

1. Title and Description:

***Thomas Jefferson: Founding Father, Modern Man***

This institute has helped me gain useful insights to share with my students. I did not previously know how relevant and prescient some of Jefferson's writings were; yet, in others, he seems conflicted to the point of being almost hypocritical. I try to emphasize current events as much as possible, and middle schoolers are very concerned with what is and isn't "fair." This unit will address both of these issues. While Jefferson and other Founding Fathers are held in high regard by Americans—often rightfully so—they were not perfect. The popular cliché "nobody's perfect" applies to everyone, including the Founding Fathers. This is evident when studying Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence. Based on his letters and writings we see that, in some aspects, Jefferson was very progressive and "modern" in his thinking. In others, however, he was stuck in his ways and reflected the "old" thinking of the time.

2. Students and Setting:

This unit is designed for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in a public school setting. It is designed to take four, 50-minute class periods.

3. Purpose or Big Idea:

By discussing modern American views on the issues of race, the economy, and war/foreign relations, students will gain a perspective on current events in their nation while comparing their own views with those of Thomas Jefferson. It is important for students to understand the history of our nation while being aware of the present. This well-rounded education will allow them to be aware of the issues facing our nation when it comes time for them to be key participants in our democracy.

In other words...

"It may be an easy thing to make a Republic; but it is a very laborious thing to make republicans; and woe to the republic that rests upon no better foundations than ignorance, selfishness, and passion"—Horace Mann

## **Day 1:**

**Outcome or objective:** Students will explore the issue of racial discrimination that still exists today despite the progress our nation has made since Jefferson's time.

### **Instructional Resources:**

Trayvon Martin case facts (<http://www.cnn.com/2013/06/05/us/trayvon-martin-shooting-fast-facts>)

"President Offers a Personal Take on Race in U.S." (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/20/us/in-wake-of-zimmerman-verdict-obama-makes-extensive-statement-on-race-in-america.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>)

Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration of Independence

(<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/declara/ruffdrft.html>)

"Thomas Jefferson on the African Race" worksheet (<http://www.historytools.org/sources/Jefferson-Race.pdf>)

"Jefferson and Slavery" (<http://classroom.monticello.org/kids/resources/profile/263/Middle/Jefferson-and-Slavery/>)

1. Do Now activity (7 mins):  
Have the students answer:

*Do you think racism still exists in America today? Give one example as evidence for your thinking.*

Students will have ~2 minutes to think and write, 2 minutes to share and discuss with a partner, and 3 minutes for a brief class share and discussion.

2. Race in America Today (20 mins):  
Explain to students the Trayvon Martin case and verdict (or, in some cases, refresh their memories). Be sure to present only the *facts*, not your own opinion of the case.

Explain that race, particularly the status of African-Americans, was an important topic surrounding the case. Hand out the article "President Offers a Personal Take on Race in U.S." and ask the students to take a few minutes to read it to themselves. Some vocabulary such as turbulent, anguished, foiled, etc. may need to be defined.

Discuss with students their views on President Obama's comments. Some guiding questions can be:

*What does the fact that our President is black tell us about race in America today? Does this prove that racism is dead in America?*

*How do you think young black males feel as a result of this case?*

*Do you think the jury made the right decision? Why or why not?*

*What more do you need to know to answer the previous question? How could you gain that information?*

3. Jefferson's Views on Race and Slavery (~20 mins):  
Hand out, or project on the board, a specific section of Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration of Independence, which lists grievances against the English King George III:

*"he 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, capturing & 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, & 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."*

Consider re-writing this into modern English—and give students your modified version along with the original. Ask the students:

*List the things Jefferson is blaming on King George III in this section. Jefferson also wrote in this document the famous words "We hold these truths to be sacred & undeniable; that all men are created equal & independent, that from that equal creation they derive rights inherent & inalienable..." What do you think he was referring to in this section? Who do you think 'all men' includes?*

Next, examine with the students a specific section of Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* by using the worksheet "Thomas Jefferson on the African Race," which contains excerpts of *Notes* that shows some of Jefferson's unfortunate views on people of African descent. In small groups, have students read and answer the discussion questions on the worksheet.

4. Homework Assignment and wrap-up (3 mins):

Ask the students: *What do you think about Jefferson's words in these documents? What does this tell us about Jefferson and the times in which he lived?*

For homework, have students read the article "Jefferson and Slavery" and reflect on it in their History journals. They should answer the following questions:

1. *Do you think Jefferson was a hypocrite? Why or why not?*
2. *What was the main reason Jefferson wanted his slaves sold, rather than freed, after his death?*
3. *Explain Jefferson's views on two of today's issues of race, finances, or labor. List two of his views or actions that would not be accepted by most Americans today.*

## **Day 2:**

**Outcome or objective:** Students will brainstorm vocabulary words relating to the economy to explain Jefferson's attitudes toward the national debt.

### **Instructional Resources:**

Dictionaries

Large paper, markers

Computer/projection screen

Handout from *American Sphinx* by Joseph J. Ellis (p. 185-186)

1. HW Check and Review (8 mins):

While teacher is checking for completion of last night's homework assignment, have students share with a partner what they wrote for last night's homework assignment. When this is finished, lead a brief class discussion on Jefferson and whether or not he was a hypocrite by today's standards. Review with them the answers to questions 2 and 3.

2. Do Now activity (15-20 mins):

Economy word splash activity. Distribute dictionaries to the students. On a blank sheet of paper, have students write "Economy" in the middle of their page. Around that word, have them write down any words they know that relate to the word "Economy." Next to each word they can think of, have them write down the definition of that word. In groups of 3-4, have students complete a larger word splash that combines their economy-related words. Have groups briefly share their words with the class.

3. Jefferson's Views on the Economy (20 mins):

Explain to the students the concept of debt. Ask the class what they think this word means and take a student volunteer to explain it. Briefly demonstrate to the class the concept of the national debt and show them a website that shows the shocking figure and its rapid escalation (<http://www.nationaldebtclocks.org/debtclock/unitedstates> is one). Explain to the students that the national debt, while somewhat different, was of similar concern to Jefferson in his time.

Show the video clip from HBO's series *John Adams* in which Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and John Adams, among others, are discussing the issue of the national debt (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrxKOO0nKwc>). It will be helpful to explain at the beginning who is who.

Ask the students the following questions:

*What is Jefferson's concern with the national debt? How does he express this?*

Read to the students, or hand out copies, from pages 185-186 of Joseph J. Ellis's *American Sphinx*:

"But (Jefferson's) obsession with public debt rested cheek by jowl with his own cavalier way with his personal debt. Just how this intriguing disjunction between personal habit and public policy actually operated inside Jefferson's character is difficult to capture confidently, though paradox is obviously at work. At the personal level Jefferson's intricate record-keeping probably bolstered his false confidence that his own debt problem was under control. (It clearly was not,

and the decision to rebuild Monticello helped assure that it never would be.) The looming decision to end his retirement and reenter politics could be seen, then, as a flight from the apparently intractable problem of his personal indebtedness; he would solve publicly what he could not solve privately. Whatever the interactive pattern might have been, it seems fair to say that the problem of debt haunted him at both levels, that his hatred of Hamilton was fueled by personal demons he did not fully understand himself and that the process of thinking about returning to public life involved a complex blend of emotional and ideological considerations.”

Ellis, Joseph J. *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996 (pp. 185-186).

Explain to the students how Jefferson was, in fact, deeply in debt at a personal level (as they saw yesterday in the “Jefferson and Slavery” reading) and that his opposition to a national debt could be seen as hypocrisy. Discuss with the class this irony in Jefferson’s attitudes toward debt and how the national debt differs from personal debt.

Present a fun fact to the class: part of the reason that our nation’s capital is located in Washington, D.C. is because of a deal brokered by Jefferson regarding the national debt. If Jefferson’s close friend and ally, James Madison, would stop opposing Hamilton’s efforts to have the federal government assume state Revolutionary War debt then Hamilton would support locating the capital along the Potomac River between Virginia and Maryland, which Virginians such as Jefferson and Madison very much wanted.

4. Homework assignment and wrap-up (2-5 minutes):

Take a quick poll of the students, answering the following question: *Based on what we know about Jefferson’s attitudes toward race and the national debt, but also considering the world he lived in, do you think he was a hypocrite?*

Take volunteers to explain their reasoning.

Homework assignment: In their History journals, have students reflect on the day’s lesson by explaining their thoughts on the national debt using at least three of the terms from their word splash. Some questions to consider:

*Should the United States be worried about the national debt?*

*Is it necessary to have all of the current programs in our government? Is it fair to cut out some of the expenses?*

*Do you agree with Jefferson that individual states should have to pay their own debts, or should the national government help? Why or why not?*

### **Day 3:**

**Outcome or objective:** Students will compare and contrast pirating of trading ships and the U.S. government response during Thomas Jefferson's presidency with such actions and response today.

**Instructional Resources:**

Video projector/screen

Query XXII of Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=JefBv021.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=22&division=div2>):

1. HW Check and Review (7 mins):

In the groups from yesterday's Do Now activity, have students share with each other what they wrote in their History journals regarding the national debt. When they are finished, have them answer the following questions:

*What were the most common economic words your group used in your responses? How do these apply to both Jefferson's time and the present?*

2. Do Now activity (~13 mins):

Present to the students a section of Query XXII of Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* regarding foreign policy toward European nations:

*To this estimate of our abilities, let me add a word as to the application of them. If, when cleared of the present contest, and of the debts with which that will charge us, we come to measure force hereafter with any European power. Such events are devoutly to be deprecated. Young as we are, and with such a country before us to fill with people and with happiness, we should point in that direction the whole generative force of nature, wasting none of it in efforts of mutual destruction. It should be our endeavor to cultivate the peace and friendship of every nation, even of that which has injured us most, when we shall have carried our point against her. Our interest will be to throw open the doors of commerce, and to knock off all its shackles, giving perfect freedom to all persons for the vent of whatever they may choose to bring into our ports, and asking the same in theirs. Never was so much false arithmetic employed on any subject, as that which has been employed to persuade nations that it is their interest to go to war.*

Have the students discuss with a partner the following questions:

*What are Jefferson's views on war at this time? How are his attitudes reflected by some Americans today? When do you hear similar views?*

Lead a class discussion and take volunteers to share answers to the questions.

3. Jefferson and the Barbary Pirates (25 mins):

Present to the students "Jefferson and the Barbary Pirates – Past is Present (2009)" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ui8OCiZsWGw>). Have students take notes on the issues at hand and how Jefferson responded.

Then, show them a second video, titled “Animated Timeline of U.S. Navy SEALs’ Rescue of Captain Richard Phillips From Somali Pirates” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMvGIqa-ZIM>). Have them take notes on this, as well. When the second video is finished, have the students create a Venn diagram showing similarities and differences between the Barbary Pirates in Jefferson’s time and the Somali pirates of present day, as well as the U.S. government’s responses to the situations. Have the students volunteer notes to put in a specific section of the class diagram on the board.

4. Homework assignment and wrap-up (5 minutes):

Discuss with the students the military operations taken by the U.S. in recent years, such as Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, etc. Ask the students the following questions:

*Why do you think Jefferson’s views toward using military force changed over time?  
If you had to choose one, should the U.S. today use money or force to solve problems? Why?  
State your opinion and use evidence to support your answer.*

Homework assignment: In their History journals, students should choose one of the topics covered in the last three days: racial attitudes, national debt, and dealing with pirates. Then, write five questions they would like answered about that issue in today’s world or Jefferson’s time. Tomorrow in class students will be researching an issue of Jefferson’s time and how it is still relevant today.

#### **Day 4:**

**Outcome or objective:** Students will make comparisons on one of three modern issues (racial attitudes, national debt, dealing with pirates) with how Thomas Jefferson dealt with similar issues in his time.

**Instructional Resources:**

Computer lab, library, or similar research area

1. Do Now activity (5 mins):

While teacher is checking for homework completion, students should get into three groups based on the issue they chose to research further (race, debt, pirates). In these groups students should discuss with each other why they chose the issue and what they need to know more about.

2. Culminating Assignment and Research (45 mins):

Explain to the students that, while Jefferson did not keep a diary, he and Adams had an extensive exchange of letters in their lifetime that is very well-known today. Their job will be to write a letter exchange between Jefferson in his time and themselves in present day:

First letter, Jefferson to you: present the issue of the time, along with Jefferson's views on the issue. *What is the issue and what does Jefferson think? Why does Jefferson think this and how are his views similar or different from others in his day?*

Second letter, you to Jefferson: address Jefferson's personal conflicts with the issue, as well as how the issue is viewed by Americans today. Take a quick poll of 5 friends or relatives to find their views, and relate this to Jefferson. *What is the status of this issue today and how do current Americans see it? What did Jefferson say or do that contradicted himself?*

Students will have the remainder of the class period to research in the library, computer lab, etc.

3. Homework: The letter exchange will be due in 2-3 days.



Rubrics:

<i>Jefferson's Letter to You</i>	<b>What is the issue?</b>	<b>What is Jefferson's view on the issue?</b>	<b>Is TJ's view similar or different from others in his time?</b>	<b>Grammar and Punctuation</b>
<i>1 point</i>	Issue in Jefferson's day is not explained	Jefferson's view on the issue is not explained	Jefferson's view as compared to others is not explained	Poor grammar and punctuation (6+ mistakes)
<i>2 points</i>	Issue in Jefferson's day is somewhat explained	Jefferson's view of the issue is somewhat explained	Jefferson's view as compared to others is somewhat explained	Good grammar and punctuation (4-5 mistakes)
<i>3 points</i>	Issue in Jefferson's day is explained well	Jefferson's view of the issue is thoroughly explained	Jefferson's view as compared to others is explained well	Very good grammar and punctuation (1-3 mistakes)

<i>Your letter to Jefferson</i>	<b>What is the issue today?</b>	<b>What is the current view of Americans on the issue?</b>	<b>Is TJ's view similar or different from others in his time?</b>	<b>Grammar and Punctuation</b>
<i>1 point</i>	Issue today is not explained	America's view on the issue is not explained	Jefferson's view as compared to others is not explained	Poor grammar and punctuation (6+ mistakes)
<i>2 points</i>	Issue today is somewhat explained	America's view of the issue is somewhat explained	Jefferson's view as compared to others is somewhat explained	Good grammar and punctuation (4-5 mistakes)
<i>3 points</i>	Issue today is explained well	America's view of the issue is thoroughly explained	Jefferson's view as compared to others is explained well	Very good grammar and punctuation (1-3 mistakes)