

∞ *Environmental Observations of Jefferson* ∞

Part 1: A Socratic Discussion of Jefferson's decision to situate Monticello on a mountaintop

Part 2: Agricultural prospects of Montalto

Purpose: Now that students had the opportunity to learn about the challenges Jefferson faced as he designed, constructed and maintained his plantation, Monticello, atop a mountain, it is time for them to practice problem-solving skills as a group. To facilitate this endeavor, students will be given the opportunity to discuss their ideas in the classroom, and brainstorm agricultural concepts for our society. Students will be empowered to utilize their personal experiences, knowledge and research in group discussions to further develop responsible communication outside of the classroom.

Objective: Students will be able to independently engage in productive conversations and discussions by building a relationship with the listener that will create a lasting effect even after their dialogue is completed.

Activities: Students will participate in a Socrates Circle which will encourage eye-to-eye contact and tolerance of various individual's ideas during the discussion.

Procedures: The teacher will introduce the great philosopher, Socrates, to the class. Briefly inform students about this famous philosopher by asking them to read the handout, *The Socrates Circle*.

To physically prepare the classroom environment for the Socrates Circle, the teacher will design the seating arrangement by positioning students' seats/desks into two circles: one "inner circle" and one "outer circle." The teacher will use the prompts suggested in the lesson, *Jefferson's Gardens: A Landscape of Opportunities: An Experimental Vegetable Garden; Environmental Observations of Jefferson, Part 1: A Socratic Discussion of Jefferson's decision to situate Monticello on a mountaintop and Part 2: A Socratic Discussion of Agricultural Prospects of Montalto*. Note: other selections such as a news article about a current event topic relating to this discussion can be added-- develop an open-ended question that will stimulate discussion among the students in the "inner circle." The open-ended question should challenge students to develop critical-thinking skills and to discuss multiple, possible answers. As students engage in conversation, it should become apparent that students' diverse beliefs, attitudes and information will surface to propose different answers to the question(s) posed in the discussion.

During the discussion, the teacher should encourage students to ask each other questions. This will, hopefully, generate some interesting viewpoints about the topic and perhaps lead to more thought-provoking subtopics in the discussion.

As students in the “inner circle” are discussing the topic, students in the “outer circle” are listening to the students’ dialogue. The teacher can set the amount of time for the discussion/observation. After the “inner circle” has completed their discussion, the “outer circle” offers feedback on their ideas and how the group conducted their overall discussion. Then, it’s time to switch the two circles so that students have the opportunity to change roles. After the second group of students’ discussion, the procedure for feedback is repeated.

To maintain a productive, positive discussion, the teacher may have to assign one student to act as a “moderator” to assure the students stay focused on the topic being addressed. If the discussion appears to be going astray, the moderator may navigate the students’ comments or redirect their thoughts back to the main idea of the discussion. Also, if the students’ comments appear to be reactions rather than responses to each other and interruptions occur, the moderator may intervene and remind the students to practice appropriate listening skills and to remain calm while others are speaking.

Note: If a current events article is introduced into this lesson, the teacher may want to assign students to read it prior to the class discussion.

Handouts: The Socrates Circle