

Thomas Jefferson's World: A Resource for AP High School and College Classrooms

I. Introduction

“Thomas Jefferson believed human freedom was the surest path to human progress. To that vision he devoted his life.” With those simple, direct words, *Thomas Jefferson's World* introduces viewers to the man who was the author of the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, the father of the University of Virginia, and the third president of the United States. The film also centers on the importance of Monticello, his mountain top home, as his personal laboratory for many of his ideas and efforts.

Thomas Jefferson's World outlines the broad interests of his life, highlighting his curiosity of all things intellectual as well as examining his personal struggle with slavery. More importantly, *Thomas Jefferson's World* shows the lineage from Jefferson's words and efforts to the expansion of liberty in United States through events such as Lincoln's Gettysburg Address to women's suffrage to civil rights in the 1960's. Showing that the quest for freedom is not solely an American ideal, *Jefferson's World* will show the power of his ideas in an effort to overcome tyranny in India, Berlin and South Africa. The film underscores Jefferson's own hope, in which he stated that “I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past.”

II. Curriculum Links: *Thomas Jefferson's World* would be helpful for U.S. History and Government courses at both the high school and collegiate level for a broad overview of the philosophy, efforts and influence of the nation's third president.

III. Key Terms: 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.

Horticulture	Monticello
Depravity	Mulberry Row
Republic	“Empire for Liberty”
Tyranny	State established church
Revolutionary	The Enlightenment
Legacy	Academical Village

IV. Discussion questions:

1. “(T)he greatest service which can be rendered by any country is to add a useful plant to its culture.” (1800) Why do you think Jefferson placed such a high emphasis on agriculture?
2. "More than any historic home in America, Monticello speaks to me as an expression of the builder. In the design, not of the whole alone, but of every room... there speaks (a) ready capacity for detail and, above all, creative genius." Franklin Roosevelt (1936) Monticello is “designed not only for living, eating and sleeping, but as a laboratory, an observatory, a library, a museum, a weather post, a greenhouse, a workshop, a concert theater...No building in the world is more identifiable with a single mind.” Garry Wills (2002). The previous quotes highlight the fact that Monticello is much more than a residence and a direct reflection of Jefferson and his personality. How would visiting Monticello be like meeting Jefferson?
3. “(T)here is nothing I would not sacrifice to a practicable plan of abolishing every vestige of this moral and political depravity.” (1814) Despite his public statements on slavery, Jefferson only freed 5 of 140 African-Americans working for him at Monticello. Why do you think he was unable to act on his moral beliefs?
4. “(T)he flames kindled on the 4th of July, 1776 have spread over too much of the globe to be extinguished by the feeble engines of despotism.” (1821) Was Jefferson’s prophecy accurate? Can you cite any current or past examples that prove Jefferson correct?
5. “That the value of science to a republican people; the security it gives to liberty, be enlightening the minds of its citizens;...the virtues it inculcates...in short, its identification with power, morals, order, and happiness...” (1821). What is the connection between science and the safety of society that Jefferson sees? Can you cite any examples?
6. “No man shall be compelled to...support any religious worship... nor shall be enforced or burdened... on account of his religious opinions or belief.” (1786) This excerpt from the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom highlighted one of Jefferson’s central tenets, that there needed to be a formal and legal separation of church and state. Why was it so controversial in his day and is it controversial today?
7. “I gradually gained a bit of satisfaction from being considered an extremist...Was not Thomas Jefferson an extremist – ‘We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal.’” (1963) Dr. Martin Luther King compared his efforts with those of Jefferson. Why does Jefferson’s signature statement continue to have the power to influence and inspire others?
8. “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free...it expects what never was and never will be.” (1816) Why is education the key ingredient, in Jefferson’s view, to maintaining a republic successfully?
9. “This institution will be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind. For here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, not tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it.” (1820) What were Jefferson’s central hopes as he founded the University of Virginia?

10. “When you stop to think to yourself, do you really believe that all men are created equal?... (Y)ou have trouble believing it, but you don’t ever wish it hadn’t been written. If the equality clause will trouble us... then the pursuit of happiness will mystify us forever and I like the trouble and I like the mystery.” (1996) Do you agree with Professor James Cox’s opinion that the Declaration still inspires despite its seeming lack of practicality?

V. Primary Document: During their celebrated exchange of letters, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson examined a wide range of subjects, including their place in history. In one letter Mr. Adams wrote: “My dear Mr. Jefferson, would you go back to your cradle and live over again your seventy years?”

Here is Mr. Jefferson’s reply:

Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, April 8, 1816

“You ask, if I would agree to live my seventy or rather seventy-three years over again? To which I say, yea. I think with you, that it is a good world on the whole; that it has been framed on the principle of benevolence, and more pleasing than the pain dealt out to us. There are, indeed, (who might say nay) gloomy and hypochondriac minds, inhabitants of diseased bodies, disgusted with the present, and despairing of the future; always counting that the worst will happen, because it may happen. To these I say, how much pain have cost us the evils which never happened! My temperament is sanguine. I steer my bark with Hope in the head, leaving Fear astern.”

VI. Pre-viewing Activities

1. Go to the Monticello web site (www.monticello.org) and click on the tab entitled “House & Gardens”. Then click on the tab “Monticello, The House” and review the different parts of the house on the page. Check out the “Monticello Explorer” which takes you on a 3-D tour of the house. What does the design of the house tell you about Jefferson the architect? What does Monticello tell you about Jefferson the man?
2. Also on the Monticello web site is a search engine. Type in “Quotations”. Then click on the first offering and review the different categories of Jefferson quotes, including those entitled, “Notable Comments on Jefferson” to see what others have said, both positively and negatively about Jefferson. Click on one of the categories assigned by your teacher or pick one that interests you and select one to present to class.

VII. Extended Activities

1. Write an essay on how and why the phrase; “All Men Are Created Equal” was incorporated into the Declaration of Sentiments at the Seneca Falls Convention (1848), the Gettysburg Address (1863) and the “I Have a Dream Speech” (1963). Why do you think that each speaker/author wanted to use that for full effect?
2. At the end of the video, the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), Indian Independence (1947), the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the end of Apartheid (1990’s) are briefly highlighted. Each shows why the concept of “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness” is universal. Prepare a short presentation on one of these historical events, detailing the cause and effects of it. As Jefferson was hailed, along with John Adams, as the men who “thought and wrote” for the American Revolution, who would be the “Jefferson” for each of the listed events?
3. The video talks briefly about the Thomas Jefferson-Sally Hemings relationship, and it has invoked much discussion, albeit controversial, in recent years. Following Mr. Jefferson’s dictum, that “we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead”, what type of information would you seek in order to satisfy your own questions about this part of his life? Would the proof have to be stronger on one side to convince you? Create a list of those points that you believe would be essential to your research. Which, if any, are unattainable? How important could that be?

VIII. Suggested Websites

1. Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello www.monticello.org
2. The Library of Congress www.loc.gov
3. The University of Virginia www.virginia.edu/
4. The Robert H. Smith International Center for Jefferson Studies
<http://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/robert-h-smith-international-center-jefferson-studies>

IX. Suggested Reading

1. *American Scripture: How America Declared its Independence from Britain* by Pauline Maier (Pimlico, 1999).
2. *The Quotable Jefferson* by John P. Kaminski, Ed. (Princeton University Press, 2006).
3. *Thomas Jefferson's Monticello* by William L. Beiswanger, Peter J. Hatch, Lucia Stanton and Susan R. Stein (Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 2002).
4. *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power* by Jon Meacham (Random House, 2012).