

# Using Epistolary Forms as Historical/Social Context in Understanding Seminal Texts: Thomas Jefferson's Letters from Paris, France as a Preclude to Charles Dicken's, *Tale of Two Cities*.

**Title:** Using Epistolary Forms as Historical/Social Context in Understanding Seminal Texts

**Descriptive Subtitle:** "Thomas Jefferson's Letters from Paris, France as a Preclude to Charles Dicken's, *Tale of Two Cities*."

**Overview:** *Describe the method you'll be using (DBQ, stations, Socratic seminar, etc.) and where the lesson fits within your curriculum and/or unit.*

This is a Lesson that is part of a six part Unit that serves as the precursor to reading Charles Dickens' seminal text on social commentary, ***A Tale of Two Cities***. The other components of **the Unit** address how ***language*** (both written and oral communication) determines culture and class spatially (particularly in Britain during this epoch) as well as further introducing students to the use of Biblical references and allusions in a seminal text. We will also review the four universals (as well as the sub-universals that appear in this text specifically). We will discuss the use of literary devices used throughout the text. Generally the four literary universals are considered to be; life, death, beauty and uncertainty. (Dickens refers to the sub-universals in Chapter Five of his text entitled, "The Wine Shop", when he states that 'the Lords of cold, sickness, ignorance and want (Hunger) were present in San Antoine'.)

**Prior knowledge:**

**This is a 12<sup>th</sup> Grade class so they are presumed to understand fundamental literary devices (but they will be reviewed throughout the reading of the text). They will be given an initial Warm-up exercise to determine what if anything they understand about the French Revolution. I may place them in small groups and make this a Contemporary Pop Cultural Exercise with a "prize" to the "winning group".**

**Objectives:**

*Students will be able to understand how events do not occur in isolation and that one actor can play a pivotal role in the chain of actions that lead to a cataclysmic or history uprising, rebellion or revolt (Thomas Jefferson American and French Revolutions)*

*Students will be able to evaluate the importance of the epistolary form as an informational document and how using the personal can literally become the political and thus “the public”.*

*Students will know how to assess how this very personal form can reveal aspects of an individual’s or several individuals’ personalities and thus through these revelations change the course of not only American history but global history as well.*

Students will be able to refer directly to the fictional text as a result of their examinations of primary source documents see the parallels between fictional passages as social commentary and epistles as historical documents that both convey important information to their recipients about the historical (past).

This Lesson will also assist in student analysis of Jean Louis David’s works that are contemporaneous to this period and will also be a facet of this Unit as well. The examination of the Jefferson letters will provide students with valuable prior knowledge in their group viewing and discussion of David’s paintings.

**Steps:** *Provide teachers or students with instructions for completing the lesson. Give step by step instructions with an estimate for the amount of time needed for each step.*

1. Teachers should conduct a CPC (Contemporary Pop Cultural) warm-up exercise to determine what students know or don’t know about the French Revolution as well as the American Revolution. I would definitely give them these words and have them in either a general class “chat” or in small groups discussing what they mean individually and thus collectively: **riot**, **rebellion**, **uprising** and **revolt**. I would also include **Civil Disobedience** in this group as well and have them as a group determining how each one differs from the other. They may or may not reach consensus; that’s okay. The definitions will evolve as they continue reading the text.
2. I may do a “Jeopardy” or “Family Feud” type exercise to break up the monotony of reading a 19th century text.
3. Then I would distribute the letters from Jefferson’s Ambassadorship to France, those referencing the Estates General to several correspondents: John Jay, Richard Price (January 8, 1789), John Brown Cutting (November 3, 1788), Alexander Donald (dated November 18, 1788), Francis Hopkinson (December 21, 1788) and two addressed to George Washington and John Jay each dated August 14, 1787. This introduces students to 18<sup>th</sup> century primary source documents in the epistolary form. Have them read through them in small groups and determine what each says:

Who is the recipient?

What is their relationship to each other?

How do you know? (What key words tell you of the nature of their connection?)

What does the diction and syntax of this written communication form convey about the writer and their intended audience?

2 The previous exercise will take you a class period and logistically it may take two or possibly three unless you have a 90 minute block period then you could possibly do it in that time frame depending on the level of your cohort and the amount of teacher scaffolding needed. Let them do the primary interpretation of the letters. It's okay if they "get" the true meaning of the letters. It's the exposure to the diction of the time period that is the main objective of the exercise.

3 Now I would move to the parallel texts to see if the prior historical/social materials provide a deeper meaning to both: A passage from Dickens and a visualization from David. (Samples are attached)

**Materials:** *List the links to primary sources, images, etc. attach any handouts or presentations, and list any technology needed for the lesson.*

Some Chapters to consider for use:

Chapter One; "The Period"

Chapter Five; "The Wine Shop"

Chapter Seven; "Monseigneur in Town"

<http://literature.org/authors/dickens-charles/two-cities/>

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/jacques-louis-david/portrait-of-madame-charles-louis-trudaine-1792>

<http://design-haven.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Jacques-Louis-David-Portrait-of-the-Marquise-dOrvilliers.jpg>

<https://lakeimagesweb.artic.edu/iiif/ac584b8a-29c8-2953-6346-613003b89d30/full/!800,800/0/default.jpg>

**Thomas Jefferson Correspondences:**

<https://founders.archives.gov/?q=Volume%3AJefferson-01-12&s=1511211112&r=31>

Letter from Thomas Jefferson to George Washington dated August 14, 1787.

<https://founders.archives.gov/?q=Volume%3AJefferson-01-12&s=1511311112&r=42>

Letter from Thomas Jefferson to James Madison

<https://founders.archives.gov/?q=Volume%3AJefferson-01-12&s=1511311112&r=42>

Letter from Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Paine

<https://founders.archives.gov/?q=Volume%3AJefferson-01-12&s=1511311112&r=69>

Marquis de Lafayette to Thomas Jefferson

<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-14-02-0196>

<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-14-02-0041>

<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-14-02-0060>

<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-14-02-0151>

**Assessment(s):** *consider diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment strategies*

There are two primary forms of assessment for this reading comprehension assignment. Both are designed to foster literacy.

The interpretation of David is in conjunction with reading the passage of Dickens. So students may interpret the painting on their own, with colleagues; however they feel most comfortable. (If they insist you can lead their process).

(There are several ways to have students analyze fine art. I always have them start from one focal point in the painting and then move either from side to side or top to bottom or the reverse. It is up to the viewer to decide what they see, think, feel or believe is occurring in the painting and where.)

**Assessment of Fine Art in Conjunction with text:**

Choose one section of the painting and draw it (only one section, not the entire painting; and tell me why you drew this particular section and how it **relates** to the text. Be **specific**.

**Summative Assessment:**

Now that you have read Jefferson's correspondence as Ambassador to France, and you analyzed David's works and paralleled them to the chapters assigned in the text, in a well written reflective abstract discuss what occurs in Chapter and why?

(**Term:** Reflective Abstract means that students are to write a two to four type written reflection on what they have "abstracted from classroom discussions, research and the reading of the various texts that provides them with a clear understanding of how Thomas Jefferson's presence in France influences the events of the French Revolution.)

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

***I personally do not use standardized rubrics except the AP Rubric for Writing that is easily accessible online.***

***Sample rubric is attached as well.***

Students need to be able to discuss and differentiate between the terms riots, rebellions, uprisings and revolts.

Students need to discuss the possible effect that Jefferson's presence in France may have had on the actions of the bourgeoisie. Let students know that it is not generally known on the European continent that Jefferson is the author of the document. (D of I)

They need to discuss the works of David and Dickens as social commentary and protest literature and why?

Most importantly students need to discuss why women are used almost exclusively in David's works (in relationship to the events of the events occurring in France)

**Accommodations:** *List suggestions for adapting the materials, procedures, and assessments for varying student needs or for grade level, etc.*

Scaffolding depends upon the teacher and their various cohorts. These are the strategies I normally use:

2. We may read the various passages of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century passages together and **discuss as a class** if necessary.
3. If you have Honors or AP students have them read the passage in class with "guided questions that you prepare with page numbers located for them to find the answers. You can do this with every level with questions designed for (a) **On the line**; i.e. listing what the text says (b) **between the lines; making inferences from the actual text and (c) above the lines for varied complexity. (this is where a student analyzes and states their opinion of what is occurring based upon prior knowledge: critical analysis of a passage)**