

‘Dreams of the Future’: Investigating Thomas Jefferson’s Youth To Achieve Our Own Goals

General

Grade Level

High School

Author Info

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Type of Lesson

Document Analysis

Duration

80 minute class period

Interdisciplinary Connections

Music, archaeology, gardening.

Objectives

Overview

Students often find history intangible, especially when it is the study of "dead white guys". In this lesson, students consider their own personal goals for the future and investigate Thomas Jefferson's experiences as a young man in order to help them reach their own goals.

Prior Knowledge

Students should have a basic understanding of the Enlightenment, a cultural movement championing the use of reason and scientific study which began in western Europe in the 17th century. Students should also be familiar with analyzing primary and secondary documents for perspective and significance. While knowledge of Thomas Jefferson's life is not necessary, in this lesson students will share their current knowledge and by the end of the lesson they should learn more about the man who achieved so much.

State Standards

Virginia and US History:

VUS.1 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;

World History and Geography 1500 to Present:

WHII.6 The student will demonstrate knowledge of scientific, political, economic, and religious changes during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries by a) explaining the political, religious, and social ideas of the Enlightenment and the ways in which they influenced the founders of the United States;

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Objectives/Learning Outcomes

Students will understand that:

1. Hard-work, education, peer support, and a positive outlook on the future can help one achieve his or her goals

Students will know:

1. Significant details from Thomas Jefferson's youth in central Virginia
2. Significant details from Thomas Jefferson's time as a adolescent in Williamsburg, especially the

impact of Enlightenment ideas

3. Major accomplishments of Thomas Jefferson over the course of his life and reasons for those accomplishments

Students will be able to:

1. Effectively analyze sources from Thomas Jefferson's youth, including non-written sources
2. Evaluate potential explanations for Jefferson's success in life by using the sources provided
3. Re-evaluate and expand upon their own means of achieving personal goals

Technology Connections/outcomes

This lesson can easily be delivered in a digital format with handouts instead of through hardcopies of each source.

Additional Learning Outcomes

Students should leave this lesson with a better understanding of the Enlightenment, Thomas Jefferson's youth and accomplishments, and ways to better prepare themselves to achieve their own goals.

Essential Questions

How did Thomas Jefferson become the man who accomplished all that he did? Was he born into greatness because of wealth and aristocracy? Was he successful due to inherited genius or an easy life? Or did Jefferson have to work hard to become one of America's most famous men? Can we use the example of Jefferson's life to help us achieve our own personal goals, or was he too different from us? If we can, what does Jefferson have to teach us?

Procedures

1. *5 minutes*

Warm-up: Pass out the 'Goals and Aspirations' graphic organizer (handout #1) and have students complete the front page individually. You may ask students to share if desired.

2. *10 minutes*

Think-Pair-Share: Pass out the 'Accomplishments of Thomas Jefferson' graphic organizer (handout #2). In pairs or small groups, ask students to brainstorm all of the accomplishments Thomas Jefferson achieved during his lifetime. Scaffold students by explaining that any political office had or document Jefferson wrote can be considered an accomplishment. Tell students to place the most significant accomplishment in the center, significant accomplishments around that central circle, and less significant accomplishments towards the edges of the paper.

When students finish, have groups/individuals share in a whole-class discussion. If needed, offer additional accomplishments for the students to consider (see 'Accomplishments of Thomas Jefferson handout teacher sample'). Determine whether there are differences in the placement and

presence of accomplishments on their organizers, and if so, discuss why.

Then, ask students why they think Jefferson was able to do so much. Ask them if it was due to Jefferson's wealth or birth, his good fortune and genius, or something else. Finally, give students a few minutes to brainstorm and record all possible explanations for why Jefferson was able to accomplish so much. Discuss these responses, time permitting.

3. *40 minutes*

Group Source Analysis Work: Explain to students that they will investigate Thomas Jefferson's youth for clues on what made him successful. This information will help students learn how to better achieve their own goals. Then, divide students into groups of four. Each group of students will work at a stations area (pod of desks, area of room) with a series of documents (see Central Virginia and Williamsburg source packets). Each student must select a unique document from other students in the group and analyze the document on his/her own by reading and completing the first section of the Source Analysis Sheet (handout #3) . Explain that not every document will be consulted in the group, and that is ok. Then, each group member must share his/her analysis with the rest of the group and complete the last question for each station area.

When students complete the first station area, have them rotate to the second station area. Note: In large classes, it is advisable to set up multiple "Central Virginia" and "Williamsburg" Station areas to maintain groups of four or fewer students.

4. *5 minutes*

Silent, independent reflection: Have students return to their seats and instruct them to complete the top portion wrap-up on the back of the 'Goals and Aspirations' (handout #1).

5. *15 minutes*

Discussion: Moderate a whole-class discussion on the student's research findings. Ask students what generalizations they can make about Jefferson's childhood. Ask students if anything surprised them about his early life. Then, as a class, brainstorm and create a list of possible explanations for Jefferson's many accomplishments in life. If students do not consider some factors, provide them, such as Jefferson's reliance on friends, his weathering hardships, his insistence on learning, his ability to moderate hard work with relaxation and fun, and his optimism for the future. If students have additional time at the end of class, give an extension activity by asking students to create a handbook for success as if they were Thomas Jefferson writing to a modern audience of their peers.

6. *5 minutes*

Wrap up: As an exit card, have students complete the bottom of the 'Goals and Aspirations' (handout #1) sheet on their own.

Related Assets

Handouts and Downloads

- [Dreams of the Future Handout #1 – Goals and Aspirations](#)
- [Dreams of the Future Handout #2 – The Accomplishments of Thomas Jefferson](#)
- [Dreams of the Future Handout #3 – Analysis Sheet](#)
- [Dreams of the Future Teacher Sample – The Accomplishments of Thomas Jefferson](#)
- [Dreams of the Future Source Packet – Jefferson's Upbringing in Central Virginia](#)
- [Dreams of the Future Source Packet – Jefferson's Time in Williamsburg](#)

Assessment

Homework

Assign the Thomas Jefferson handbook guide activity for students who did not complete this activity during class if you wish.

Assessment

Collect and grade 'Goals and Aspirations' handout for formative assessment. Have students complete an essay prompt on Jefferson's accomplishments and the ways in which his life can help us achieve our own goals as a summative assessment. Require students to cite at least three pieces of evidence when crafting their arguments.

Accommodations

Accommodations – Students with Special Needs

The station packets can be modified to consist exclusively of visual documents for English Language Learners and students with disabilities. For students or classes struggling to accurately interpret primary documents, teachers can replace stations independent time with direct instruction or modeling the analysis of one source as a class.

Accommodations – Advanced Learners

Students may be asked to analyze more than one source at each station. Students who are proficient at analysing documents may be asked to find their own additional documents to supplement the sources at each station. Finally, students who work at a faster rate may be asked to complete an extension anchor activity. Ask students to develop a guidebook for achieving one's personal goals. Instruct students to write the guidebook from the viewpoint of Thomas Jefferson speaking to a modern audience.