under the age of sixteen. About eighty of these lived at Monticello; the others lived on adjacent Albemarle County plantations, and on his Poplar Forest estate in Bedford County, Virginia. Jefferson freed two slaves in his lifetime and five in his will and chose not to pursue two others who ran away. All were members of the Hemings family; the seven he eventually freed were skilled tradesmen.

Having attended the College of William and Mary, Jefferson practiced law and served in local government as a magistrate, county lieutenant, and member of the House of Burgesses in his early professional life. As a member of the Continental Congress, he was chosen in 1776 to draft the Declaration of Independence, which has been regarded ever since as a charter of American and universal liberties. The document proclaims that all men are equal in rights, regardless of birth, wealth, or status, and that the government is the servant, not the master, of the people.

After Jefferson left Congress in 1776, he returned to Virginia and served in the legislature. Elected governor from 1779 to 1781, he suffered an inquiry into his conduct during his last year in office that, although finally fully repudiated, left him with a life-long prickliness in the face of criticism.

During the brief private interval in his life following his governorship, Jefferson wrote Notes on the State of Virginia. In 1784, he entered public service again, in France, first as trade commissioner and then as Benjamin Franklin's successor as minister. During this period, he avidly studied European culture, sending home to Monticello, books, seeds and plants, statues and architectural drawings, scientific instruments, and information.

In 1790 he accepted the post of secretary of state under his friend George Washington. His tenure was marked by his opposition to the pro-British policies of Alexander Hamilton. In 1796,

Handout #2

as the presidential candidate of the Democratic Republicans, he became vice-president after losing to John Adams by three electoral votes.

Four years later, he defeated Adams and became president, the first peaceful transfer of authority from one party to another in the history of the young nation. Perhaps the most notable achievements of his first term were the purchase of the Louisiana Territory in 1803 and his support of the Lewis and Clark expedition. His second term, a time when he encountered more difficulties on both the domestic and foreign fronts, is most remembered for his efforts to maintain neutrality in the midst of the conflict between Britain and France; his efforts did not avert war with Britain in 1812.

Jefferson was succeeded as president in 1809 by his friend James Madison, and during the last seventeen years of his life, he remained at Monticello. During this period, he sold his collection of books to the government to form the nucleus of the Library of Congress. Jefferson embarked on his last great public service at the age of seventy-six, with the founding of the University of Virginia. He spearheaded the legislative campaign for its charter, secured its location, designed its buildings, planned its curriculum, and served as the first rector.

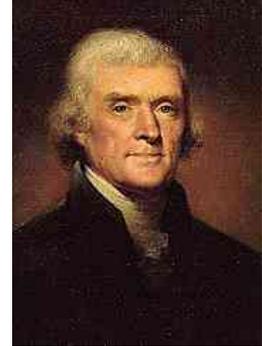
Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, just hours before his close friend John Adams, on the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. He was eighty-three years old, the holder of large debts, but according to all evidence a very optimistic man.

It was Jefferson's wish that his tomb stone reflect the things that he had given the people, not the things that the people had given to him. It is for this reason that Thomas Jefferson's epitaph reads:

HERE WAS BURIED
THOMAS JEFFERSON
AUTHOR OF THE
DECLARATION
OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE
OF THE
STATUTE OF VIRGINIA
FOR
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
AND FATHER OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
BORN APRIL 2, 1743 O.S.
DIED JULY 4. 1826

**HABITS OF "A HARD STUDENT" To Dr. Vine Utley
Monticello, March 21, 1819**

SIR, -- Your letter of February the 18th came to hand on the 1st instant; and the request of the history of my physical habits would have puzzled me not a little, had it not been for the model with which you accompanied it, of Doctor Rush's answer to a similar inquiry. I live so much like other people, that I might refer to ordinary life as the history of my own. Like my friend the Doctor, I have lived temperately, eating little animal food, and that not as an aliment, so much as a condiment for the vegetables, which constitute my principal diet. I double, however, the Doctor's glass and a half of wine, and even treble it with a friend; but halve its effects by drinking the weak wines only. The ardent wines I cannot drink, nor do I use ardent spirits in any form. Malt liquors and cider are my table drinks, and my breakfast, like that also of my friend, is of tea and coffee. I have been blest with organs of digestion which accept and concoct, without ever murmuring, whatever the palate chooses to consign to them, and I have not yet lost a tooth by age. I was a hard student until I entered on the business of life, the duties of which leave no idle time to those disposed to fulfil them; and now, retired, and at the age of seventy-six, I am again a hard student. Indeed, my fondness for reading and study revolts me from the drudgery of letter writing. And a stiff wrist, the consequence of an early dislocation, makes writing both slow and painful.



I am not so regular in my sleep as the Doctor says he was, devoting to it from five to eight hours, according as my company or the book I am reading interests me; and I never go to bed without an hour, or half hour's previous reading of something moral, whereon to ruminate in the intervals of sleep. But whether I retire to bed early or late, I rise with the sun. I use spectacles at night, but not necessarily in the day, unless in reading small print. My hearing is distinct in particular conversation, but confused when several voices cross each other, which unfits me for the society of the table. I have been more fortunate than my friend in the article of health. So free from catarrhs that I have not had one, (in the breast, I mean) on an average of eight or ten years through life. I ascribe this exemption partly to the habit of bathing my feet in cold water every morning, for sixty years past. A fever of more than twenty-four hours I have not had above two or three times in my life. A periodical headache has afflicted me occasionally, once, perhaps, in six or eight years, for two or three weeks at a time, which seems now to have left me; and except on a late occasion of indisposition, I enjoy good health; too feeble, indeed, to walk much, but riding without fatigue six or eight miles a day, and sometimes thirty or forty. I may end these egotisms, therefore, as I began, by saying that my life has been so much like that of other people, that I might say with Horace, to every one "nomine mutato, narratur fabula de te."

I must not end, however, without due thanks for the kind sentiments of regard you are so good as to express towards myself; and with my acknowledgments for these, be pleased to accept the assurances of my respect and esteem.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, which reads "Th: Jefferson".

Lesson #2: Analyzing the Declaration of Independence

Instructional Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Review how economic factors such as restrictions on exports and “taxation without representation” led to the American Revolution.
- Interpret and grasp meaning on key concepts including the phrase “All Men Are Created Equal” in the historical context of the Declaration of Independence.
- Examine principles expressed in both the rough draft and final version of the Declaration of Independence.

Guiding Questions

- What historical events led Jefferson to draft the Declaration of Independence?
- What does equality mean to you?
- Which version of the Declaration of Independence is best or works better for you?
- Why do you think Jefferson blamed King George III for slavery, if this system had been established before the king was born? Do you believe this is an effective argument? Explain.

Instructional Resources

Rough draft of the Declaration of Independence.

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/rough-draft-of-the-declaration-of-independence/>

Thomas Jefferson’s Address of Slavery in the Declaration of Independence (handout #4).

Instructional Process

1. Distribute handouts, and copies of the rough draft and final version of the Declaration of Independence signed by the Second Continental Congress. Mention to students that Thomas Jefferson was very disappointed at the edits made on his rough draft. Emphasize that Jefferson decided to send copies of his rough draft to his closest friends.
2. Remind students that they will be reading passages from the Declaration of Independence throughout the week. For today’s lesson, students will focus on the passage addressing slavery in the declaration.
3. Teacher will read the passage to the class for clarification on new terminology. Students will read individually and complete the questions to be discussed in class.

Homework/Assessment

- Review the list of guiding principles expressed in the Declaration of Independence, choose one principle that you feel is the most important to you. Explain why it is significant for this principle to be included in the declaration.
- Write one persuasive paragraph suggesting a new principle that should have been added to the declaration (keep in mind the historical period, you can consider women’s rights, land distribution etc).

Name _____ Date: _____

Thomas Jefferson’s Address of Slavery in the Declaration of Independence

Read the following passage from Thomas Jefferson’s rough draft of the Declaration of Independence and answer the questions.

"[H]e [the king of Britain] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. this piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce: and that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people upon whom he also obtruded them; thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another."

1. Who is Jefferson blaming for the “slave market” in the colonies? Cite specific examples from the document.

2. Based on the primary document, what are Jefferson’s views on slavery?

3. Why do you think that other Founding Fathers decided to omit this passage from the Declaration of Independence?

Lesson#3: Thomas Jefferson's and Slavery

Instructional Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Interpret passages from the *Notes on the State of Virginia*.
- Use information and facts to understand Thomas Jefferson's conflicting views on slavery.
- Examine Jefferson's letters written to prominent Virginian planters regarding the emancipation of slaves.

Guiding Questions

- Can individuals contradict themselves with their words or actions? Provide examples of real-life scenarios.
- How was Jefferson able to write and advocate for the right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness and yet be a slave owner?
- Besides enslaved African Americans, what other groups of people did not have access to the rights and treatment granted by the Declaration of Independence in 1776?
- Do you believe that there is slavery in our society today? Provide examples. How do consumers and politicians support or condemn practices of modern slavery?

Instructional Resources

Notes on the State of Virginia: Views of the founders on slaves (handout #5).

http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/jeffvir.asp

Notes on the State of Virginia, Query XVIII: Manners (handout #6).

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/notes-on-the-state-of-virginia-query-xviii-manners/>

Instructional Process

1. Inform students that today they will be responding to a *Do Now*. Ask students to write about a situation/ issue where they experienced conflicting ideas or reactions. For example, buying cheap clothes being manufactured in less economically developed countries such as Sri Lanka where employees are discriminated upon based on gender and race while also being exploited in the workplace. A conflicting reaction could be buying Children's Place clothing for its affordable price while feeling guilty for supporting and maintaining a system of exploitation and injustice.
2. Ask students to volunteer to share their *Do Now* responses.
3. Discuss guiding questions as a whole class.
4. Distribute handout #4. Ask students to answer questions working in pairs.
5. Remind students that *Notes on the State of Virginia* contains strong language that can be offensive and derogatory for many individuals. However, students should try their best to interpret it with a historical context in mind.
6. Students will read individually the passages from handout #6. Before reconvening for a class discussion of the passages, students will share their reactions and responses to the person seating next to them.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Notes on the State of Virginia, Query XVIII
1781

Read the following passage from Thomas Jefferson’s writings of Notes on the State of Virginia, and answer the questions.

“This is so true, that of the proprietors of slaves a very small proportion indeed are ever seen to labor. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever: that considering numbers, nature and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation is among possible events: that it may become probable by supernatural interference! The almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest. - But it is impossible to be temperate and to pursue this subject through the various considerations of policy, of morals, of history natural and civil. We must be contented to hope they will force their way into every one's mind. I think a change already perceptible, since the origin of the present revolution. The spirit of the master is abating, that of the slave rising from the dust, his condition mollifying, the way I hope preparing, under the auspices of heaven, for a total emancipation, and that this is disposed, in the order of events, to be with the consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation.”

1. Based on this passage, what do you think are Thomas Jefferson’s views on slavery? Did he seem to be condemning or supporting it? Use specific citations from the passage to support your claims.

2. Why do you think Jefferson mentioned “I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just...?”

Name: _____ Date: _____

Notes on the State of Virginia

“They have less hair on the face and body. They secrete less by the kidneys, and more by the glands of the skin, which gives them a very strong and disagreeable odour. This greater degree of transpiration renders them more tolerant of heat, and less so of cold than the whites. Perhaps too a difference of structure in the pulmonary apparatus, which a late ingenious experimentalist has discovered to be the principal regulator of animal heat, may have disabled them from extricating, in the act of inspiration, so much of that fluid from the outer air, or obliged them in expiration, to part with more of it. They seem to require less sleep. A black after hard labour through the day, will be induced by the slightest amusements to sit up till midnight, or later, though knowing he must be out with the first dawn of the morning. They are at least as brave, and more adventuresome. But this may perhaps proceed from a want of forethought, which prevents their seeing a danger till it be present..- When present, they do not go through it with more coolness or steadiness than the whites. They are more ardent after their female: but love seems with them to be more an eager desire, than a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation. Their griefs are transient. Those numberless afflictions, which render it doubtful whether heaven has given life to us in mercy or in wrath, are less felt, and sooner forgotten with them.

In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection. To this must be ascribed their disposition to sleep when abstracted from their diversions, and unemployed in labor. An animal whose body is at rest, and who does not reflect, must be disposed to sleep of course. Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous. It would be unfair to follow them to Africa for this investigation.

We will consider them here, on the same stage with the whites, and where the facts are not apocryphal on which a judgment is to be formed. It will be right to make great allowances for the difference of condition, of education, of conversation, of the sphere in which they move. Many millions of them have been brought to, and born in America. Most of them indeed have been confined to tillage, to their own homes, and their own society: yet many have been so situated, that they might have availed themselves of the conversation of their masters; many have been brought up to the handicraft arts, and from that circumstance have always been associated with the whites.”

Analysis Questions

1. How does Jefferson describe black people in Virginia? How does he compare whites and blacks? Explain with specific details

2. From the previous readings completed during class (Exp: Declaration of Independence), do you believe that Jefferson had conflicted views about slavery. Explain with details.

3. What reactions do you feel after reading these famous passages?

Supplementary Activities

- Ask students to take out *Thomas Jefferson: A Brief Biography*. Have one volunteer read to the class Jefferson's epitaph. Remind students that Jefferson himself composed his epitaph. Engage students in the following questions:

HERE WAS BURIED
THOMAS JEFFERSON
AUTHOR OF THE
DECLARATION
OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE
OF THE
STATUTE OF VIRGINIA
FOR
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
AND FATHER OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
BORN APRIL 2, 1743 O.S.
DIED JULY 4, 1826

1. Why do you think Thomas Jefferson decided to compose his own epitaph? What are the benefits of writing your own epitaph especially if you are a political figure?

2. Based on the biographical facts and readings that you have completed on Thomas Jefferson, write 2-3 paragraphs describing any important qualities, practices or accomplishments that Jefferson omitted from his epitaph. Be specific and explain why you think he did it.
