

**A MORE PERFECT UNION:
THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT
OF THE U.S. CONSTITUTION**

SOUTH SHORE EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATIVE

Final Project: Thomas Jefferson

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Historical Background-

Thomas Jefferson is one of the most complex figures in American history. He indeed was a very important figure in the early development of the United States. He was involved in many stages of this development, including the Revolution, the Confederation, (indirectly in the Constitution), and as President in the Early Republic. Historians today still disagree over how to view this complex man. He worked to end slavery, yet he owned slaves and never emancipated them. He wrote about the inferiority of Africans, yet he had sexual relations with one of his slaves. He championed conservative limited governments, yet as president he expanded the power of the presidency.

Understandably, teachers struggle with their approach in introducing their students to Jefferson. Most teachers, faced with time constraints, focus mostly on Jefferson as “hero”. There is nothing wrong with this approach; however it does little to help students understand the complexity of Jefferson, as well as other founders. Teachers should try to develop lessons that introduce the students to all facets of Jefferson and let the students come to their own conclusions. This is where real leaning and skill development will take place.

Content Standard Alignment

Concepts and Skills, Grades 8–12

History and Geography

- *Interpret the past within its own historical context rather than in terms of present-day norms and values. (H, E, C)*
- *Distinguish historical fact from opinion. (H, E, C)*

U.S. History I Learning Standards

The Political and Intellectual Origins of the American Nation: The Revolution and

The Constitution 1763-1789

- **USI.3** Explain the influence and ideas of the Declaration of Independence and the political philosophy of Thomas Jefferson. (H, C)

Political and Democratization, Westward Expansion, and Diplomatic Developments

1790-1860

- **USI.22** Summarize the major policies and political developments that took place during the presidencies of George Washington (1789–1797), John Adams (1797–1801), and **Thomas Jefferson** 1801-1809.

Grade 10 U.S. History I Honors

Objectives:

By the end of this lesson students will:

- Gain a stronger understanding of Thomas Jefferson the man, the slave owner, the revolutionary, and the president.
- Understand Thomas Jefferson's political motives based on historical context.
- Understand the apparent conflict between Jefferson's ideals and actions.
- Support an opinion about Thomas Jefferson.

Classroom Context:

This lesson will be taught at the end of the unit on the American Revolution. It will serve as enrichment for the Revolution itself, Thomas Jefferson, and as a preview for the Thomas Jefferson presidency. The Students would already have some knowledge of Thomas Jefferson including his role in writing the Declaration of Independence, his contribution to the Northwest Ordinances, and his worries about the new Constitution. For the most part, at this point the students have learned about Jefferson as "Hero".

Procedures- (2 class periods)

- Pre-read homework – “Notes on the State of Virginia”

[Query 14](#) "Laws" The administration of justice and description of the laws? Pages 264-270

[Query 18](#) "Manners" The particular customs and manners that may happen to be received in that state? Pages 288-289

1. **Writing prompt-** “Thomas Jefferson was a hero to the American way of life and deserves his own national holiday” Agree/Disagree Why? (Student free-write 5-10 minutes)
2. **Three Corners-** Based on their responses, the students stand in three corners of the room. One corner for students who agree with the statement, one for those who disagree, and one for those who are still not sure. The teacher then moderates an open discussion/debate between the corners. (10-15 minutes)
3. **Senatorial Committee Simulation-** The teacher will then explain to the students that those three groups are going to participate in a simulation. Each group above will have a specific role.

Student roles:

- Unsure students- Senatorial Committee
- For Holiday students- Experts on Jefferson as “hero”
- Against Holiday students- Experts against Jefferson as “hero”

4. Groups- The students then break up into their groups. Each group will use their sources such as the internet, the text books, and all readings and documents they have about Thomas Jefferson.

- The Senatorial Committee will use their sources to develop 5 questions for each group of “experts”. They will be encouraged the use specific examples about Thomas Jefferson in their questions. Each Senator will be required to ask one question with a follow up during the simulation.
 - There must be at least two questions pertaining to Jefferson in each of the following areas: *Revolution, Constitution, Presidency, Slavery, Personal Life*
- The Jefferson as “Hero” and against Jefferson as “Hero” groups will use their sources to develop their arguments. They will also try to anticipate what questions will be asked of them during the simulation. Special emphasis will be placed on debunking arguments against their positions.
 - Each group member will have a specific area of expertise on Jefferson: *Revolution, Constitution, Presidency, Slavery, Personal Life*
 - Each of these groups must also prepare an opening statement.

5. Simulation- On day 2 the classroom should be set up for the simulation, with a section for the senators and a section for each group of experts. Each senator will ask a question to one group, and the other group will have a chance to rebut. Questions will alternate between the two groups.

6. Vote- The committee will then go into “closed” session for 5 minutes. Next they will vote on the proposed holiday.

Assessment- The students will write a 2-3 page essay framed around the following questions.

- What was your position before the simulation? Why?
- Did your position change after the simulation? Why?
- Describe your over-all opinion of Thomas Jefferson?
- Please include 3 pieces of evidence from your research to back up your opinion as it stands now.

References

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