

Thomas Jefferson's World: A Resource for Middle School Classrooms

Thomas Jefferson's presence has impacted the world in many ways. This film will introduce you to the ideas, theories and actions of Jefferson that changed the world in which we live today.

I. Vocabulary: Identify the vocabulary words below to aid your understanding of the film.

- Freedom
- Surveyor
- Progress
- Reason
- The Enlightenment (movement)
- Plantation
- Natural rights of men
- Moral/political depravity

II. Discussion Questions

1. What was the best path to survival, progress and success, according to Thomas Jefferson?
2. How did Monticello represent a symbol of progress to Jefferson and his contemporaries (people who lived at the same time as Jefferson)? Provide some specific examples.
3. Discuss how Jefferson embraced the beliefs of The Enlightenment era, and how he represented his interest in this type of thinking in his home Monticello.
4. How did Monticello serve as a "laboratory" for Jefferson?
5. How did Jefferson reconcile the institution of slavery with his beliefs in the natural rights of men? What was Jefferson's recommendation on what to do about slavery?
6. Why did Jefferson support expansion of the US? Why might others not support this?
7. What is Jefferson's most significant legacy? Support your choice!
8. How can we use what we learn from Jefferson and Monticello to improve our nation and world today?

III. Extension Activities

1. You are a delegate from Massachusetts to the Constitutional Convention. You are against the institution of slavery and think it should be abolished in the Constitution. Your friends back home are counting on you to share their opinion on ridding the nation of slavery. Write a letter to Thomas Jefferson explaining why slavery contradicts the fundamental ideas of the Enlightenment.

2. Create a collage entitled: Monticello and Progress. In this collage you should represent the many ways in which Monticello served as a model for progress and advancement to Jefferson and his generation.

3. Use Jefferson's ideas and those borrowed from The Enlightenment to write a persuasive speech that supports the idea of natural human rights. Include examples from the 17th-21st centuries in your speech to support your main argument, the natural rights of man.

4. Choose one of the following big ideas and compose a poem, song or short story that explains the importance of the idea and its connection to Jefferson and Monticello. (Big ideas: progress, enlightenment/reason, slavery, expansion)

5. Make an illustrated and captioned timeline that traces Jefferson's impact on world events throughout the 18th, 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. In your timeline, identify the event, provide an illustration (optional), and explain in 1-2 sentences how Jefferson and his beliefs were applied to this issue, altered thinking about this issue, or stirred up controversy. Include at least 5 events.

6. What is Thomas Jefferson's most lasting and important legacy? Interview a (fictional) Jefferson historian about this legacy. Include a set of interview questions, focused on this legacy, as well as the historian's thorough responses.

7. Write Twitter responses from Jefferson in response to the following quotes/statements:

"Which is better – to be ruled by one tyrant 3000 miles away or 3000 tyrants less than a mile away." Dr. Mather Byles

"How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of the negroes." Samuel Johnson

Write a separate Twitter response for each quote.

8. Create a campaign poster for Thomas Jefferson. Your poster should address Jefferson's stances on 2-4 of the following issues: education, westward expansion, government, the republic and human rights, progress, economics.

9. How can Jefferson's ideas make the world a better place? Create a public service announcement (either a written script, podcast or other recording) that uses Jefferson's words and ideas to encourage people to become better citizens. This PSA should interest and apply to young people of the 21st century.
10. Create a dialogue between Jefferson and a British Loyalist. How would Jefferson argue for independence? What counter arguments would he face? Each character (Jefferson and the Loyalist) should have at least 4 lines each.
11. Create a mural that represents the driving ideas and beliefs behind The Declaration of Independence. Your mural should have no words except a title or caption. Viewers must be able to understand how Jefferson used logic to reason for independence.
12. How is the architecture of the Academical Village at UVA and Monticello representative of Jefferson's beliefs? Explain in a well-written short essay.
13. If you could bring Thomas Jefferson back to help you win one argument, what would it be? How could he help?
14. Research Jefferson's writings and opinions on slavery throughout his life. Include his opinions on issues such as the 3/5 Compromise, Missouri Compromise, abolition, and the expansion of slavery.
15. Write a graduation speech to be given by Thomas Jefferson at The College of William and Mary. The speech should highlight ideas and beliefs of Jefferson and how they apply to the modern world.