

Hey Thomas, What's In Your Wallet?

General

Grade Level

High School

Author Info

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Type of Lesson

Document Analysis

Duration

80 minutes

Interdisciplinary Connections

This lesson plan incorporates elements of literary analysis (point of view, interpretation and synthesis) that are commonly taught in high school english courses.

Objectives

Overview

It is my personal experience as an American History teacher that very few students grasp the great originality and creativity that willed our country into existence. Part of doing so involves understanding the distinction between a democracy and a republic, both as approaches to governing as well as the impetus for a uniquely American socio-political identity. Knowing this difference illuminates the rest of American history in a profound way. Therefore, it is the goal of this lesson that students will be able to distinguish between the concepts of a democracy and a republic using the papers of Thomas Jefferson.

Prior Knowledge

None needed.

State Standards

Virginia State Standards:

USI.6c, USI.7b, CE.2a

Common Core Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1](#)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2](#)

2014 Revised AP Learning Objective and Key Concept:

CUL-4, 3.2 IB

Procedures

1. *10 minutes*

Introduce the lesson by sharing with students that in October of 1787 (just after the conclusion of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia), Thomas Jefferson's good friend James Madison wrote to him, saying:

“Those who contend for a simple Democracy...actuated by the sense of the majority, and operating within narrow limits, assume or suppose a case which is altogether fictitious. They found their reasoning on the idea, that the people composing the Society, enjoy not only an equality of political rights; but that they have all precisely the same interests, and the same feelings in every respect. Were this in reality the case, their reasoning would be conclusive. The interest of the majority would be that of the minority also; the decisions could only turn on mere opinion concerning the good of the whole, of which the major voice would be the safest criterion; and within a small sphere, this voice could be most easily collected, and the public affairs most accurately managed. We know however that no Society ever did or can consist of so homogeneous a mass of Citizens.”

In this correspondence, Madison and Jefferson (as Founding Fathers) are unearthing a theme central to the forming of our union as states – specifically, that the founding fathers desired to give the future citizens of the United States something more than a “simple Democracy”.

1. Brainstorm with students their understanding of the concept of a democracy.
2. If Madison and Jefferson desired for us something more than a “simple Democracy”, what, then, were we given? Discuss with students their prior knowledge of the notion of a “republic”.

2. *30-40 minutes*

Tell students that during Jefferson's lifetime (1743-1826), men often carried their papers, letters and other documents in a wallet, similar to (though larger than) the modern day version. Today's lesson, entitled “Hey Thomas, What's in Your Wallet?” will ask students to reconstitute the wallet of Thomas Jefferson with the papers that they believe best embody, or provide definition for, the distinct nature of the republic that was being built (as compared to the “simple Democracy” that Madison bemoaned in his letter Jefferson).

Students will read the eight documents (or excerpts of documents) included in the lesson. From those eight, they will choose the four that they believe best embody, or provide definition for, the distinct nature of a republic. These documents will essentially constitute their fictitious reconstitution of Jefferson's wallet.

Give students 30-40 minutes to read all eight correspondences. Students should take notes on any references to a republic that are made (both explicit and implicit) using the graphic organizer provided

here: <http://classroom.monticello.org/kids/resources/download/592/Hey-Thomas-Primary-Source-Analysis-Sheet/>

(The graphic organizer can also be found under “Learning Resources”)

3. *15-20 minutes*

After students have completed their reading and notetaking, students should gather together for more instructions from the teacher. At this point, students will write a letter to Jefferson to include in the hypothetical wallet. In this letter, they will synthesize important information in the four other letters they have chosen by describing to Jefferson himself their understanding of the distinction between a democracy and a republic. The letter should be written in first person and address Jefferson in the same manner and form as the letters that they have just observed. NOTE: Students can hand write the note or type it using whatever format the teacher deems appropriate. There is no template for this letter.

4. *15-20 minutes*

To conclude, three options exist (as forms of formative assessment):

1. Teachers could facilitate the making of a collective, class-wide definition for the term “republic” that they believe epitomizes Jefferson's beliefs and intentions on the subject. This definition should, ideally, be hung in the room and specifically referenced whenever a discussion on the topic arises. In this way, students will be much more clear about the great originality that was the genesis for the formation of this great country. SUGGESTION: Use butcher-block paper to ensure the definition can be seen throughout the room.

AND/OR

2. Teachers could facilitate a conversation wherein students compare their prior definitions of democracy (from step 1, above) with their concluding definitions of a republic (from step 3, above).

AND/OR

3. Teachers could facilitate a conversation about the ways in which the notion of a republic can inform their understanding of what it means to be an American, both in terms of individual acts as well as a collective American social consciousness. Additionally, students could consider the questions, “How can your new understanding of a republic inform, and shed light on, other events and people in American history?” and “How can your new understanding of a republic inform the way you see your local community?”

Materials

Materials Needed

Here, again, is the notetaking graphic organizer for the primary sources: <http://classroom.monticello.org/kids/resources/download/592/Hey-Thomas-Primary-Source-Analysis-Sheet/>

Technology Needs

Students will need an electronic device on which they can read the selected excerpts (unless you as a teacher choose to print them).