

# Did Thomas Jefferson do enough?

## Lesson Plan Template

**Title:** Did Thomas Jefferson do enough?

**Descriptive Subtitle:** A comparison of documents demonstrating the difference between Jefferson's views versus his actions on slavery.

**Grade level:** upper elementary – 4th Grade American Revolution studies in Georgia schools

**Topic/subject:** (pick topics or subjects, as many as applicable. Add your own as needed)

### **Topics:**

Primary Documents & Jefferson Writings  
Slavery and Plantation Life  
Jefferson's Public Life and Politics  
Equal rights and Legislation

### **Subjects:**

History: U.S.  
Civics  
Language Arts

## **Author Information:**

**Name:** Kenneth A. Blum

**Email:** blum.kenneth@mail.fcboe.org

**School:** Oak Grove Elementary School

**School Address (opt):** 101 Crosstown Drive

**City:** Peachtree City

**State:** Georgia

**Duration:** 30-60 min: could be much longer with extension exercises

## **Overview:**

Countless documents demonstrate Jefferson's view on slavery as an "abomination [that] must have an end", and yet he possessed over 600 slaves in his lifetime; freeing only a handful. This is a DBQ (Document Based Question) geared towards 4th grade students during their study of the Founding Fathers. The focus is Thomas Jefferson and the conflict created between his attitude on natural rights of freedom and his ownership of slaves.

In addition to the study of the American Revolution and the creation of our country through the Declaration of Independence, the culminating activity will be a written response by the students.

**Prior knowledge:** Students are introduced to Thomas Jefferson as an American hero in 1st grade. 4th grade studies Colonial American life and the Revolutionary War. This project would come after the study of the Declaration of Independence.

### **Vocabulary**

Prior:	abolition	egalitarian	equality	
During:	abomination	ardent	avarice	pretext

### **Standards:**

Based on Georgia 4th Grade Standards:

SS4H3 The student will explain the factors that shaped British colonial America.

1. Compare and contrast life in the New England, Mid-Atlantic, and Southern colonies.
2. Describe colonial life in America as experienced by various people, including large landowners, farmers, artisans, women, indentured servants, slaves, and Native Americans.

SS4H4 The student will explain the causes, events, and results of the American Revolution.

1. Explain the writing of the Declaration of Independence; include who wrote it, how it was written, why it was necessary, and how it was a response to tyranny and the abuse of power.
2. Describe key individuals in the American Revolution with emphasis on King George III, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Benedict Arnold, Patrick Henry, and John Adams.

SS4H5 The student will analyze the challenges faced by the new nation.

1. Identify the major leaders of the Constitutional Convention (James Madison and Benjamin Franklin) and describe the major issues they debated, including the rights of states, the Great Compromise, and slavery

SS4CG1 The student will describe the meaning of

1. Natural rights as found in the Declaration of Independence (the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness).
2. "We the people" from the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution as a reflection of consent of the governed or popular sovereignty.

SS4E1 The student will use the basic economic concepts of trade, opportunity cost,

specialization, voluntary exchange, productivity, and price incentives to illustrate historical events.

1. Describe opportunity costs and their relationship to decision-making across time

ELAGSE4RI1: Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text

## Objectives:

*Students will understand ...*

that slavery is a complex institution intertwined with cultural beliefs as well as the economy of the American Colonies.

*Students will be able to...*

develop an argument using supporting evidence from primary and secondary resources.

## Steps:

1. Have on display the question of equal rights: Should equal rights be granted to everyone?
  1. Allow for some discussion, perhaps a definition of equal rights.
  2. In terms of equal rights to all, consider these groups:
    1. Children
    2. Convicted Prisoners
    3. Former Inmates
2. Remind students of the document chiefly authored by Thomas Jefferson. They can complete the statement, "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created \_\_\_\_\_"
3. Introduce the question, "Was Thomas Jefferson egalitarian?"
  1. Define the term
  2. Extended exercise: Have students respond 'yes' or 'no' to this question – no discussion. This can be simple raising of hands or moving to sides of the classroom
4. Present documents for analysis
  1. Present Document 1 having a student read the excerpt out loud
  2. Provide students with time to reply in writing – quick responses are acceptable
5. Continue presenting documents 2 through 4 with time for written response and short discussion
6. Present Document 5 (list of slaves from Monticello)
  1. Notice the date of the Farm book as compared to the date of the writing of the Declaration of Independence
7. Present Document 6
8. Hash it out
  1. Have students select a side
    1. One side stating he was egalitarian
    2. The other side stating he was not
  2. Allow for group discussion
    1. Each group should appoint a spokesperson for each round
      1. First, allow one group to state their most important reason using support from the documents
      2. The second group gets to refute that argument and provide their own reasons
      3. At teacher discretion, the debate can go back and forth
    2. Finally, allow students to 'change sides' the teacher will likely notice challenges for students to be all one way or another.
    3. Allow students to align themselves on a scale across the room, the center being neutral – each side of the room representing more conviction.
    4. Return students to their seats
    5. Ask about the challenges of answering this simple question: Was Thomas Jefferson

egalitarian?

6. In closing, demonstrate how Jefferson's words are still being used today with quotes from Lincoln, Stanton, King, and Yousafzai.

### **Materials:**

1. [Excerpt from Thomas Jefferson to Brissot de Warville](#) 11 February 1788
2. [Excerpt from Thomas Jefferson to Edward Coles](#) 25 August 1814
3. [Excerpt from Thomas Jefferson to Edward Rutledge](#) 14 July 1787
4. [Extract from Thomas Jefferson's Drafts of the Virginia Constitution](#) 13 June 1776
5. [Thomas Jefferson's Farm Book](#) 1774-1824
6. [Runaway Ad](#) 14 September 1769

### **Assessment(s):**

#### **Formative:**

Participation is a key part of this lesson. Responding appropriately to questions as well as participating in the movement to sides and the Hash it out are all key components to judging student attention

Written responses to each of the documents

#### **Summative:**

A participation rubric is available at the end of the lesson (2 per page) as a quick check for students to gauge their own participation. The teacher can then review these rubrics to verify students' responses as well as look for disparity in perceived and actual participation.

A written response can be assigned to students. This could be a ten minute free write or as formal as a multi-paragraph response.

#### **Assessment Criteria (rubric, checklist, etc.):**

See assessment handout

#### **Accommodations:**

1. Especially for the images, consider broadcasting on larger screen to assist the visually impaired
2. This lesson allows for students to move to positions within the classroom as demonstration of their agreement with statements. Consider mobility issues for those in the classroom to participate.
3. In Extension exercises (written responses), students can be allowed accommodations in their response based on IEP or other needs.

#### **Extensions**

Lesson on Primary and Secondary sources. The Runaway Ad is from a newspaper print. Demonstrate how newspapers can be both primary and secondary.

Students could provide a written response to the question: Was Thomas Jefferson egalitarian? This could be a ten minute free-write all the way through a formal five paragraph style response.

Discussion of Jefferson's words through the years. State Standards have covered suffrage (Stanton) and Martin Luther King, Jr in previous years. 5th grade Standards include Abraham Lincoln. Many students are familiar with Malala Yousafzai. How have Lincoln's radical words shaped different issues through these people?

**Reading Opportunities** (class-wide or individual):

- *Slave Life at Monticello* The Monticello Classroom:  
<https://classroom.monticello.org/article/slave-life-at-monticello/>
- *Dave the Potter* by Laban Callick Hill
- *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Everything* by Maire Kalman
- *If You Lived in the Time of Slavery* by Anne Kamma

