

18th Century Friend Requests

General

Grade Level

Middle School

Author Info

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Type of Lesson

Cooperative Learning

Duration

2 (30-40 minute) class periods

Interdisciplinary Connections

This lesson plan will include heavy elements of language arts through careful examination of specific primary documents related to Thomas Jefferson. Students will also have an opportunity to consider how they would want to be introduced to strangers for consideration, AND students will also consider the recommendations of fellow peers related to "new meetings."

Objectives

Overview

Students will examine four primary documents in order to learn about Letters of Introduction. Letters of Introduction were literary devices used in order to increase collaboration, facilitate information sharing, and/or build new acquaintances or friendships in the 18th century. Today, students are quite familiar with "friend requests, likes or follows" as impersonal methods to begin e-relationships with existing friends or potential friends. This lesson will demonstrate the methodology involved in introductions, and

will also allow students to examine the type of person they'd like to meet or "friend," as well as how they would like to be introduced (themselves) to others—possibly complete strangers.

Prior Knowledge

Students will have a firm background with the personalities involved in the literary process; includes Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, & Marquis de Lafayette. Students do not need to know anything related to Gilmer & Morgan to utilize resource item. The vast majority of students will have a familiarity with e-friend experiences (Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, etc.)

This should be grade-level appropriate for entry-level 8th grade students.

State Standards

Virginia Standards of Learning

USI-1a, USI-1b, Reading 8.6b, Reading 8.6k, Writing 8.7a, Writing 8.7e

Objectives/Learning Outcomes

The student(s) will:

- Identify and interpret primary and secondary source documents to increase understanding of events and life in United States history to 1865 (USI-1a)
- Make connections between the past and the present (USI-1b)
- Make inferences and draw conclusions based on explicit and implied information using evidence from text as support (Reading 8.6b)
- Evaluate, organize and synthesize information for use in written and oral formats (Reading 8.6k)
- Identify intended audience (Writing 8.7a)
- Select specific vocabulary and information for audience and purpose (Writing 8.7e)

Technology Connections/outcomes

Students will engage prior knowledge of contemporary social networking sites to begin examination of 18th century examples of "friend requests" through Letters of Introduction. Aside from the technological divide that separates the 1700s from 2014-2015, what other processes were involved in transitioning acquaintances to short or long-term friendships? What might be some of the goals involved in meeting with a previously unknown stranger? What did individuals stand to benefit from this sometimes tedious

process?

Additional Learning Outcomes

1. Students will encounter and examine primary source documents in order to explore the process of introduction of strangers via the "letter of introduction" offered by a mutual friend or acquaintance.
2. Students will compare 1700s methodology to contemporary practices of "friend requesting" and/or introduction in order to draw conclusions.
3. Students will consider how they would want to be introduced to previously unknown persons, as well as who they would want to serve as a mutual "introducer" or go-between for the arrangement.
4. Students will provide written feedback about the process strategies of the 1700s.

Essential Questions

1. How do you make friends with strangers today? What is the easiest way to gain or make new friends? What is the most difficult way to gain or make friends today?
2. How do you think "friend requests" may have worked before Smartphones, Laptops, PCs, or the Internet? Was it possible to "friend" someone that was a stranger before advanced technology?
3. Why might someone want to make a new friend or meet a new person? What motivations could be involved in the "first-step" of the process?
4. What are the possible positive & negative outcomes of the "friend request" process regardless of time or era?
5. How did Mr. Gilmer introduce Thomas Jefferson to Dr. Morgan? What type of relationship existed between Gilmer and Morgan prior to the exchange of letters? Who would be carrying this letter to Dr. Morgan? Why might Thomas Jefferson want or need this letter on his way to Philadelphia?
6. How much time passed between Lafayette's letter of introduction was written (by George Washington) before it was eventually delivered to Thomas Jefferson with Lafayette's personal letter? Why would George Washington want to introduce Lafayette to Jefferson? Why would Lafayette need a letter of introduction from Washington before writing to Jefferson?
7. How can you be sure that Washington's letter of introduction was successful for Lafayette and his desire to communicate with Jefferson?
8. How does the role of mutual friendship affect the chances for strangers to meet and share ideas and information with new people in the 1700s? Today with social media networks?

9. How would you describe your own character traits (strengths)? How would you describe your best friend's character traits? Which person would you want to write a letter of introduction on your behalf? Which person would you want to avoid in that process of recommendation or introduction?

10. What character traits are most receptive when reading about a previously unknown person? Which character traits are least desirable?

Procedures

1. 5-7 minutes

The instructor will pose an opening question to the student audience:

"How do you make a new friend that was previously a stranger to you?"

Students will formulate responses through feedback, and the instructor can expect the students to explain using a variety of responses (social media, friend-to-friend introductions, accidental meeting, planned meeting, etc.); Continue:

"What types of people are you looking to meet, in order to make new friends? Are there particular qualities or descriptions that you'd be interested in locating?"

Instructor will write 3-5 responses on a white board (interactive/dry-erase); Continue:

"How would you want a good friend of yours to introduce you to a previously unknown stranger? What are some of your personal qualities or traits that you would want mentioned? Which would you prefer to NOT be mentioned?"

Instructor will have students write 3-5 responses on scrap paper per the student-learner.

2. 10-15 minutes

The instructor will break students up into smaller groups (3-4 students each) and distribute copies of the 1st primary document (George Gilmer to John Morgan; 11 May 1766) to students; as well as project the transcription onto the whiteboard (overhead/interactive projection.)

Context instruction:

"23 year-old Thomas Jefferson relied on an adult to provide positive remarks about his personal character traits, work ethic and background to complete strangers in 1766. In a time with limited technologies, someone like Jefferson would have had to have been introduced in person to new people OR had the fortunate opportunity to carry a LETTER OF INTRODUCTION with him when presenting himself to new people in new cities away from home. This particular letter allowed George Gilmer to introduce Thomas Jefferson to John Morgan when Jefferson visited Philadelphia. Although Jefferson had never met John Morgan, he relied upon the relationship

between Gilmer and Morgan to secure a "window of opportunity" to possibly build a new relationship with a former stranger.

Document exploration:

"What strategies or topics of conversations does George Gilmer choose to begin his letter to John Morgan?"

Students will spend a few moments examining the initial sentences to familiarize themselves with uncommon language, references to Edinburgh, past family/friend connections, etc.

"How does George Gilmer describe the young (and unknown) Jefferson to John Morgan?"

Students will offer their findings from small group to large group, and instructor will note common themes, language, descriptors on the white board.

"Why would John Morgan offer to host, help or befriend Thomas Jefferson based on this letter from George Gilmer?"

Students will spend a few moments to consider the question, and then respond from small group to large group.

"Why do you think that this Letter of Introduction would be important for Thomas Jefferson to present to John Morgan? Do you think Jefferson felt any pressure to live up to the descriptions that George Gilmer offered to John Morgan?"

Students will spend a few moments to consider the questions, and then respond from small group to large group.

3. *5-10 minutes*

"How do you think the LETTER OF INTRODUCTION might have been different if George Gilmer could have contacted John Morgan using modern technologies today?"

Students will spend a few moments considering cell phones, emails, Facebook/Twitter/Instagram, etc. at the small group level and then respond to the large group with their thoughts.

"What are some techniques that George Gilmer could have used to make Thomas Jefferson appear as someone that John Morgan HAD TO MEET (desireability)?"

Students will spend a few moments considering the question at the small group level before responding to the large group.

"How could John Morgan use modern technologies to find out more about Thomas Jefferson today in order to double-check George Gilmer's letter of introduction?"

Instructor looking for students to get to "Internet/Google/etc." response quickly.

The instructor will then hand out copies of the next 3 primary source documents for individual review; at-home extension focus for the evening.

4. *5-7 minutes*

Students will review the following primary source documents on their own:

George Washington to Thomas Jefferson; 8 December 1780 (Letter of Introduction on behalf of Lafayette.)

Lafayette to Thomas Jefferson; 20 March 1781

Thomas Jefferson to Lafayette; 24 March 1781

Homework instructions & expectations will be delivered for the next class period.

5. *10-12 minutes*

Context Instruction:

"The Marquis de Lafayette was a French nobleman that came to the United States of America during the early part of the American Revolution in order to help with the struggle for independence against the British. Lafayette believed in the American cause and was highly intrigued by many American thinkers and leaders. Lafayette was probably closest to General George Washington, who he served as an aid and officer. Lafayette was also very interested in meeting with the man that was considered the Father of the Declaration of Independence—Thomas Jefferson, but he did not know him personally. Fortunately, his mentor and friend, George Washington did have a relationship with Jefferson. He asked Washington to write him a LETTER OF INTRODUCTION to present along with his own letter to Jefferson."

Active Use of Primary Document #2 (8 December 1780):

1. Why does Washington believe that Jefferson should consider meeting with Lafayette?
2. What is Lafayette's personal background? Does he have any good character traits according to Washington?
3. Does Washington believe that Lafayette will be travelling alone?

Students will respond after consideration in their previous small group settings to the larger group. The 3 main questions can be pre-written on the white board for focus and students can have 5-7 minutes to work on them before responding.

6. *20-25 minutes*

Context Instruction:

"Thomas Jefferson was able to receive the LETTER OF INTRODUCTION from Washington along with Lafayette's own letter to Jefferson (Primary Document #3 – 20 March 1781.) However, Jefferson received both letters from a courier instead of directly from Washington or Lafayette themselves. In many instances, individuals might have shown up at Monticello to meet Jefferson and then had to wait to see if the LETTER OF INTRODUCTION was "good enough" for the meeting to actually take place. In this case, Lafayette is using his own letter to hopefully arrange a meeting in the near future as well as discuss important strategy items related to the war efforts against the British."

Active Use of Primary Document #3 (20 March 1781) & #4 (24 March 1781):

1. Using Lafayette's letter to Jefferson, as well as Jefferson's response, consider how you might contact a historical figure in order to arrange a meeting for one of your close friends. Pretend that you know the figure (Jefferson, Washington, etc.) quite well but that they do NOT know your friend in the slightest.
2. Write a 2-3 paragraph LETTER OF INTRODUCTION that attempts to use the models provided in Primary Document #1 and #2 to assist with language development.
3. Students need to consider how they would describe their close friend with regard to character traits, personality descriptors, or past experiences that demonstrate positive attributes or sentiments.
4. Students will have the liberty to exaggerate or imagine "connectivity" experiences between themselves (the writer) with the recipient (historical figure.)
5. Students need to consider the potential reaction of the letter, as well as their own desired outcomes for the "friend" that wants to meet with the historical figure.
6. Students will have 15-20 minutes to work independently, seek help from the instructor, and/or search for more examples using technologies. The completed response needs to be written or typed; completed for the next class period.

Materials

Materials Needed

1. George Gilmer to John Morgan (11 May 1766); carried by Th. Jefferson to Philadelphia.

founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-01-02-0011

2. George Washington to Thomas Jefferson (8 December 1780); carried by Lafayette & attached to personal letter to Jefferson.

founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-04-02-0232

3. Lafayette to Thomas Jefferson (20 March 1781); delivered to Jefferson along with letter of introduction written by G. Washington.

founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-05-02-0245

4. Thomas Jefferson to Lafayette (24 March 1781); written in response to Lafayette's request to visit Monticello and meet Jefferson.

founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-05-02-0303

Items located through Founders Online (Courtesy of the National Archives.)

All transcripts and annotations supplied and managed by the Princeton University Press.

Link to Teacher-Created Google Document with embedded primary documents HERE:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YJAPCJ80gMIPdiuH9UPp3JYjFPIgU07jZZGchrRFQHY/edit?>

If the Google link does NOT work, *please email James Lautzenheiser at:*

lautzenheiser.james@apps.crestviewknights.com for assistance!

Technology Needs

Students may use shared iPads, laptops or stationed PCs to read documents online, or the instructor may print transcripts of letters for students to use as part of document packet.

The instructor will benefit from using an interactive white board such as Promethean whenever possible, but can use this lesson with a dry-erase white board with an overhead projector if need be.

Assessment

Homework

Following Day 1 of 18th Century Friend Requests LP:

Students need to read the 3 supplied primary documents for independent understanding outside of class. Students should also be supplied with Founders Online web URLs (through a platform link via Moodle or Google Drive) or simply shown in the closing minutes of the first day's class period.

Students need to highlight sections of the text that they understood well, and circle areas of the text that they did not understand. Students should be encouraged to utilize a dictionary and/or thesaurus to help them meaning of difficult vocabulary or terms.

The instructor can easily check for quick understanding on Day 2 if they do an assessment on scrap paper:

1. Of the three figures involved in the three letters, which person was the stranger hoping to be introduced to a mutual friend of their own friend?

Assessment

Accommodations

Accommodations – Students with Special Needs

Students that are developing readers will most likely benefit from a reduced/revised transcription that allows for more focused reading. Individual work time opportunities could remain at the small group or large group scale in some instances to allow for outloud reading strategies, repeated readings, etc. The instructor may highlight key portions of the text transcription instead of "cutting" text as well.

Accommodations – Advanced Learners

Students that need differentiated materials to extend above and beyond this lesson can work independently, or be challenged to write a historical figure (imagining that they have a good relationship already) about a Letter of Introduction for another historical figure. For example, the student could write Thomas Jefferson on behalf of Lafayette (assuming it was prior to the 20 Mar 1781 "literary meeting" between the two—courtesy of General Washington.) Additionally, it would be interesting to see students make e-Letters of Introduction that focus on web recordings (YouTube channel, Google Plus, etc.)