

VA Statute for Religious Freedom, III.

Discussion

General

Grade Level

High School

Author Info

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Type of Lesson

Document Analysis

Duration

55 min

Objectives

State Standards

STANDARD VUS.1a, b, c, d, e, f,h The student will demonstrate skills for historical and geographical analysis, including the ability to

- a) identify, analyze, and interpret primary and secondary source documents, records, and data, including artifacts, diaries, letters, photographs, journals, newspapers, historical accounts, and art to increase understanding of events and life in the United States;
- b) evaluate the authenticity, authority, and credibility of sources;
- c) formulate historical questions and defend findings based on inquiry and interpretation;
- d) develop perspectives of time and place, including the construction of maps and various time lines of events, periods, and personalities in American history;
- e) communicate findings orally and in analytical essays and/or comprehensive papers;
- f) develop skills in discussion, debate, and persuasive writing with respect to enduring issues and determine how divergent viewpoints have been addressed and reconciled;

h) interpret the significance of excerpts from famous speeches and other documents.

STANDARD VUS.5d

The student will demonstrate knowledge of the issues involved in the creation and ratification of the Constitution of the United States of America and how the principles of limited government, consent of the governed, and the social contract are embodied in it by

d) examining the significance of the Virginia Declaration of Rights and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom in the framing of the Bill of Rights.

Objectives/Learning Outcomes

The objective of the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom lesson is to introduce students to this work as a primary source document in order to understand events in history, make connections between past and present and interpret ideas and events from different historical perspectives. The program will incorporate 11th grade history SOLs (see below) and the core Monticello interpretive themes as much as possible.

Procedures

1. 5 min

For homework the day before the discussion, each student should choose (or be assigned) one of the questions below. Arrange it so that there are an equal number of students working on each of the first four questions.

(Note: there is a link to a .pdfversion of the questions under the Related Assets section below. If you have created a class on this website you can use the "Copy to Assignment" link in the upper right corner of this page to have this pdf appear as assignment when your students login using your Classroom Number.)

2. 1 min

Inform students that they should form an argument to support their answers and be prepared to discuss them the following day. Using an online search engine (like Google), they can use terms and names from the questions below to find relevant online resources and additional information to support their position. Instruct students to come to class with written notes to refer to during the discussion.

3. 5 min

On the day of the discussion, arrange students into groups according to which of the questions they answered; there should be four equally sized groups. In each of the groups, students should decide who will perform each of the following roles:

- **Facilitator:** Responsible for including every member of the group in the discussion and avoiding digressions. The facilitator is not the boss, but more of an “encourager.”
- **Recorder:** Responsible for writing down the main ideas that are brought up in the group. The recorder does not have to write everything everyone says, just the main ideas.
- **Timekeeper:** Responsible for watching the time and being sure that everyone has equal time in the group.
- **Spokesperson:** Responsible for representing the group and reporting results back to the whole class.

(It is possible that some students will not have a role. When this type of activity is repeated in the future, the roles should all shift so that everyone eventually has an opportunity to act in all roles.)

4. 20-30 min

Give the groups a fixed time limit for their discussions and let them begin. Instruct the facilitators to ask each group member to summarize their argument for the group.

5. During the discussion, try to spend equal time with all groups as an observer; allow the group members to exercise their roles and only intervene if the students are off task.

6. 10 – 20 min

When the time limit is reached, ask each group’s spokesperson to give a one-minute summary of the main ideas brought up. Encourage other groups to question or comment on this.

Related Assets

Handouts and Downloads

- [Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom – Discussion Questions](#)

Materials

Materials Needed

Discussion Questions

When Jefferson wrote the Statute in 1777, it caused a controversy, and some people said he was an atheist and an enemy of religion.

1. Put yourself in the place of a church official in 1780 and read the Statute again. Why might you disagree with it?

In 1787, in a letter to his nephew, Peter Carr, Jefferson wrote

"... shake off all the fears and servile prejudices, under which weak minds are servilely crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear."

2. Does this letter to his nephew support this claim that he was an atheist and an enemy of religion? Why or why not?
3. Do you think Jefferson would be considered an enemy of religion today? Why or why not? Use quotes from the Virginia Statute to support your answer.
4. In your opinion, are there certain circumstances under which the freedom of religion granted in the Virginia Statute and in the first amendment should not apply? Why or why not?

Accommodations – Advanced Learners

Assign a written composition to the students in which they should answer the debate question that they have worked on (alternately, they may choose another question they find more interesting.) Now, in addition to the research they have already done, they have heard others' thoughts about the same question in the debate.

The logo for The Jefferson Monticello, featuring the name "The Jefferson" in a cursive script above the word "MONTICELLO" in a bold, sans-serif font.