

And Liberty and Justice for... Some?: Writings on Liberty, Democracy, and Government by the Founding Fathers

General

Grade Level

High School

Author Info

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Type of Lesson

Document Analysis

Duration

1 block (80 min)

Objectives

Overview

While relying on enlightenment philosophy which stated that liberty and equality were natural rights inherent in every person, the Founding Fathers wanted to ensure that white, male, monied citizens received these rights, while other persons did not. Students will compare and contrast various writings of the Founding Fathers that discuss liberty, equality, and democracy while analyzing how these documents assess and apply to race, class, and gender.

Prior Knowledge

Students have already studied the founding of the United States in 11th grade, but in a more traditional course of study. They are familiar with most of the documents here, such as the Declaration of Independence, Common Sense, and the Constitution. They also studied The Enlightenment in 9th grade, and then again how it influenced the founding of the U.S. in 11th grade. If necessary, the teacher can do a brief introductory lecture on the founding documents.

State Standards

State Standard:

This lesson meets New York State Learning Standard for Social Studies 5

Civics, Citizenship, and Government

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of the necessity for establishing governments; the governmental system of the U.S. and other nations; the U.S. Constitution; the basic civic values of American constitutional democracy; and the roles, rights, and responsibilities of citizenship, including avenues of participation.

SOURCE: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/socst/socstand/home.html>

This lesson also meets the following Common Core Standards:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1](#) Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2](#) Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas

[.CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.3](#) Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

SOURCE: <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/11-12>

Objectives/Learning Outcomes

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Compare and contrast various primary source documents while analyzing them for enlightenment theory as well as application to race, class, and gender.
2. Examine the effects that audience can have on a writer and the subsequent documentUse documents from the 18th Century as inspiration to write their own declarations that represent modern day ideas of race, class, and gender

Essential Questions

1. Why is language so important in these documents? How can it be misleading?
2. How did one get power in the late 18th Century? What characteristics made getting power almost impossible? Which characteristics are changeable? Which are not?

Procedures

1. 10-20 minutes

1. Before class, students will read and answer the following questions (to be typed, collected and graded):

John Adams, Thoughts on Government: <http://www.constitution.org/jadams/thoughts.htm>

1. When was this written? What circumstances and philosophies might influenced Adams' writing? Who was the intended audience?

2. According to Adams, what is the end of government?

3. What kind of government does Adams suggest for the colonies?

Thomas Paine, Common Sense, Of the Origin and Design of Government in General: <http://www.ushistory.org/paine/commonsense/sense2.htm>

1. When was this written? Why was it written? What circumstances and philosophies influenced Paine's writing? Who was the intended audience?

2. According to Paine, why do societies form governments?

3. What kind of government does Paine suggest for the colonies?

The United States Constitution

http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html

1. When was this written? Why was it written? What/who were the influences for it? Who was the intended audience?
2. What kind of government is set up here?
3. How does it relate to the writings of Adams and Paine?

Now that you have read all 3 documents, what do they say (or not say) about race, class, and gender? How do enlightenment philosophies play a role in these documents? How have the philosophies been amended for the American experience? What does this tell us about this historical era? How might these documents be different if written today?

Answers will be discussed before being handed in.

If the teacher feels that any of the text is too much for the students to get through in one class period, they can excerpt it themselves and adapt the questions accordingly

2. *10 minutes*

Quick Write Activity: Both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were presidents and slaveholders, but Washington hires white servants while in the White House, while Jefferson brings slaves with him to serve. Why do you think each man made the decision that he did? Is one better than the other? Can appearance change reality?

3. *40-50 minutes*

1. Think/Pair/Share: In class, students will be given handouts of the Declaration of Independence and an excerpt from Notes on the State of Virginia (both authored by Thomas Jefferson) entitled Thomas Jefferson's Writings. Teacher might want to remind students of the timing of each document, as well as its intended audience. Students will work in pairs to answer the following questions (also included on the hand-out):

A. After reading the 1st paragraph of the Declaration, summarize why the colonies are declaring their independence from England (1-2 sentences)

B. Based on reading the second paragraph, what rights do all men have?

C. After reading the list of grievances, which seem to violate rights in the U.S. today?

D. After reading the entire document, were the colonies justified in declaring their freedom? Why or why not?

E. Does the fact that indentured servants, slaves, American Indians, and women were not considered "all men" change your view of the document or the decision to declare independence? Why or why not?

F. After reading the excerpt from Notes, summarize Jefferson's views on African-Americans.

G. How does it compare to his views on Native Americans?

H. Both of these documents were written by Thomas Jefferson over a span of 5 years. Compare and contrast Jefferson's views on equality in the documents. What does this comparison reveal about Jefferson's beliefs about African Americans and slavery? How does that work with the famous quote, "all men are created equal, endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, among these, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"? Does the purpose of the document affect what is written in it?

OR

(Teacher hands out copies which do not mention the author)

Read each of these documents for their ideas on liberty and equality. What similarities are there? What differences? Knowing that the documents were only written 5 years apart, hypothesize what could account for the differences. Once students have answered this question out loud, inform them that Jefferson authored both and now discuss the differences)

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After 40 minutes, pairs will share with a couple of other pairs, and then discussion will be opened up to the class as a whole.

4. 20 minutes

1. If time permits, have students read this article about Washington, Jefferson, and slavery to see if they agree with the analysis:

http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/Flawed_Founders.html (Smithsonian Magazine, Nov. 2002, "Founding Fathers and Slaveholders")

Materials

Materials Needed

pen, paper, handouts

Assessment

Homework

With your own modern day perspective in mind, re-write the Declaration of Independence (or a portion thereof) to reflect the way that you think race, class, and/or gender should be represented in it. (Another extension activity: In the next class, have students switch their writing with a partner and have the partner analyze the document with an 18th Century perspective (time traveling) and write a quick critique

of it. What makes sense, what doesn't? What seems outrageous? What seems sensible? Students then share with their partner and then the class as a whole.)

Assessment

See above

Accommodations

Accommodations – Students with Special Needs

If the teacher feels that any of the text is too much for the students to get through in one class period, they can excerpt it themselves and adapt the questions accordingly

