

Thomas Jefferson:
Literature for
Elementary School Students

Erin E. Komendat
Albion Central School District
Albion, New York
Grade 5 Teacher
July 2013

Rational for Project:

No matter the age, Thomas Jefferson is a tricky subject to approach with students. Jefferson as two characters: the hero and the villain, and the challenge of doing both sides of this paradox justice in the classroom has been an issue for years. In many ways, it will probably always be an issue.

Being an *elementary* school teacher takes that challenge to another level. Throughout this institute, we have been presented materials that have provided insights into Jefferson's persona and career. While the basic, historical facts regarding this man are completely appropriate to present to ten year olds, the more controversial topics we have learned about are a struggle. As an educator, I have committed my career to teach my students to be not only learners, but *thinkers*. I want them to be able to form opinions and views on a wide range of topics. finding materials that are *appropriate* on all levels (academically, historically, morally, developmentally, etc) is a challenge. Many primary sources and biographical information on Jefferson are WAY BEYOND what can be shared with elementary students. adaptations need to be made.

this project offers a set of materials to overcome both of these problems. The following is a collection of elementary level books that broach a sampling of Jefferson topics. For each of the three titles, I have provided a summary, review and analysis, lesson suggestions, and CLOSE reading comprehension questions that are dependent on text based evidence to answer.

Worst of Friends

Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and the True Story of an American Feud

By Suzanne Tripp Jurmain

Publisher: Dutton Juvenile

Summary: the introduction of this picture book poses the question of "Can Presidents Be Pals?" Beginning with the early and personal lives of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, and concluding with the letters that "rekindled" the Jefferson/Adams relationship at the end of their lives, Jurmain describes the journey of these two Revolutionary figures and how their friendship, helped shape the foundation of this country. Each man's character and political views are addressed, and events including the writing of the Declaration of Independence, the second and third presidential elections, and their retirements are outlined in narrative fashion.

Analysis: With a Lexile level of 920, this text is ideal for students in the upper elementary grades. Rich with figurative language and high levels of academic and content based vocabulary, Jurmain takes a fun, narrative approach to describing the intense and historically significant Jefferson/Adams relationship. The historical references are accurate, although, Jurmain tip toes around some major events, such as the role of vice president of Jefferson under President Adams and the deterioration of their friendship. The author uses a combination of direct quotations and kid-friendly language to present [this key Jeffersonian element] what key element? in a manner deemed appropriate for the grade and developmental level.

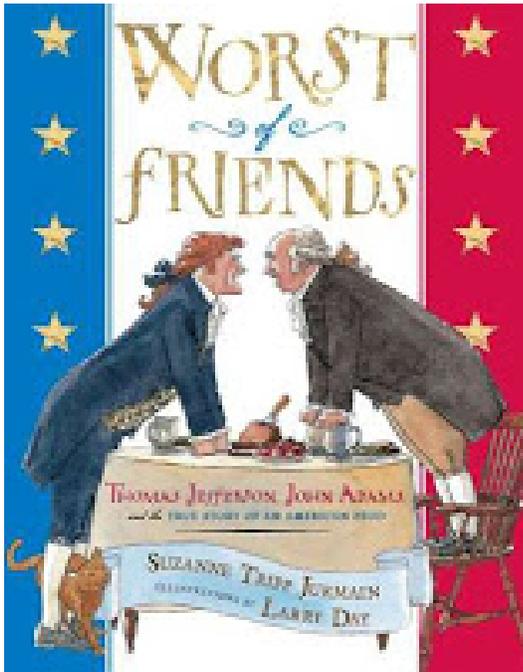
Activity/Lesson Ideas:

1. Compare and Contrast (Reading and Writing): Students could examine the relationship of Jefferson and Adams through compare and contrast comprehension and writing activities. Using a variety of graphic organizers, transitional writing vocabulary, and appropriate compare and contrast writing formats, students will utilize information from the text to identify and analyze the similarities and difference between these two figures.
2. Figurative Language (Reading and Writing): Beginning with the metaphor of "pickles and ice cream" on the first few pages, and addressing such historical vocabulary as "fricasseed bullfrog," the author has created a narrative chock-full of figurative language used to describe Jefferson and Adams. Identifying the different types of language and implementation of related activities can be completed on a variety of cognitive levels and through multi-intelligence activities.
3. Political Debate (Language Arts and Social Studies): Students can utilize gathered information from previous activities to organize a debate between Jefferson and Adams. Students can develop answers on variety of topics (ex: slavery, political parties, role of government) and participate in a verbal debate. At least offer a proposition to be debated.

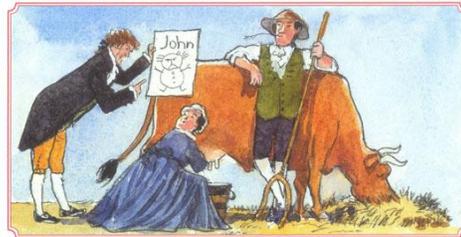
CLOSE Reading Questions:

1. On page 1, the author asks "can presidents be pals?" How did the author answer this question? *Use details and evidence from the text to support your answer.*
2. At the beginning of the book, what clues showed you that Tom and John were the best of friends?

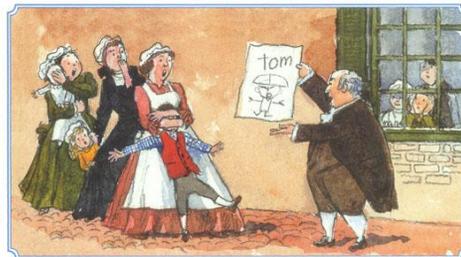
3. How does the author explain why Tom and John stopped being friends?
4. Use evidence to describe the difference between how Tom and John thought the government should be run?
5. Towards the end of the text, how does the author describe the way Tom and John became friends again?



Soon, Tom told all the people he knew that John was "vain, suspicious, irritable, stubborn, and wrong."



And John told all the people he knew that Tom was "weak, confused, uninformed, and ignorant."



Thomas Jefferson

A

Nation

al Geographic Biography

By: Cheryl Harness

Publisher: National Geographic Children's Books

2007

ISBN-10: 1426300433

Summary: In this illustrated biography of Jefferson, author Cheryl Harness looks at this historical figure from every angle. Detailing a full description of his early life in Virginia, Harness alludes to the overall importance of education in Jefferson's life and career. This type of introduction lends to an overall trend in this particular biography: Jefferson was a man of many worlds. Whether it be about law, science, philosophy, politics, diplomacy, or farming, Harness describes in precise detail the life of someone characterized by precise detail, including both heroic and grim details.

Analysis: While the pictures in this text are IMMACULATE, the text is lengthy and contains difficult academic vocabulary. The Lexile level of this text is 1030, making it a challenge for even the higher level elementary student. Overall, the text may be too long to use in one sitting, but would be ideal for enrichment activities in both Reading and

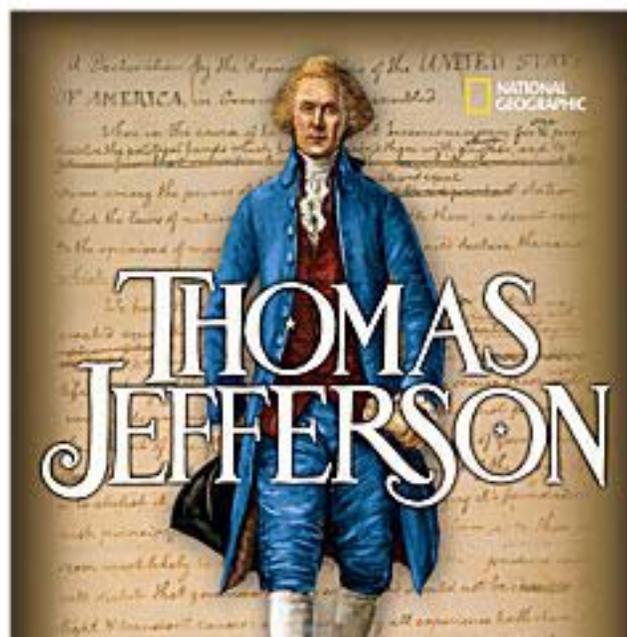
Social Studies. In general, the historical information presented in the biography is accurate, and, at times, even reaches into the more controversial aspects of Jefferson's life, including his views on slavery and his relationship with Sally Hemmings. Although these topics may be difficult to approach in an elementary classroom, Harness broaches the subject tactfully. The most remarkable feature of this book are the detailed pictures. Many are filled with notes, captions, maps, and charts that enhance the historical content and interest level.

Activity/Lesson Ideas (Common Core Learning Standards Grade 5):

1. Graphic Sources (Social Studies and English Language Arts): An important upper elementary school reading comprehension skill is utilizing and analyzing graphic resources found throughout both fiction and non-fiction text. This book would be an excellent resource to teach about different types of resources! Students could use this book to further understanding of captions and map reading, as well as gathering information facilitating comprehension.
2. Biography Genre Study (Social Studies and English Language Arts): *National Geographic* has published a series of presidential biographies in a similar format. Based on Lexile and interest levels, students could work in groups to research a president using this series, completing various, multidisciplinary biography projects.

CLOSE Reading Questions:

1. Use evidence from the text to support the fact that education was important to Thomas Jefferson.
2. Use clues from page 24 to describe the personal troubles Jefferson experienced.
3. What does the picture on pages 32-33 show the reader? *Use evidence and details from the text to support your answer*
4. Use the map and details on pages 34-35 to explain the importance of Lewis and Clark to Jefferson's presidency.
5. Using the evidence on page 37, summarize why Monticello was so important to Jefferson.



Jefferson's Sons

A Founding Father's Secret Children

By: Kimberley Brubaker Bradley

Publisher: Puffin

2013

ISBN-10: 0142421847

Summary: This young adult novel spins a narrative of the lives of three African American slave boys and their lives revolving around Thomas Jefferson at Monticello. Two of these boys, Beverly and Madison (Maddy), were the sons of Jefferson's slave, Sally Hemmings, and the plot centers around the notion that Jefferson is indeed their father. The other main character is Peter Fossett, son of Jefferson's blacksmith and grandchild of Mary Hemmings, another Jefferson slave. While Peter is not defined as Jefferson's child, the unfortunate and chronicled tale of Peter's interactions and experiences at Monticello make his story just as relevant and intriguing as Beverly and Maddy. Starting off as young boys and weaving a tale through young adulthood, Bradley paints a historical, memorable, and endearing glimpse at one of the most secretive and troubling notions in Jefferson's history.

Analysis: This novel is a well-constructed balance of what Bradley believes to be true, (that the two boys were the children of Thomas Jefferson) and concrete evidence. While many events in the novel, such as the one-on-one interactions between Bev, Maddy, and Jefferson and their mother's emanate reactions ("Do not call that man Papa!"), should most likely be categorized as historical fiction, her evidence of real events is conclusive with the information gathered from Jefferson research. I found this to be particularly true through her account of the Fossett family, as well as in her description of the character and temperament of Jefferson's most prevalent daughter, Martha(Patsy) in regards to the Hemmings. With a Lexile level of 600, this novel is an easy read for most upper elementary learners, and will be of interest to most readers. The vocabulary is approachable, and even those without a historical background regarding Jefferson will find it easy to follow and comprehend. The greatest value I find in this book is how phenomenally it balances a controversial, almost taboo, Jefferson topic and child friendliness. Ultimately, it broaches a topic I never thought I could approach in elementary school and makes it appropriate for the classroom.

Activity/Lesson Ideas:

1. Character Study Activities (*Since this novel is told from the three boys' points of view, character analysis is essential and pertinent to the comprehension of the novel in both historical and literary realms*).
- "I Am..." or Diamante Poetry: character analysis poems that use a particular writing formula to express traits and perspectives
 - Artifact Boxes and "From the Desk of..." Projects; students use character traits and details from the story to create one of two projects. Artifact boxes would be a

collection of objects that represent and correlate with the character. The desk project entails the same notion, however, students create a fictional desktop for the character.

- "Dear Master Jefferson..." letters: Students create a fictional letter from the point of view of one of the boys, expressing feelings and thoughts that can be supported through the evidence in the book.

CLOSE Reading Questions:

Beverly (pages 1-115)

1. On page 3, what did the author mean when he said "his stomach gave a little twist, almost like he was hungry?"
2. What clues does the author give about Beverly wanting to be close to his father?
Use details and evidence from the text to support your answer.
3. Explain, using evidence, how both Maddy and Beverly got their names.
4. Why is the word "tranquility" important to Beverly's story?
5. On page 87, what did Mama wish for Beverly?

Maddy (pages 116-286)

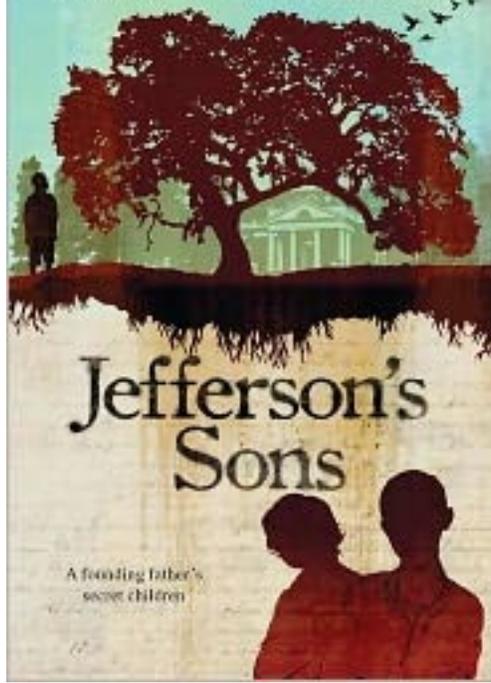
1. what did James mean when he said "who ever heard of a book on Mulberry Row?" (page 122)
2. What clues does the author give to explain why Maddy "loved musical words?"
3. Explain, using evidence, why Maddy and the mockingbird are similar?
4. why was Maddy so upset when Eston played "Money Musk" on the violin? (page 186)
5. why did Maddy feel, for the first time ever, that he had a father? (page 257)

I'm not sure that I would give a specific page number for answering the question. I fear it will make students too inclined to only read the page from which accountability is required.

Peter (pages 287-360)

1. On page 325, Maddy teaches Peter an important lesson. What is it? Why is it important?

KIMBERLY BRUBAKER BRADLEY



Jefferson's Sons

A founding father's
secret children

