

Jefferson & Washington: The Pursuit of Happiness

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a.k.a. Once in a Blue Moon

Challenge/Question: Just a year before his untimely death, on the subject of his relationship with Thomas Jefferson, George Washington wrote: *"Nothing short of the Evidence you have adduced ... could have shaken my belief in the sincerity of a friendship, which I had conceived was possessed for me."*^[1] Once contemporaries with much in common, their friendship was irrevocably broken by the international publication of a letter Jefferson had written privately to a friend which was universally interpreted as an attack on Washington's values, ambition and character. Sixteen years later, Thomas Jefferson appeared to have had a change of heart: *"I think I knew General Washington intimately and thoroughly; and were I called on to delineate his character it should be in terms like these . . . his integrity was most pure . . . he was indeed, in every sense of the words, a wise, a good, & a great man . . . on the whole, his character was, in it's mass perfect . . . never did nature and fortune combine more perfectly."*^[2]

Had Washington lived longer, would he and Jefferson have eventually reconciled?

Grade Level: designed for a middle school audience (6-8), but readily adaptable for students in grades 9-12

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Lesson Type: Group/Entire Class (guided introductory activity, sharing of final products); Individual/Small Group (hypothesis, research, analysis, product creation)

Duration: 150-180 minutes (we've divided the activity into six "30 minute" blocks)

Lesson Plan Overview: At the time of George Washington's death in 1799, the relationship between 'Founding Brothers' Thomas Jefferson and George Washington had disintegrated, primarily as the result

of a personal letter Thomas Jefferson wrote to his former neighbor, Philip Mazzei. While the focus of the letter, penned 24 April 1796, “discussed Mazzei’s lingering business affairs in Virginia and relayed news of his old friends, a single paragraph transformed this piece of private correspondence into the notorious ‘Mazzei letter’ that plagued Jefferson for the remainder of his life,”^[3] and ultimately destroyed his collegial friendship with Washington. Students will: (1) examine the Mazzei letter and its subsequent translations into newspapers in France and the United States as a guided group activity; (2) independently research and analyze the common acquaintances, cherished peers, Enlightenment ideals and polymath lifestyles Jefferson and Washington shared; then (3) create a differentiated product using the technology of their choice (Mad Lips, Twitter, iMovie, ThingLink, et al.) inferencing/hypothesizing how the Jefferson/Washington split might (or might not) have been mended had Washington lived beyond 14 December 1799.

Prior Knowledge/Selected Vocabulary/Introductory Background Concepts: Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, republic/republican government, monarchy/monarchical, aristocrat, despot/despotism, Enlightenment, polymath, partisanship/political parties, primary source, secondary source, public/private

State/National Standards:

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework/Incorporating the Common Core –

Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies . . . 6-12

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing – Research to Build and Present Knowledge

7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Virginia Standards of Learning

US History to 1865

USI.7 The student will demonstrate knowledge of the challenges faced by the new nation by

1. c) describing the major accomplishments of the first five presidents of the United States.

Virginia and United States History

VUS.6 The student will demonstrate knowledge of the major events from the last decade of the eighteenth century through the first half of the nineteenth century by

1. a) explaining the principles and issues that prompted Thomas Jefferson to organize the first opposition political party;

Virginia and United States Government

GOVT.17 The student will demonstrate knowledge of personal character traits that facilitate thoughtful and effective participation in civic life by

1. a) practicing trustworthiness and honesty;
2. b) practicing courtesy and respect for the rights of others;
3. c) practicing responsibility, accountability, and self-reliance;

Objectives/Rationale: 21st century students will appreciate that two of America's beloved 18th century heroes were very human in that they shared an experience common to us all: the damage (and in their case, loss) of a friendship over comments intended for private ears that ended up in the public arena. This lesson is both valuable in the context of the United States' historical narrative as well as useful in students' contemporary understanding of the nearly invisible line between public and private information and how our character is shaped by the conflicts and resolutions that we ourselves generate. This lesson works well in the study of Enlightenment ideology, early American history, character development, and communication strategy (literally "lost in translation").

Outcomes: After completing their research, students will create a digital product using the technology of their choice. This product will reflect their research ideas and show how Jefferson and Washington could (or could not) have reconciled their friendship.

Steps/Time Needed for Each:

CLASS PERIOD ONE:

1. **5 mins; Warm-Up Activity:** Have students think about a close friend, and come up with 2-3 things they have in common, and 2-3 things that they disagree on. Ask a few students to share out, use these ideas as a springboard into the Jefferson and Washington relationship.
2. **1 min; Survey (could be completed manually or using a digital platform like Edmodo):** On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being BFF and 1 being arch-enemy, rate how closely you imagine the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and George Washington to have been. Teacher should record the results and save for a post-research survey.
3. **5 min; Read/highlight the paragraph 3 excerpt of [Letter: Jefferson to Philip Mazzei; April 24, 1796](#)** (from "The aspect of our politics . . ." to "which succeeded our labors.").
4. **5 min; With a partner, identify the main idea of the excerpt:** What is Jefferson, the author, trying to communicate?
5. **2 min; With your partner, outline two questions you have about the text:** What do you find startling, unclear or incomplete in your understanding of this text?
6. **2 min; Groups share their main idea summaries and questions with the class.**
7. **10 min; Teacher-led exploration of [Editorial Note of Jefferson's Letter to Philip Mazzei](#) and modeling of CREI CHART:** (C)laim/hypothesis, (R)reason, (E)evidence (identify primary or secondary source(s)), (I)nterpretation/inference).

CLASS PERIOD TWO:

1. **10 mins; Overview of Project:** Teacher-led explanation of “The Pursuit of Happiness” Lesson — introduction of [PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS DIRECTIONS AND RUBRIC](#) and sharing of exemplary **OUTCOME** project example(s).
2. **20 mins; Student (or student team) analysis of *Moniteur* and *Minerva* and *Gazette*:** Find Evidence and Interpretation/inference to support a reason for the continued fracture in the TJ/GW friendship, or for the reconciliation of the two men.

*[Paper Extract and Commentary: Printed in the Paris *Moniteur*; English Translation](#)

*[Paper Extract and Commentary: Printed in the New York *Minerva*](#)*

–[Paper: Minerva; Date: May 2, 1797; Volume: IV; Issue: 1032; Page: \[2\]; Location: New](#)

[York, New York](#)

*[Paper: Gazette of the United States; Date: February 2, 1800; Volume: XVII; Issue: 2306; Page: \[3\];](#)

[Location: Philadelphia, PA](#)

CLASS PERIOD THREE:

1. **15 mins;** Search the [Founders Online](#) website for primary source evidence for the E-I sections of [CREI CHART](#) regarding Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and their relationship.
2. **15 mins;** Search the [Jefferson Encyclopedia](#) and the [Washington Encyclopedia](#) websites for secondary source evidence for the E-I sections of [CREI CHART](#) regarding Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and their relationship.

CLASS PERIOD FOUR:

1. **15 mins;** Explore Monticello (virtually) as a Metaphor for the Character of Thomas Jefferson: Find secondary source evidence for E-I sections of [CREI CHART](#) through TJ’s home’s websites ~
*[Website: Monticello Explorer](#); *[Website: Explore the Rooms and Furnishings of Monticello](#).
2. **15 mins;** Explore Mount Vernon (virtually) as a Metaphor for the Character of George Washington: Find secondary source evidence for E-I sections of [CREI CHART](#) through GW’s “home” website ~

*[Website: Mount Vernon Virtual](#)

[Tour](#).

CLASS PERIOD FIVE:

30 mins; Creation of Research Products: Student groups use their [CREI CHART](#) research to create an original product utilizing the technology of their choice.

CLASS PERIOD SIX:

1. **29 mins; Presentation of Projects:** Student groups share the original products created using the **OUTCOME** of their research.
2. **1 min; Post-Survey (could be completed manually or using a digital platform like Edmodo):** On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being BFF and 1 being arch-enemy, rate how closely you imagine the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and George Washington to have been. Teacher should record the results and save for a post-research survey.

Materials: A Great Teacher's Guide: A comprehensive editorial further explaining the background and subsequent consequences of the Mazzei letter; a close read will also reveal additional sources than those listed below: [Editorial Note of Jefferson's Letter to Philip Mazzei](#)

- Primary Sources, in chronological order:
 - [Letter: Jefferson to Philip Mazzei; April 24, 1796](#)
 - [Paper Extract and Commentary: Printed in the Paris *Moniteur;* English Translation](#)
 - [Paper Extract and Commentary: Printed in the New York *Minerva*](#)
 1. [Paper: Minerva; Date: May 2, 1797; Volume: IV; Issue: 1032; Page: \[2\]; Location: New York, New York](#)
 - [Paper: Gazette of the United States; Date: February 2, 1800; Volume: XVII; Issue: 2306; Page: \[3\]; Location: Philadelphia, PA](#)
 - [Founders Online](#), contains transcriptions of most of Jefferson's and Washington's correspondences, as well as other founding fathers. Students can search by keyword, dates, author and recipient. This is an ideal resource for student research.
- Handouts:
 - All students need the [PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS DIRECTIONS AND RUBRIC](#) and [CREI CHART](#); We have left this document blank to let the teacher decide where the lesson should take their students. A claim and/or reasons could be added to the chart to guide students in their pursuit of learning. Suggestion, copy the CREI Chart back-to-back to give students enough room to expand their ideas.
- Example Secondary Sources:
 - These websites could be used to examine and compare the styles of architecture and interior design that Jefferson and Washington shared:
 - [Website: Monticello Explorer](#)
 - [Website: Explore the Rooms and Furnishings of Monticello](#)
 - [Website: Mount Vernon Virtual Tour](#)
 - Students can do a keyword search for ideas on:
 - [Jefferson Encyclopedia](#)
 - [Washington Encyclopedia](#)

- Primary Sources regarding the Mazzei Letter: These sources are excellent in their explanation of the break up and could be used as a way to prove the Claim, that their relationship would not have reconciled.
- James Monroe writes Jefferson advising him to acknowledge his authorship of the Mazzei letter: [Letter: Monroe to Jefferson; July 12, 1797](#)
- Jefferson writes to James Madison explaining his dilemma and asking his advice about the Mazzei letter: [Letter: Jefferson to Madison on August 3, 1797](#)
- Madison's response to Jefferson, advising him against the advice of Monroe:

[Letter: Madison to Jefferson; August 5, 1797](#)

- Jefferson's nephew Peter Carr writes to Washington under the pen name John Langhorne. In an attempt to 'even the playing field' Carr/Langhorne sympathizes with Washington as an attempt to lure him into writing something negative and inflammatory about Jefferson. [Letter: Carr/Langhorne to Washington; September 25, 1797](#)
- After [John Nicholas reveals Carr's intentions to Washington in a letter on November 18, 1797](#), Washington's response to Nicholas finally unveils his reactions to Jefferson's letter to Mazzei: [Letter: Washington to Nicholas; November 30, 1797](#)
- Jefferson's praise of George Washington, fifteen years after his death, showing evidence of his reconciliatory spirit. [Letter: Jefferson to Walter Jones; January 2, 1814](#)

Assessment criteria: See PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS DIRECTIONS AND RUBRIC

Accommodations: This lesson could be easily adapted by giving struggling students more information. For example, supply the Reasons students will need on their [CREI CHART](#), or give them further examples of Evidence they could use for their Interpretations. Our lesson has built in accommodations, the final product allows students to choose how they would like to present their knowledge. This differentiation allows children to decide what works best for them.

Extensions: Foreign Language "Lost In Translation"

Behavior/Conflict Resolution

Public/Private and 21st Century Technology

^[1]<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/06-02-02-0112>

^[2]<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-07-02-0052>

^[3]<https://jeffersonpapers.princeton.edu/selected-documents/jeffersons-letter-philip-mazzei>

