

# Forging Independence within the Confines of Plantation Life

## General

### Grade Level

High School

### Author Info

Rachel Pitkin

[RPitkin@gmail.com](mailto:RPitkin@gmail.com)

The Brooklyn Latin School

81 Sterling Place

Apt. 4

Brooklyn, NY 11217

### Type of Lesson

Document Analysis

### Duration

4 days total (45 minute class periods)

### Interdisciplinary Connections

The reading comprehension of both primary and secondary sources on the Monticello Classroom website can be tied to the English Language Arts standards within the Common Core.

## Objectives

### Overview

Over the course of his lifetime, Thomas Jefferson owned over six hundred enslaved African Americans. While he only freed a small handful –either during his life, or upon his death– it is clear through surviving source material and witness accounts that despite their enslaved condition, a handful of African American individuals were able to take advantage of choice and opportunity within the limitations of their

daily lives at Monticello. Over the course of three days, students will complete a series of lessons which will help them better understand the complexities of enslaved life for many African American individuals living at Monticello and respond to the following question through a class discussion on Day 4: To what extent were enslaved African Americans at Monticello able to forge a more independent way of life within the confines of slavery and plantation life?

## **Prior Knowledge**

This series of lessons will work best after students understand the ingrained system of slavery within the fabric of early America. While the lessons do allow students to explore the ways in which the African American community was able to exert elements of independence, it is important for students to understand that enslaved individuals were forced to do so within a chattel system that stripped them of their basic liberties—no matter how much choice or opportunity they were afforded within that system. A basic understanding of Thomas Jefferson and his role in founding early America is necessary, along with a working knowledge of the foundations of early America (the Declaration of Independence, The Constitution, etc.).

## **State Standards**

Skills: USI.1

a) identify and interpret primary and secondary source documents to increase understanding of events and life in United States history to 1865.

e) evaluate and discuss issues orally and in writing.

i) identify the costs and benefits of specific choices made, including the consequences, both intended and unintended, of the decisions and how people and nations responded to positive and negative incentives.

Exploration to Revolution: USI.5

c) describe colonial life in America from the perspectives of large landowners, farmers, artisans, women, free African Americans, indentured servants, and enslaved African Americans.

Civil War, 1861-1865: USI.9

a) describe the cultural, economic, and constitutional issues that divided the nation.

## Objectives/Learning Outcomes

Upon finishing this series of lessons, students will be able to:

1. Evaluate the various ways in which African American gardens both limited the African American community at Monticello and allowed for choice and opportunity through the completion of a t-chart (to be used in conjunction with the article entitled *African American Gardens at Monticello*. found at [monticello.org](http://monticello.org)).
2. Draw conclusions and formulate a more wholistic picture regarding daily life for specific members of the African American community and the ways in which they exercised independence through primary source analysis of the Jefferson Randolph Budgetary records and by working with the *Plantation and Slavery* tab of the Monticello website.
3. Formulate an argument –and discuss– in response to the extent to which African Americans were able to forge a more independent way of life despite the confines of slavery and the plantation system at Monticello.

## Technology Connections/outcomes

Upon completion, students will be able to make connections between the plantation system, the idea of power, and how individuals work within the confines of a system which strips them of their liberties in order to exercise elements of independence.

## Additional Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

1. Compare primary source analysis to secondary source material in order to draw connections regarding African American individuals and their daily lives at Monticello.
2. Evaluate the ways in which African American gardens further limited African Americans and provided them with increased opportunity for physical and economic mobility.
3. Argue and discuss the extent to which enslaved African Americans at Monticello were able to forge a more independent way of life despite the confines of slavery and the plantation system.

## Essential Questions

In what ways, and with what effects, did the African American gardens at Monticello both limit members of the enslaved community, and allow for increased choice and opportunity?

What are the values and limitations of using the experiences of these particular members of the enslaved community to better understand daily life for the African American community at Monticello?

What are the values and limitations for using the experiences of these particular members of the enslaved community to better understand daily life for the African American community in early America?

To what extent were enslaved African Americans at Monticello able to forge a more independent way of life within the confines of slavery and the plantation system?

How did the discussion of enslaved life at Monticello either verify or help to change your initial way of thinking?

## Procedures

### 1. *Day 1: One, 45 minute class period.*

1. (Steps 1-3 should take 5 minutes) On this first day, introduce students to overall lesson preface: Over the course of his lifetime, Thomas Jefferson owned over six hundred enslaved African Americans. While he only freed a small handful –either during his life, or upon his death– it is clear through surviving source material and witness accounts that despite their enslaved condition, a handful of African American individuals were able to take advantage of choice and opportunity within the limitations of their daily lives at Monticello. Over the course of three days, you will complete a series of lessons which will help you better understand the complexities of enslaved life for many African American individuals living at Monticello and respond to the above question through a class discussion on Day 4.

2. Show students the Monticello Classroom website, and explain that they will use this site over the course of the next couple of days.

3. Specifically show students the *African American Gardens at Monticello*

article:<http://www.monticello.org/site/house-and-gardens/african-american-gardens-monticello>

4. (30 minutes) Direct students to the T-Chart provided, and explain that Day 1 will be devoted to collecting information regarding the ways in which the gardens limited the enslaved community, and allowed for physical/economic opportunity and elements of choice.

5. (5 minutes) Have students quickly share information within groups for wrap-up.

### 2. *Day 2: One, 45 minute class*

#### PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. (1-3 should take 5 minutes) Explain to students that existing source material from members of

the Jefferson Randolph family detail many of the transactions that were made between enslaved members of Monticello community and Jefferson's family members. Many of these transactions were made possible as a result of the establishment of the African American garden.

2. Explain to students that in addition to the African American Gardens at Monticello article, they will use the surviving source material from the Jefferson Randolph account ledgers to draw conclusions about particular members of the enslaved community.

3. Also explain to students, that in addition to the account ledgers, they will use the Monticello Classroom website to further help draw conclusions about particular members of the enslaved community and their lives beyond the garden to form a more wholistic picture of their daily lives.

4. (5 minutes) Independent reading before group work. Encourage students to annotate.

5. (15 minutes) Tell students to analyze the source material within their groups, and to draw larger, broader conclusions regarding any themes that they see present.

6. (15 minutes) Tell students to narrow their focus into the specific activities of up to three individuals that they see present in the documents, and to fill out the accompanying table.

7. (5 minutes) Share out– have a casual wrap-up conversation regarding significant or interesting findings/conclusions.

### 3. *Day 3: One, 45 minute class*

1. (1-2 should take 5 minutes) Explain to students that for today's lesson, they will choose one person from the primary source analysis sheet that they completed as a group (students should have further described the activities of up to three people in the previous day's activities with the Jefferson Randolph account ledger).

2. Explain to students that they will be using the following website to work within groups to gather more information regarding their individuals:

<http://www.monticello.org/site/plantation-and-slavery/people-plantation>

\*Note: depending on the abilities of your students, you may need to guide them in a specific direction. For example, there will be more information regarding John and Sally Hemmings, along with Wormley Hughes. If you feel as if you need to help them discover this, lead them there early on.

3. (35 minutes) Have students complete graphic organizer prompting them to gather increased amounts of information on the individual of the group's choice. If time permits, have them explore other members of the community on the website.

4. (5 minutes) Explain HW: Tell students that they need to use the information that they've uncovered over the past three class periods in order to prepare for seminar/discussion tomorrow.

4. *Day 4: One, 45 minute class*

\*NOTE: This culminating discussion is outlined for a Socratic Seminar. However, if your class is not trained in a seminar style discussion, it may also be used in a small group style, transferred into a whole class wrap-up.

1. (5 minutes) Have students move desks into Socratic circle.

2. Introduce today's seminar question: To what extent were enslaved African Americans at Monticello able to forge a more independent way of life within the confine of slavery and plantation life? Explain to students that other questions may arise throughout seminar and after that may also be discussed. These questions might be:

In what ways, and with what effects, did the African American gardens at Monticello both limit members of the enslaved community, and allow for increased choice and opportunity?

What are the values and limitations of using the experiences of these particular members of the enslaved community to better understand daily life for the African American community at Monticello?

What are the values and limitations for using the experiences of these particular members of the enslaved community to better understand daily life for the African American community in early America?

How did the discussion of enslaved life at Monticello either verify or help to change your initial way of thinking?

Then, allow for a pair-share: have students share their arguments. Give them one minute each to turn and talk to the person next to them. Remind students that you'll be selecting someone at random, so focus on their argument.

3. (30 minutes) Call on random student to share argument. After initial student shares, ask for volunteers and for someone who would like to directly respond to initial student. After second student responds, explain that the "floor is open" and that students will now be calling on one another. Tell students that at times, you may interject to ask if anyone would like to further expand on an idea, introduce a new question, or to challenge something that they've heard in seminar thus far.

4. (5 minutes) Wrap-Up: Review notes of seminar. Have a casual conversation about the ways in which students' thinking on slavery and Jefferson has changed throughout the course of your

study.

## Related Assets

### Handouts and Downloads

- [Forging Independence within the Confines of Slavery](#)
- [Jefferson Randolph Account Ledger](#)

## Materials

### Materials Needed

Students will need copies of primary source material from the Jefferson Randolph account ledger. In addition, students will need copies of graphic organizers for all four days of lessons.

Readings are available online. The following websites are needed on the following days:

Day 1 (African American Gardens article at Monticello Classroom website):

<http://www.monticello.org/site/house-and-gardens/african-american-gardens-monticello>

Day 3 (biographical information for African American individuals at Monticello; *The People of the Plantation*): <http://www.monticello.org/site/plantation-and-slavery/people-plantation>

### Technology Needs

Students will need computer access on Days 1 and 3 of this lesson sequence.

## Assessment

### Homework

Homework will vary depending on the specific nature of the class. However, this is a suggested outline:

Day 1: N/A, unless t-chart and reading regarding African American Gardens at Monticello is not complete

Day 2: N/A

Day 3: Prepared seminar response required for class discussion on Day 4

## **Assessment**

Students will be assessed based on both their written seminar responses— including the selection of evidence/reasoning that they use to justify their arguments on Day 4. Arguments should incorporate evidence from various sources used throughout lessons. Student participation in seminar will also be considered.

## **Accommodations**

### **Accommodations – Students with Special Needs**

These series of lessons are meant for a high-performing (A.P. or I.B. U.S. History) students, but can easily be tailored to meet the needs of different learners. One suggestion might be to highlight key points on the primary source work that you'd like to draw students attention to, and scale back the number of documents. On Day 1, copy and paste key sections of the African American gardens article and narrow their focus.

### **Accommodations – Advanced Learners**

For advanced students, give them more freedom when they are initially searching for information regarding individual African Americans. Let them figure out, through process of elimination, which individual it might be easier to collect information on from the website, and let that lead into a discussion as to why. Take away graphic organizers or additional scaffolds if they inhibit your students' findings and conclusions.