

**Title:**

***Thomas Jefferson and his Pursuit of Truth, Beauty and Excellence***

**Description:** As a participant of NEH Institute: Thomas Jefferson: Personality, Character, and Public Life, I had the opportunity to hang around super talented teachers from various parts of the United States, and also scholars such as Peter Gibbon, Richard Bernstein, Joan Musbach, Yale University's Joanne Freeman, and the University of Virginia's Peter Onuf. As participants we read, we attended lectures, we analyzed and viewed Thomas Jefferson and his implications in our classrooms and in society today.

These intellectual gatherings have been more fulfilling that I could have ever expected. I know my students are hungry for knowledge and I will be able to offer them richer lessons about the founding generation.

We were not confined to the campus of Boston University. We visited two institutions of informal learning: The Adams National Historical Park and the Massachusetts Historical Society. These cultural institutions are important for two reasons. One reason is that so much knowledge is locked away in them. Teachers benefit from these places because they can reinforce their prior knowledge and become more confident and vital in their practice...like tour guides. Another reason is that critical thinking is not only confined to the classroom. Our students, by observing objects in a museum learn how to learn by asking and/or reframing their questions. That curiosity and the ability to learn new things are required to become thinkers, who ask the kind of questions that lead to informed decisions during the liberated hours in this democratic society. A gift from Thomas Jefferson and his fellow Founders.

**Description of the Students and Setting(s):** The students attend Middle School (MS) 301 in the Morrisania section of the Bronx. Historically, Lewis Morris, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and the owner of Morrisania proposed in 1790, his property, as the site of the future capital of the United States of America. Today we have a large number of students who come from food insecure households. There is a great cultural diversity with students for instance, of Dominican, Bengali, Jamaican, Guinea, Guyanese, Ghanaian heritage.

Morrisania is also a place where mothers do not purchase guns for protection. They see what guns have done daily. They know that only quality education, they themselves never received, will change the fate of their treasured children.

**Purpose/Big Idea:** I wanted to shine a spotlight on Thomas Jefferson, an exceptionally accomplished man and polymath who loved books so much he offered his country a book palace: the Library of Congress the largest and most inclusive source of knowledge in the world. I wanted to analyze the Thomas Jefferson who was sworn in as third president of a tiny and very young United States and "expanded the neighborhood with the Louisiana Purchase. Also, Thomas Jefferson, the author of a text—written with balance and eloquence, as well as clarity—associated with liberty, yet he was a slave driver. This paradox gave him a chameleon quality

that makes him a character who holds a promise of an interesting American story for young minds.

In this project we will speak more about the Declaration of Independence—the text behind which why our students celebrate July 4 with hotdogs, parades, displays of American flags, and awesome fireworks in the dark.

This lesson will remind students that having independence since 1776 does not mean that life will be fair today. Also, that the study of history is essential to comprehend the values and institutions that bind us as Americans and citizens of the world. Even though the United States is an increasingly non-white country as compared to new states of 1776, all men and women have equal rights.

## **Historical Biography**

### **Learning Objectives**

With Thomas Jefferson as a focal point, we will introduce a model of a biography highlighting interrelated elements of achievement and contributions to the American experience, including his complex character traits, primary and sources of information, chronological order, and author's point of view.

Students will; define the word “ revolution “ and distinguish between revolution and rebellion.

Describe the connection between the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution.

Construct a chronology of Thomas Jefferson's life.

Write a narrative describing the most significant aspects of Thomas Jefferson's life.

Analyze the impact of the ideas of the Declaration of Independence on popular culture in their own life time.

### **Materials**

Nickel (5 cent-coin)

Books: Thomas Jefferson by Marvin Barrett\

American Revolution by Mary Pope Osborne

If You Lived at the Time of the American Revolution by Kay Moore

Martin Luther King Jr.'s “ I have a dream “ speech

The Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson

### **Music**

Songs : “ Get Up, Stand Up “ by Bob Marley

“ Justice and Independence” John Cougar Mellencamp CD

Photograph: Mt. Rushmore

### **Instructional Process**

1. Building Background—Discuss the American Revolution and the reason the Declaration of Independence was signed by 56 delegates, including the principal author of the text and the subject of this lesson : Thomas Jefferson.
2. a. Write the word REVOLUTION on the board.  
b. Explain that the word “revolution” is what happens when the people of a country make an attempt to change the way a country is governed along with the economy and culture

of everyday life. In contrast, a rebellion is an organized resistance to a government aiming not to break with the past but very often returning to it.

C. Have students make list of 5-7 words you think of when you see the word REVOLUTION. Next, write a correct sentence using one of the words on your list.

d. Make a class list on the board where each student contributes at least one word.

e. Review the list with class and explain the relevance of each of the words that fit within the definition/context of the word REVOLUTION and exclude the words that do not fit the definition/context.

3. a. Have students examine Thomas Jefferson's face on the nickel.

b. Next, Ask students to look a picture of the four figures sculpted on Mt. Rushmore and identify Thomas Jefferson and say: a. "What qualities do you see in his face?"

Say: "Write for five minutes about the inferences you can make about the inferences you can make about Thomas Jefferson's outlook on life." (For ELL students, invite volunteers to translate a phrase or two of what you are saying about the activity with the nickel or photograph.)

c. Volunteers will share their responses to the classroom and write a couple responses on the board.

#### Group Activity

1. Say to the class that a strong historical biography shows the contribution of the subject and also why the subject should be remembered and whether they are worthy of a narrative.

2. A. Divide the class into groups of five.

B. Remind students that biographies are often written in chronological order.

Group 1: Read Thomas Jefferson by Marvin Barrett and from your reading

a. Create a timeline chronicling major events in Thomas Jefferson's life using the following dates/years: 1743, 1767, 1772, 1775, Summer 1776, 1779, 1784-1789, 1796, 1800, 1803, 1804, 1805, 1826

b. Students will use their timeline to write a paragraph describing in more detail the events on the timeline. Remind students to use transition words such as: first, early, after, during, when, etc. Have students add events or details they found significant or interesting to the paragraph.

Group 2: Students will read "I have the dream" speech by Martin Luther King Jr. and The Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson

Write one paragraph identifying similarities between Martin Luther King Jr's notion of "equality" with Thomas Jefferson's. Remind students to use words/phrases such as "both," "like," "same," "similar," "in common."

Group 3:

--Provide lyrics of "Justice and Independence" by John Cougar Mellencamp and play the song

Using both the lyrics and the song\:

--Have students identify their favorite

- Describe how the song makes them feel
- students will write a paragraph describing how this song could be a soundtrack for the Declaration of Independence.

Group 4:

- Provide lyrics and listen to “Get Up, Stand Up” by Bob Marley

Using both the lyrics and the song

- Have students identify their favorite
- Describe how the song makes them feel
- Interpret the lines: “Get up, stand up, keep on struggling on. Don’t give up the fight.”
- students will write a paragraph describing how this song could be a soundtrack for the Declaration of Independence.

Group 5:

After reading the Book, “ If You Lived at a Time of the American Revolution” students:

- Write their own one-day account of a fictional youth (ages 12-14) who lived on the day July 4, 1776.

3. After Group Activities—groups will share their written responses with the rest of the class.
4. **Writing Time:** Have students answer the following:

***Essential Question:***

- a. Does the phrase “all men are created equal “ mean the same today as it did when it was written?

Write a five-paragraph essay in response to this question:

- Be sure to include the following:

Introduction

State your position

Pros/Cons

Conclusion

- You may use independent research to add details to your argument

Visual for Quick Write



Links for song lyrics:  
John Cougar Mellencamp's, "Justice and Independence"

<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/johncougarmellencamp/justiceandindependence85.html>

Bob Marley's, "Get up Stand Up"

[http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/bob+marley/get+up+stand+up\\_20021743.html](http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/bob+marley/get+up+stand+up_20021743.html)