

Monticello: Thomas Jefferson's Autobiography

Title: Monticello: Thomas Jefferson's Autobiography

Subtitle: What was Thomas Jefferson's public persona and private personality?

Grade level: High School (9-12)

Topics: Monticello Architecture and Furnishing, Jefferson's Personal Life and Family

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Duration: 90 minutes (1 block class period or 2 regular class periods)

Lesson plan overview: "Like the contents of your refrigerator, your house reveals quite a bit about your personality and your priorities. The décor, the furniture, the layout, the objects with which you choose to surround yourself – these all provide hints about the person you are when no one is looking. Now imagine you also designed the house. For some architects that is the case, and their homes function as autobiographies."

(Excerpts taken from *The Home As Autobiography* by Annabel Walsh for DuJour)

Source: <http://dujour.com/design/the-architects-home-book-photos/>

Often students reference letters, diaries, and other papers when thinking of primary sources. In this lesson students will use Monticello, Jefferson's meticulously designed home, as a primary source in their analysis and eventual determination of Jefferson's public persona and true, private personality. While taking the virtual tour on Monticello Explorer students will complete the graphic organizer. Once completed, they will answer a series of follow-up questions using their newly acquired information to determine Jefferson's public persona and private personality.

Prior knowledge: Students will come to this lesson with background information on Jefferson's public career: member of the Second Continental Congress and author of the Declaration of Independence, ambassador to France, Secretary of State for Washington, Vice President for Adams, co-founder of

the Democratic-Republican political party, and third President of the United States.

State or national standards:

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.

Objectives/Rationale: Students will be able to describe the image Jefferson wanted to portray to the public and how he achieved this.

Students will be able to describe what Jefferson's private personality might have been and how it influenced his career and achievements.

Steps:

1. Introduction: Explain to students how historians determine information about history from objects as well as letters, diaries, and other documents. Show students a variety of objects (either in a picture or actual items) and have them work in pairs to come up with a description of that person. Have them share out to describe the person and their personality as a whole class. Push the students to analyze the objects and think more deeply about what they may represent.

2.Virtual Tour: Students will take the virtual tour of Monticello using Monticello Explorer (<http://explorer.monticello.org>). As they take the virtual tour online, students will complete the graphic organizer answering whether each of the rooms or artifacts are public or private, a 7 word summary, and what this reflects about Jefferson's personality or character.

- Public or private: This will allow students to quickly determine which of the two the particular room or artifact addresses.
- 7 Word Summary of Purpose of Rooms or Object: Limiting the students to using exactly seven words requires them to think about the item being analyzed instead of writing a quick answer. This is a good activity to use when teaching students how to write summaries, evaluation, and writing in a concise manner.
- What might this tell you about Jefferson's personality/character?: Answering this question for each room and object pushes students to analyze objects and rooms instead of just clicking through them.

3.Reflection and Analysis: Once students have all completed their virtual tours, they will get into groups and analyze their findings. In groups, students will answer the following questions either on a worksheet, in their notebooks or orally. After discussion in small groups, the entire class can continue the conversation

- Describe Jefferson's public persona. Use the rooms and artifacts to justify your description.
- Describe what Jefferson's private personality might have been. Use the rooms and artifacts to justify your description.
- Which artifact or room do you believe best represents the public personality/ character of Jefferson? Why did you choose that artifact?
- Which artifact or room do you believe best represents the private personality/character of Jefferson? Why did you choose that artifact?
- What else might you look at to help you determine the public persona and private personality of Thomas Jefferson?

4. Final Class Discussion: Wrap up the activity by having students answer the following questions as a large group:

- Describe the image Jefferson wanted to portray to the public and how he achieved this.
- Describe what Jefferson's private personality might have been and how it influenced his career and achievements.

Materials:

- Monticello Explorer: <http://explorer.monticello.org>
- Copy of the graphic organizer from the lesson for each student

Accommodations:

This activity can be adapted by eliminating rooms of the virtual tour.

