



Portrait of Thomas Jefferson
by Rembrandt Peale

*"I hope our wisdom will grow
with our power, and teach us
that the less we use our power
the greater it will be."*

THOMAS JEFFERSON

Teachers Guide

Thomas Jefferson is the most researched, written about, referenced, and quoted of our Founding Fathers. And yet he continues to perplex and surprise us—his contradictions and complexities are explored anew by each generation of scholars and students. JEFFERSON is an insightful 2-hour presentation on HISTORY® which examines his many identities and asks viewers to answer for themselves: who was the real Thomas Jefferson, and what is his legacy in our world today?

Leading Jefferson scholars and Monticello curators offer fresh insights into his life before, during, and after his presidency. In addition to a thorough look at his political philosophies and actions, teachers and students will learn about Jefferson's family life including his relationship with Sally Hemings, and the role of slavery at Monticello. This program also addresses Jefferson's financial difficulties, his architectural vision, and his varied interests and innovations. This is an excellent program for course units and lectures on Jefferson's life and era.

Vocabulary:

Using a dictionary, textbook, or online source such as History.com, ask students to define the following words before or after watching this program. Students can also write down their own lists of words to define as they watch.

agrarian
concise
enlightenment
frenetic

incandescent
muse
portico
republic
rhetorical

Curriculum Links:

JEFFERSON would be useful for American politics, history, and government courses.

It would be an excellent contribution to course units and lectures on the American Revolution, the founding of the republic, and Jefferson's presidency. It is recommended for high school and college students.





Discussion Questions:

1. How would you describe Jefferson's upbringing and family life? Why was reading so important to him as a young man?
2. What was one of the important cases Jefferson tried as a lawyer? Why do you think he eventually decided to go into politics?
3. Why was Jefferson chosen to draft the Declaration of Independence? Why do you think there were so many changes to his draft even though it was regarded as an excellent piece of writing and political argument?
4. What was the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom and why was it significant? Why do you think Jefferson wanted to include this document on his tombstone?
5. What were some of the major disagreements between Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton? Despite these differences, why did Hamilton advocate for Jefferson when the 1800 election was tied?
6. What role did slavery play at Monticello? Why do you think Jefferson continued to own slaves despite his arguments against slavery?
7. Describe what we know about Jefferson's relationship with Sally Hemings. Why do you think Jefferson never acknowledged their relationship or children in his writings?
8. What role did Jefferson play at Monticello? Why do you think he was unable to balance his finances and avoid debt?
9. How would you describe Jefferson's second term as President? Why do you think Jefferson decided not to run for a third Presidential term?
10. In this documentary, Jefferson is described many times as contradictory in his actions. Can you give an example of Jefferson's contradictions? Do you agree with the statement that Jefferson is our most complex founding father? Discuss.
11. How would you describe Jefferson's legacy in our world today? What do you think were his most important contributions to American history?

Pre-Viewing Activities:

1. Ask students to review the timeline of Jefferson's life briefly, including his birth and death dates, and the dates of his presidency.
2. Have students discuss and review differences between the Federalist and Republic parties, and their changes over time.



Extended Activities:

1. **Jefferson Re-examined.** Thomas Jefferson lived a very long life full of activity. Ask students to review what they learned from watching this program, and then break up into small groups to do additional research on Jefferson's life. Ask students to choose 10 key events, writings, or turning points in Jefferson's life and create illustrated timelines or presentations. These presentations can be in PowerPoint format, or any other format. After they are completed, lead the class in a discussion of the most significant events in Jefferson's life. As a bonus, students can write Jefferson's epitaph, condensing what they believe is his central contribution or legacy in American history.
2. **Expanding Westward.** During Jefferson's Presidency, the United States was expanding westward geographically. A major turning point in the expansion of the U.S. was the Lewis and Clark expedition, launched in May 1804. Before the expedition got underway, Jefferson delivered a secret message to Congress outlining the reasons he supported an expedition that would travel all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Online or at the library, ask students to locate and read this message to Congress. Then, ask students to write a response from Congress to Jefferson's request for funding for this expedition.
3. **Jefferson and Slavery: A Conversation.** The issue of slavery is one window through which to explore Jefferson's often contradictory actions. Jefferson advocated for the freedom of slaves, though he continued to own slaves throughout his life. In 1791, a free black man named Benjamin Banneker wrote a long, impassioned letter to Jefferson demanding that African Americans be incorporated into the nation as full citizens and slavery be abolished. Ask students to locate and read the letters exchanged between Jefferson and Banneker online or at the library. Then, ask students to write a follow up letter from Banneker to Jefferson after he received Jefferson's reply. Lead a class discussion about slavery during Jefferson's era.

4. **Many Faces of Thomas Jefferson.** This documentary touches upon many aspects of Jefferson's life, including his interest in architecture, botany, astronomy, and taxidermy. Ask students to choose one of these interests and write a short essay of 1-2 pages about one aspect of Jefferson's life. Students may also want to write about slavery at Monticello or another aspect of Jefferson's life such as the years he spent in France. Students can share these essays with the larger class or group. Alternately, students could write a short essay answering the question, "Who Was the Real Thomas Jefferson?"

Primary Source Document:

Excerpt from Thomas Jefferson's first Inaugural Address (March 4, 1801)

In his first inaugural address, Jefferson stressed the importance of national unity based on shared democratic ideals in the wake of a bitter election between Republicans and Federalists.

"...but every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists. If there be any among us who wish to dissolve the Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it....Sometimes it is said that man can not be trusted with the government of himself. Can he, then, be trusted with the government of others? Or have we found angels in the form of kings to govern him? Let history answer this question. Let us, then, with courage and confidence pursue our own Federal and Republican principals."

(Citation: Jefferson, Thomas. Draft of First Inaugural. The Thomas Jefferson Papers. Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827. Manuscript Division. Library of Congress.)

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Websites:

HISTORY topics page on Thomas Jefferson, with video and articles:
<http://www.history.com/topics/thomas-jefferson>

The official site of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello:
<http://www.monticello.org/>

A Thomas Jefferson exhibition from the Library of Congress:
<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson>

A National Park Service lesson plan on Jefferson's role in the University of Virginia:
<http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/92uva/92uva.htm>

Books:

Ellis, Joseph. ***American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson.*** (Vintage Books, 1998.)

Freeman, Joanne B. ***Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*** (Yale University Press, 2002).

Gordon-Reed, Annette. ***The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family.*** (W.W. Norton & Company, 2009).

Jefferson, Thomas. ***The Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson.*** Edited by Wayne Franklin (W.W. Norton & Company, 2009).

Onuf, Peter. ***Jeffersonian Legacies.*** (University of Virginia Press, 1993).