

Journal Writing

General

Grade Level

Elementary School

Author Info

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Type of Lesson

Other

Duration

45 min – several weeks

Interdisciplinary Connections

This lesson can easily tie into social studies, history, and language arts curriculum.

Objectives

Overview

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce students to the various journals that were kept by Thomas Jefferson and his wife Martha Wayles Jefferson.

Prior Knowledge

Teachers will want to read the teacher background sheet listed under "materials."

If further background reading is desired, refer to information sheets listed under "materials."

Objectives/Learning Outcomes

- Students will learn about Thomas Jefferson, his wife Martha, and life at Monticello by reading the various journals
- Students will learn about different formats for journals
- Students will learn to create their own journals

Procedures

1. 20 minutes

State the purpose of the lesson and allow students to examine pages from the following journals:

- Jefferson Family births and deaths in the Book of Common Prayer
- Martha Wayles Jefferson household accounts
- Observations on the Weather
- Thomas Jefferson's Farm Book page 51

2. 15 minutes

Discuss the reason for keeping journals with students and be sure to bring in some of the ideas brought up in the teacher background reading (under "materials" section).

3. 5 minutes

Assign for homework:

Ask students to create and write a journal for any length of time you desire (perhaps the length of your unit on Thomas Jefferson).

Materials

Materials Needed

Teacher Background: Journal Writing

Journals, diaries, and blogs are the recordings of the events of everyday life. They often include personal accounts of happenings or events and sometimes reveal private opinions and personal feelings. The Jefferson family journals and writings that are included in this lesson represent a broad spectrum of events and interests and are typical of many journals kept during the age of Jefferson. These journal entries can tell us a lot about Thomas Jefferson, his family, and the enslaved people who lived and worked at Monticello, but as with many documents from this time period, they often leave us with as many questions as they do answers. In order to facilitate your discussion with your students, please review the following information.

Book of Common Prayer:

This page, taken from Jefferson's *Book of Common Prayer*, lists births and death dates of some members of the Jefferson family. The term "old style" also written as "O.S." refers to the [Old Style](#) or

Julian calendar that was used in the United States until 1753. In that year, the New Style (N.S.) or Gregorian calendar was adopted, and eleven days were added to the date. Thomas Jefferson was born on April 2, 1743 O.S., but today we celebrate his birthday on April 13.

Martha Wayles Jefferson Household Accounts:

A plantation mistress was usually responsible for overseeing the food production for her family and the enslaved population. She managed the dairy, smokehouse, poultry yards, and the butchering of animals for food. Candle and soap making were two of her most time-consuming activities. A plantation mistress supervised the production of cloth and the making of clothing for both her family and all of the slaves. This document is one of the few records surviving in the hand of Martha Wayles Jefferson. It is a very impersonal account of her daily activities. During the time of these pages, on May 28, 1777, Martha gave birth to her only son. Sadly, he died just over two weeks later on June 14. There is no mention of this event in her account journal.

Observations on the Weather:

Thomas Jefferson was among the first people in America to conduct systematic meteorological studies. He recorded temperatures twice a day and noted rainfall and winds. With the help of his friends in different parts of the country he tried to keep an accurate record of the weather patterns across the land. This document is his record from Philadelphia taken during the Second Continental Congress in July 1776.

Thomas Jefferson's Farm Book page 51 (Ration Lists for 1796):

As a plantation owner, Thomas Jefferson was responsible for feeding, clothing, and sheltering his enslaved workers. His *Farm Book* contains the details of the provisions, clothing, and bedding he allocated the slaves on a yearly basis. This document, Ration List for 1796, consists of three major columns. Each column is headed by the name of one of Jefferson's Albemarle County, Virginia properties. The *ration* column refers to the ration of fish given to the slaves each week. A ration equaled four fish and consisted of salted herring which Jefferson usually ordered from Richmond, Virginia. A group of names under one bracket was usually a household (or family) and one ration was usually given to a household or group.

Homework

Students will write their own journals for homework.

