

TJ and the Separation of Church and State.

General

Grade Level

High School

Author Info

Mike Klapka, Largo High School, Barringer Fellow 2014

Type of Lesson

Challenge

Type of Project (Individual/Group/Both)

Group

Duration

30-60 minutes

Challenge Question

Is the separation of church and state necessary in America?

Rationale

Because the question on church and state even precedes the founding of the Republic, and the question about the proper place of religion in the political life of this nation still exists today, students will use their skills to identify and evaluate prominent terms contained in the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom.

Notes to Teacher

Students need to use the documents/audio of the Statute for Religious Freedom. The additional documents can be used based upon teacher's discretion..Two quotes from the statute that you might

consider for additional discussion are:

1. "Whereas, Almighty God hath created the mind free; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burthens, or by civil incapacitations tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion, who being Lord, both of body and mind yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either..."
2. "(T)hat to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves is sinful and tyrannical; that even the forcing him to support this or that teacher of his own religious persuasion is depriving him of the comfortable liberty of giving his contributions to the particular pastor, whose morals he would make his pattern, and whose powers he feels most persuasive to righteousness..."

Steps

1. 1. Introduce the concept by reading and/or listening to the audio of the statute.
2. Show the students the "word cloud" of the statute either by passing out copies to them or by projecting it on your classroom screen.
3. Working in groups (5-10 minutes) the students will choose 3-5 terms that are prominently displayed in the word cloud and explain why those words are so important.
4. Have the class share their choices and write their choices on chart paper for the entire class to see. (15-20 minutes)
5. Invite conversation in the classroom on what terms/ideas on the chart paper are particularly important as related to the question. Have them include a quote from the statute if possible. Ask if they see any connection to the 1st amendment as well (10 minutes).
6. Wrap up: Assign a quick writes assignment (homework if time does not permit to complete in class) on whether or not Mr. Jefferson's beliefs as stated in the statute are being followed today. You may also have them state whether or not that is good practice.