

Thomas Jefferson – Patient

General

Grade Level

Elementary School

Author Info

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Type of Lesson

Research Project

Duration

6 class periods

Interdisciplinary Connections

Upper Elementary school students will use science, math and the visual arts in this hands-on research project which will use the medical history of Thomas Jefferson as a springboard for a broader study of the methodologies for treating illness and attitudes concerning the practice of medicine in early America.

Objectives

Overview

The practice of medicine in Jefferson's time was based on time honored theories that often did more harm to the patient than good. Depending on one's station in life, medical care by trained physicians was a non-reality available to those who lived within distance of a doctor and could afford their fees. For the average citizen and the slaves of the time alternative treatments were developed. These treatments were usually in the form of medicinal practices which were handed down from generation to generation. In this research project, students will be assigned maladies which Thomas Jefferson suffered from and

will be asked to treat him using the traditional medicinal remedies known by most colonial households, the plant and non-plant based medicines of slaves and the healing practices of Native Americans.

Prior Knowledge

While no prior knowledge is necessary for these lessons, it is hoped that they will be included in a broader unit of study about Jefferson or life in the colonies.

State Standards

Common Core Standards:

History (U.S.)- Early exploration, colonial life 4.6-4.23

Science- Life Science- Life cycles 2.1, 2.2 Classifying organisms 2.7, 2.8, 2.11

Environmental- Resources 4.5, 4.6, 4.8, 4.9

Scientific Inquiry- Research and Investigate 6.1, 6.2 Record Keeping 6.3 Measurement 6.12, 6.13, 6.17, 6.19, 6.20

Objectives/Learning Outcomes

By participating in this research project students will be able to:

Understand the development of alternative methods for the treatment of maladies in colonial times.

Demonstrate through hands-on inquiry the forms these treatments took.

Analyze a problem from multiple points of view and through the lens of varied cultures.

Technology Connections/outcomes

History- Colonial life, Slave life, Native American healing practices, the personal life of Thomas Jefferson (beliefs and attitudes about medicine, seed-saving, agriculture/ gardening, and experimentation).

Math-Measurement and estimation

Science- Classification, medicinal qualities of some plants, botany

Visual Arts- Scientific Illustration

Essential Questions

What were the prevailing attitudes toward the practice of medicine in Jefferson's time and did his beliefs mirror those of the general public?

What options were available to a majority of people of the time when it came to the treatment of illness and injury?

What role did the cultivation of medicinal plants play in the lives of early Americans and who were the people chosen to administer to the sick?

In what ways did the beliefs and customs of ethnic groups influence the practice of medicine in Jefferson's time?

Procedures

1. *50 minutes*

Have students use **bubble maps** to brainstorm why alternatives to treatments by trained physicians was the norm rather than the exception in early America. (The fear of doctors in general and the pain associated with their methods specifically, the expense involved and the scarcity of physicians even in large urban centers, the trust placed in family members or renowned community healers).

2. *2 or 3- 50 minute periods*

Students form teams to research ailments and conditions affecting Jefferson and alternative methods of treating them. These treatments are approaches from the perspectives of Native Americans living in your area, slaves working at or near Monticello and Thomas Jefferson himself.

3. *50 minutes*

Students create 'simulated' decoctions, tinctures, or poultices based on their research. While the ingredients are for the most part substitutes for the real organic materials, the formulation and related measurements are true to the original preparation whenever possible.

4. *Several weeks*

Teams will select one of the plants from their study to grow. Each member will be assigned jobs on a rotating base. The results of these jobs will be kept in a scientific journal that in many ways mirrors the 'Garden Book' of Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson faithfully kept this horticultural diary from 1766 until 1824. This book documents his varied approaches to gardening as seen through the eyes of a family gardener, scientist and landscape architect.

5. *50 minutes*

As was customary in early America, teams will collect and preserve seeds from their specimen plant for use by students next year.

6. *50 minutes*

Introduce the subject of medicine in early America through a discussion of Hermann Boerhaave (1668- 1738). Boerhaave was a noted medical practitioner whose theories concerning the origin of diseases and treatments for various illnesses was widely accepted in Jefferson's time. Use George Washington as an example of how the treatment was often worse than the disease. Complete math lesson based on the amount of blood lost during treatment for a sore throat that directly contributed to his death.

7. 50 minutes

This final lesson is done individually. In 1800 in *A Memorandum: Services to My Country* Jefferson wrote "The greatest service which can be rendered any country is to add a useful plant to its culture." In this spirit, students will invent a new plant; be it vegetable, fruit or flower and classify it scientifically.

Related Assets

Handouts and Downloads

- [Thomas Jefferson, Patient – Unit Planner](#)

Materials

Materials Needed

[Thomas Jefferson, Patient – Unit Planner](#) has more detail, documents, and visuals to use when teaching this lesson.

Books- Thomas Jefferson Treats Himself (Herbs, Physicke, & Nutrition in Early America) By John M. Holmes ISBN 0-9630797-3-5

Native Plants Native Healing (Traditional Muskogee Way) by Tis Mal Crow ISBN 978-1-57067-105-0

The Cherokee Herbal (Native Plant Medicine from the Four Directions) by J.T. Garrett ISBN 978-187918196

African American Slave Medicine by Herbert C. Covey

Thomas Jefferson's Garden Book, edited by Edwin M. Betts ISBN 13: 978-1-882886-11-1

Technology Needs

Use the *SmartBoard* to facilitate cross-cultural connections concerning medical practices and philosophies for treating illness.

Use the *Internet and Informational Text* to research the use of plants for medicinal purposes over time and the methodologies for administering such treatments.

Assessment

In a unit such as this, an assortment of assessments will be employed to measure progress. A majority of assessments will be in the form of anecdotal records. The products of the various lessons will be used as alternative assessments.

Accommodations

Accommodations – Students with Special Needs

- For a majority of this unit, students will be working in teams of no fewer than three and no more than four. Jobs will be assigned each member on a rotating basis. (See Instructional Activity # _7_).
- This unit combines written, verbal and visual components and provides opportunities for demonstrating research, leadership and upper level thinking skills.
- All material will be delivered and shared through multiple learning styles and modalities.
- Lessons/ activities are broken down into smaller, sequential parts to foster understanding.