

# Crusades Against Ignorance: Educating Citizens to Create Change

**Title:** Crusades Against Ignorance

**Descriptive Subtitle:** Educating Citizens to Create Change

**Grade level:** Middle (6-8), High (9-12)

**Topic/subject:** Jefferson's Public Life and Politics, Primary Documents & Jefferson Writings, Civics, Government, History: U.S.

**Tags:** Education, Current Events, Election, Voting, Civic Education, Civic Responsibility, Citizenship, Jefferson, Mandela, Call to Action, Monticello Teacher Institute

## Author Information:

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**School Address (opt):** 310 N. 11th Street

**City:** Van Buren

**State:** Arkansas

**Duration:** 90-120 min (2 class periods)

**Overview:** Students will be using Primary Source Analysis tools and prepared excerpts of various letters from Thomas Jefferson on the subject of education. Through the facilitation of discussion and questioning techniques students will use their analysis to write an open letter to Americans.

This lesson will be part of a launch for an Expeditionary Learning Unit titled "Rock the Vote," which focuses on the various aspects of voting as well as national, state, and local elections.

**Prior knowledge:** Prior to this lesson, students will have analyzed and discussed the historical aspects of early America, as well as the Declaration of Independence, Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers, and US Constitution. Students will be immersed in primary source analysis using the Library of Congress Primary Source Analysis Tool.

**Standards:**

Era4.1.8.6 Evaluate the historical significance of individuals, groups, and events CCRA.R.1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 CCRA.W.1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10 CCRA.SL.1, 2, 4 D2.His.3, 11, 17.6-8

CG.6.AH.7-8.1 Analyze the role of government and public policy on social concerns in Arkansas over time (e.g., unemployment, education, poverty, immigration, culture)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

## **Objectives:**

*Students will understand... Thomas Jefferson's vision regarding civic education and the role education plays in creating change.*

*Students will be able to... analyze and interpret primary sources to create inferences and use these sources to support their writing.*

*Students will know... that Thomas Jefferson believed civic education for the masses was crucial to safeguarding the rights of the American people and creating change.*

**Steps:** Provide teachers or students with instructions for completing the lesson or challenge, giving step by step directions. Indicate the time needed for each step.

## Day 1:

1. Ask students to brainstorm a topic in today's world that they would like to fix or change (Anticipate:

Racism, Shootings, Equality, Job Shortages, Hatred). Create a chart to gather student responses. You may need students to clarify or be more specific with some answers.

[15 minutes]

2. Tell students that Thomas Jefferson suggested one powerful tool to change all of these things. Pass out “The Most Powerful Tool” analysis sheet. Students will use sheet to analyze each quote and create an interpretation of what each quote is saying. After students have read, analyzed, and interpreted each quote, they will complete the sentence stem at the bottom of the page to determine what Jefferson believes is the most powerful tool for creating change. Students use physical or digital dictionary to determine meaning of words they do not understand.

[30 minutes]

### Day 2:

3. Facilitate student-to-student discussion. If possible, arrange students in a round table style. Students will share out their sentence stem at the bottom of the page and ask them what makes them think this. Students cite evidence. Do other students agree or disagree? Why? Do students agree that education is a powerful tool for creating change? Jefferson once asked George Wythe to preach a “crusade against ignorance” to educate the common people. What does this mean? How could education for all citizens impact voting? It was very important to Jefferson that citizens were educated so that they could guard their own rights, do you think the citizens are educated to do that?

[20 minutes]

4. Students create an Open Letter to Americans asking them to become educated so that they can create change. Students may reference current events, the words of Jefferson, other influential individuals, or their own experiences. See guidelines in [An Open Letter to Americans – Writing Prompt](#).

[30 minutes]

### Possible Extensions:

a. Students will revise and use writing later in the unit as an opening to their voter’s guide, the final product for our “Rock the Vote” Unit. This voter’s guide will discuss the importance of voting, how voting works, and other aspects of America’s political system.

1. As an enrichment activity, some students may revise their writing and (with parental consent) submit their writing for publication in the local newspaper.

**Materials:** list any primary sources, images, handouts, videos, websites, technology needs, etc. for your lesson (include any attachments needed with final lesson plan)

Letters from Thomas Jefferson to various recipients:

Thomas Jefferson to George Wythe (Paris, Aug 13, 1786)

Thomas Jefferson to Edward Carrington (Paris, January 16, 1787)

Thomas Jefferson to John Wyche (Monticello, May 19, 1809)

Thomas Jefferson to Charles Yancey (Monticello, January 6, 1816)

Thomas Jefferson to John Adams (Monticello, August 1, 1816)

[The Most Powerful Tool](#) Analysis Sheet (see below)

[The Most Powerful Tool – Definition Sheet](#) for learners who need support (see below)

[An Open Letter to Americans – Writing Prompt](#) for learners who need support (see below)

[The Most Powerful Tool – Extension Quotes](#) for learners who need enrichment (see below)

[Make Your Writing MEATy](#) Rubric (see below)

**Assessment(s):**

Formative: Students will be assessed on Day 1 through informal discussions, listening into student conversations, and asking students questions 1-on-1. Further learning will be assessed during our whole group discussion on Day 2.

Summative: Students will be assessed on their analysis and interpretation of various primary sources. Students will also be assessed on their extended writing and work to create a persuasive open letter to Americans which integrates textual and personal evidence to support the argument.

**Assessment Criteria (rubric, checklist, etc.):**

Student's contribution to our discussion by using a list of names and checking the number of times someone has spoken. Based on this data, I will encourage and facilitate responses from students who have not yet contributed their thoughts.

Student's writing will be assessed by using a rubric that is common to our writing in the classroom called "Make Your Writing MEATy." (see link above or below)

**Accommodations:**

Students Who Need Support

Resource Accommodations: Students who need support will be provided a definition chart of words from the Primary Sources that may be difficult to understand. ([Link](#))

Assessment Accommodations: Students who need support will receive help on their Open Letter to Americans by receiving a handout that provides prompting for how to write the letter. ([Link](#))

Students Who Need Enrichment

Resource Accommodations: Students who could use enrichment may be provided a copy of Extension Quotes, so that they may further read Jefferson's thoughts regarding education. ([Link](#))

Assessment Accommodations: Students who could use enrichment may be asked to revise their Open

Letter To Americans and (with parental consent) send the letter to a local newspaper for publication.

### **The Most Powerful Tool**

**Task:** Read the Thomas Jefferson quotes below. Analyze each quote and create an interpretation of

what each quote is saying. After you've read, analyzed, and interpreted each quote, complete the sentence stem at the bottom of the page to determine what Jefferson believes is the most powerful tool for creating change.

1. *“Bigotry is the disease of ignorance, of morbid minds; enthusiasm of the free and buoyant. Education and free discussion are the antidotes of both. We are destined to be a barrier against the returns of ignorance and barbarism.”* – Thomas Jefferson to John Adams (Monticello, August 1, 1814)

**Interpretation:**

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2. *“if a nation expects to be ignorant & free, in a state of civilisation, it expects what never was & never will be. the functionaries of every government have propensities to command at will the liberty & property of their constituents. there is no safe deposit for these but with the people themselves; nor can they be safe with them without information. where the press is free and every man able to read, all is safe.”* – Thomas Jefferson to Charles Yancey (Monticello, January 6, 1816)

**Interpretation:**

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3. *“Cherish therefore the spirit of our people, and keep alive their attention. Do not be too severe upon their errors, but reclaim them by enlightening them. If once they become inattentive to the public affairs, you and I, and Congress, and Assemblies, judges and governors shall all become wolves.”* – Thomas Jefferson to Edward Carrington (Paris, January 16, 1787)

**Interpretation:**

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4. *“the people of every country are the only safe guardians of their own rights, and are the only instruments which can be used for their destruction.”* – Thomas Jefferson to John Wyche (Monticello, May 19, 1809)

**Interpretation:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. I believe Jefferson thinks that the greatest tool to create change is \_\_\_\_\_

because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **The Most Powerful Tool**

### **(Definition Sheet)**

**Letter 1:** Thomas Jefferson to John Adams (Monticello, August 1, 1814)

Bigotry – someone who regards others with hatred

Morbid – unpleasant

Buoyant – able to rise to the top

Antidotes – something that prevents

Barbarism – extreme cruelty

**Letter 2:** Thomas Jefferson to Charles Yancey (Monticello, January 6, 1816)

Civilisation – organized society

Functionaries – officials

Propensities – tendency to behave a certain way

Liberty – state of being free

Constituents – voter

Deposit – sum of something stored for safekeeping

**Letter 3:** Thomas Jefferson to Edward Carrington (Paris, January 16, 1787)

Cherish – protect

Enlightening – teach

Inattentive – not paying attention

Public – people

Assemblies – group of people gathered

**Letter 4:** Thomas Jefferson to John Wyche (Monticello, May 19, 1809)

Guardians – defender

Instruments – tools

**An Open Letter To Americans**

Letter Prompt

**An Open Letter to Americans,**

In this paragraph you will discuss why you are writing this letter. Please start with a hook, or something that will get your reader's attention. Then, think about the issues in today's world that you said should be changed or fixed. Discuss these issues.

In the second paragraph, write about Jefferson's beliefs regarding education and citizens. Use quotes from Jefferson or other leaders. For example, Thomas Jefferson began a revolution when he stated in the Declaration of Independence that, "all men are created equal." Just be sure you use your commas and quotations properly.

In this paragraph you will combine your thoughts about the issues in today's world with the quotes you mentioned in paragraph two. How are they related?

Finally, use the last paragraph as a call to action. Tell your readers, Americans, what you want them to do, why you want them to do it, and how it will benefit our nation.

Appreciatively,

Your Name

**The Most Powerful Tool**

**Extension Quotes**

[Extract from "Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge" \(1778\)](#)

*“Guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens.”*

Thomas Jefferson to George Wythe (Paris, Aug 13, 1786)

*“I think by far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised, for the preservation of freedom and happiness.”*

*“Preach, my dear sir, a crusade against ignorance; establish & improve the law by educating the common people.”*

*“Let our countrymen know that the people alone can protect us against these evils, and that the tax which will be paid for this purpose is not more than the thousandth part of what will be paid to kings, priests & nobles who will rise up among us if we leave the people in ignorance.”*

Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Mann Randolph (Paris, August 27, 1786)

*“Knowledge indeed is a desirable , a lovely possession. ...”*

Thomas Jefferson to Edward Carrington (Paris, January 16, 1787)

*“The way to prevent these irregular interpositions of the people is to give them full information of their affairs thro’ the channel of the public papers, and to contrive that those papers should penetrate the whole mass of the people. The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them.”*

*“Cherish therefore the spirit of our people, and keep alive their attention. Do not be too severe upon their errors, but reclaim them by enlightening them. If once they become inattentive to the public affairs, you and I, and Congress, and Assemblies, judges and governors shall all become wolves.”*

Thomas Jefferson to John Wyche (Monticello, May 19, 1809)

*“the people of every country are the only safe guardians of their own rights, and are the only instruments which can be used for their destruction.”*

Thomas Jefferson to Governor Tyler (May 26, 1810)

*“I have indeed two great measures at heart, without which no republic can maintain itself in strength. 1. That of general education, to enable every man to judge for himself what will secure or endanger his freedom. 2. Divide every county into hundreds, of such size that all the children of each will be within a central school of it... These little republics would be the main strength of the great one. We owe to them the vigor given to our revolution in its commencement in the Eastern States.”*

Thomas Jefferson to J.C. Cabell (January 31, 1814)

*“There are two subjects, indeed, which I shall claim a right to further as long as I breathe, the public education, and the sub-division of counties into wards. I consider the continuance of republican government as absolutely hanging on these two hooks. Of the first, you will, I am sure, be an advocate, as having already reflected on it, and of the last, when you shall have reflected.”*

Thomas Jefferson to John Adams (July 5, 1814)

*“When sobered by experience, I hope our successors will turn their attention to the advantages of education. I mean of education on the broad scale, and not that of the petty academies, as they call themselves, which are starting up in every neighborhood, and where one or two men, possessing Latin and sometimes a Greek, a knowledge of the globes, and the first six books on Euclid, imagine and communicate this as the sum of science. They commit their pupils to the theatre of the world, with just taste enough of learning to be alienated from industrious pursuits and not enough to do service in the ranks of science.”*

Thomas Jefferson to Charles Yancey (Monticello, January 6, 1816)

*“if a nation expects to be ignorant & free, in a state of civilisation, it expects what never was & never will*

*be. the functionaries of every government have propensities to command at will the liberty & property of their constituents. there is no safe deposit for these but with the people themselves; nor can they be safe with them without information. where the press is free and every man able to read, all is safe.”*

Thomas Jefferson to Pierre Samuel DuPont de Nemours (Monticello, April 24, 1816)

*“Enlighten the people the generally, and tyranny and oppressions of body & mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of the day.”*

Thomas Jefferson to John Adams (Monticello, August 1, 1816)

*“Bigotry is the disease of ignorance, of morbid minds; enthusiasm of the free and buoyant. Education and free discussion are the antidotes of both. We are destined to be a barrier against the returns of ignorance and barbarism.”*

### Make Your Writing MEATy

	Not Yet...	Getting There...	Got It.	Rocked It!
<b>Mechanics</b> (spelling, grammar, conventions, etc.)	1 – 18	18 – 19	20 – 23	24 – 25
<b>Evidence</b> (support your thinking with accurate facts)	1 – 18	18 – 19	20 – 23	24 – 25
<b>Argument, &amp; Analysis</b> (create a compelling argument or show strong thinking)	1 – 18	18 – 19	20 – 23	24 – 25
<b>Tone</b> (Does the tone fit the writing prompt?)	1 – 18	18 – 19	20 – 23	24 – 25
				<b>Total ____ /100</b>

*Thomas Jefferson*  
MONTICELLO