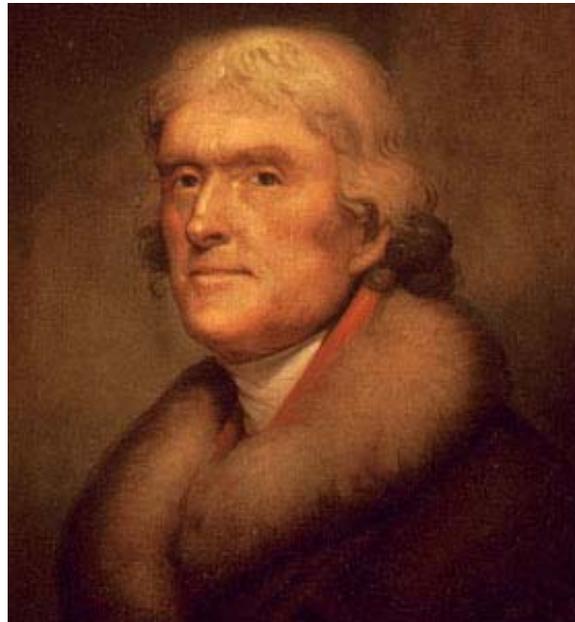# Thomas Jefferson: 'A Man For All Seasons'

History as Narrative

Northrop Frye and the Theory of Myths

- Northrop Frye was an influential literary critic and theorist.

- "Anatomy of Criticism", published in 1957, argued that you could look at literature in a new way.

- Using Frye's 'myths', one can analyze any novel, film, or person (!)

Theory of Myths

- Frye argued that one could analyze literature by breaking up the stories into FOUR parts.
- Romance, Comedy, Tragedy, Irony
- These 'seasons' each have different characteristics
- Using these characteristics, one can even analyze Jefferson's personality and events/issues in his life.

Romance

- Romance is associated with SUMMER.
- Choose adjectives to DESCRIBE summer.
- Summer represents the best of all seasons.
- In a romance, the hero is 'virtuous' and must complete a successful quest against an evil enemy.
- It is also associated with adventure!
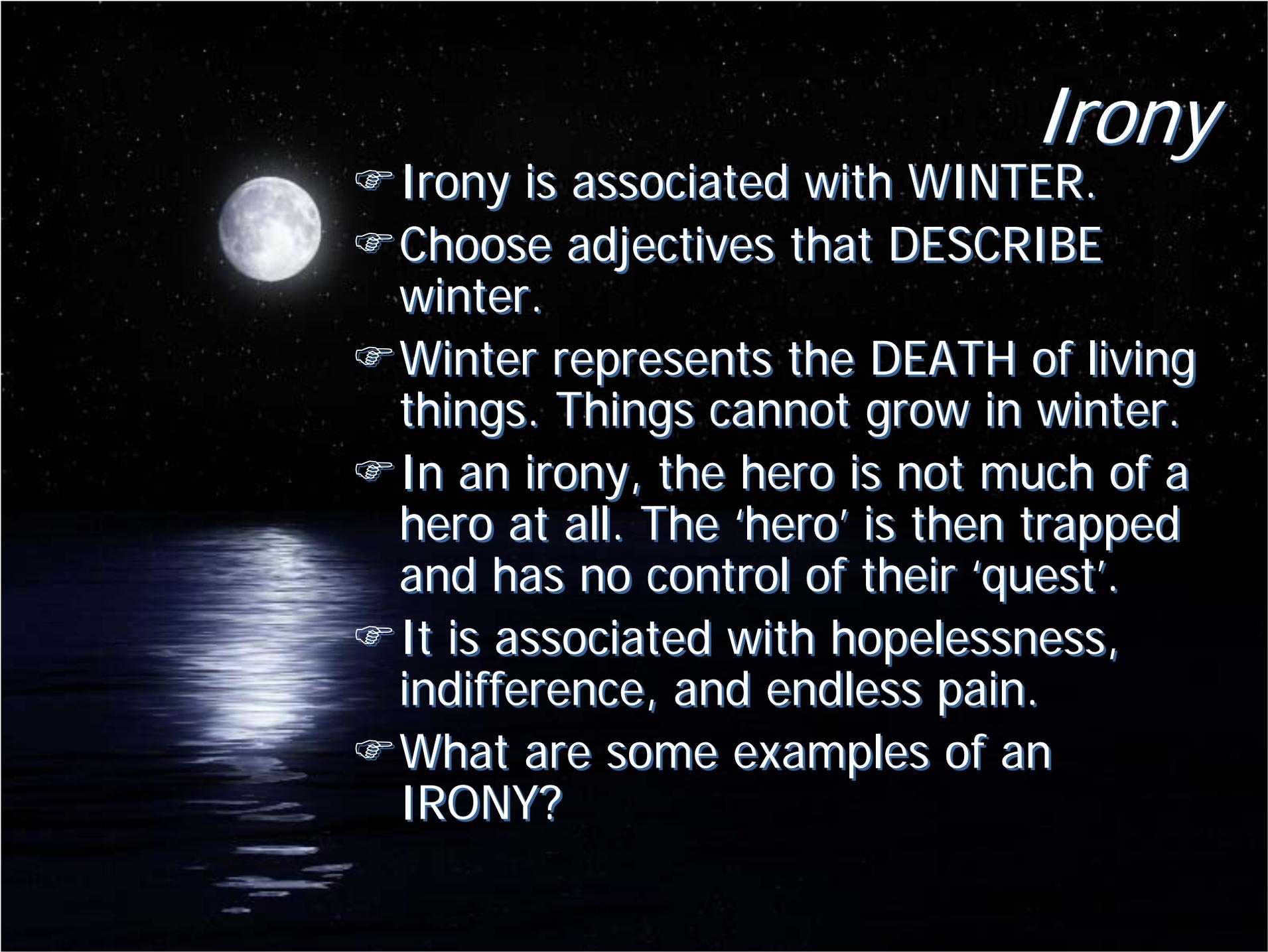- What are some examples of a ROMANCE?

Comedy

- ❖ Comedy is associated with SPRING.
- ❖ Choose adjectives that DESCRIBE spring.
- ❖ Spring represents rebirth.
- ❖ In a comedy, a hero must challenge an established authority, which ends in a party or celebration.
- ❖ It is associated with rejection of the old and much needed changes in society.
- ❖ What are some examples of a COMEDY?

Tragedy

- Tragedy is associated with FALL.
- Choose adjectives to DESCRIBE fall.
- Fall represents the dying of living things.
- In a tragedy, the hero is flawed and despite his/her desire to change or do good, cannot overcome their faults, in order to do so.
- It is associated with a hero destined for great things, but falling short of his/her goals.
- What are some examples of a TRAGEDY?

Irony

☞ Irony is associated with WINTER.

☞ Choose adjectives that DESCRIBE winter.

☞ Winter represents the DEATH of living things. Things cannot grow in winter.

☞ In an irony, the hero is not much of a hero at all. The 'hero' is then trapped and has no control of their 'quest'.

☞ It is associated with hopelessness, indifference, and endless pain.

☞ What are some examples of an IRONY?

Jefferson in Summer

- Jefferson's writing of the Declaration of Independence is an example of Frye's myth of summer.
- Why is this the case?
- In groups, try and figure out what about the Jefferson's writing of the Declaration is symbolic of summer.
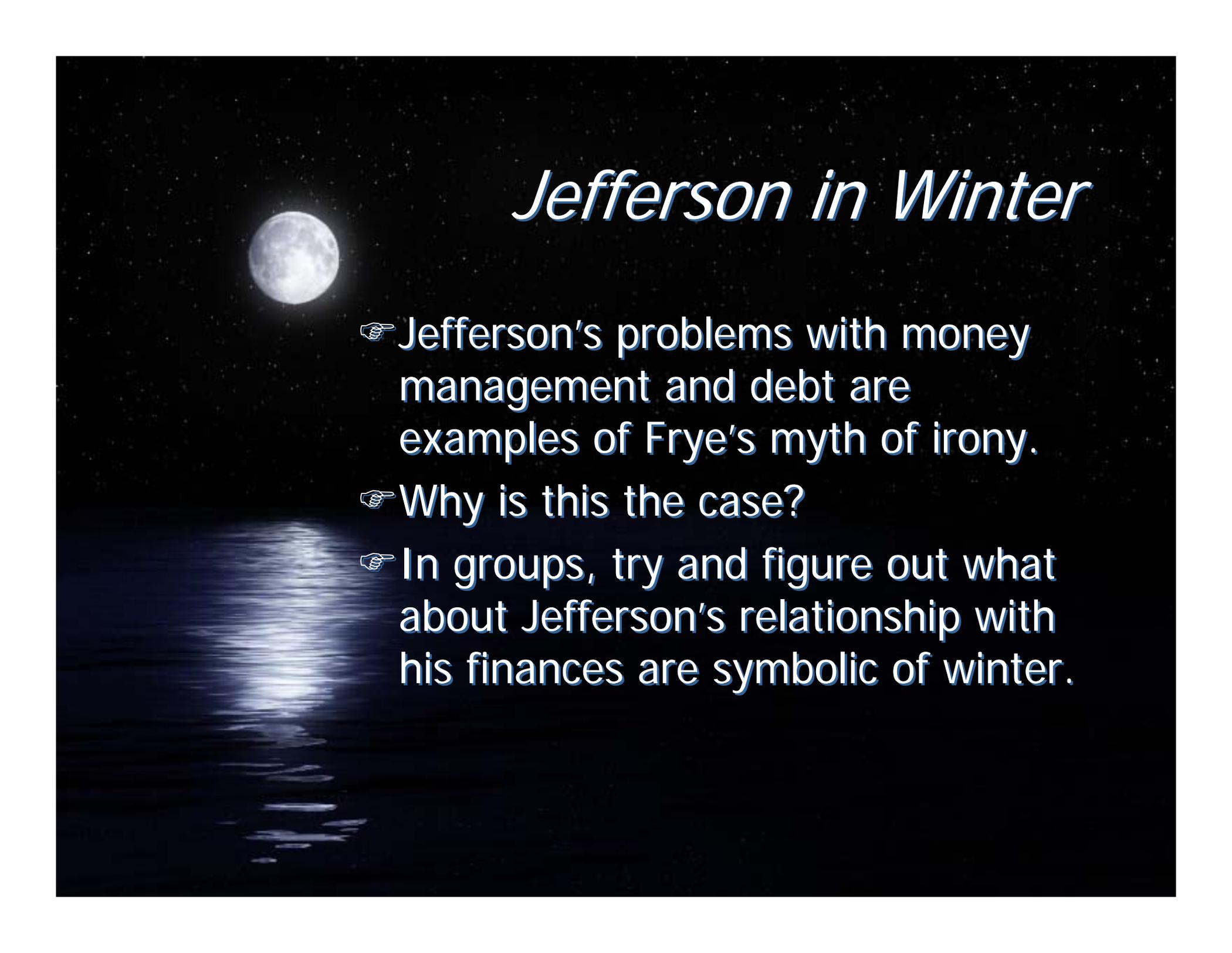
Jefferson in Spring

- ❖ Jefferson's theories of education is an example of Frye's myth of spring.
- ❖ Why is this the case?
- ❖ In groups, try and figure out what about Jefferson's attitudes towards education are symbolic of spring.

Jefferson in Fall

- Jefferson's attitudes towards slavery are an example of Frye's myth of fall.
- Why is this the case?
- In groups, try and figure out what about Jefferson's attitudes towards slavery are symbolic of fall.

Jefferson in Winter

☞ Jefferson's problems with money management and debt are examples of Frye's myth of irony.

☞ Why is this the case?

☞ In groups, try and figure out what about Jefferson's relationship with his finances are symbolic of winter.

Conclusion

- Are there any other events, opinions, thoughts about/surrounding Jefferson that exemplify Frye's theories?

- If you had to choose, which myth do you think BEST fits Jefferson?

- Do you think Frye makes it easier or harder to understand literature?

- Does seeing Jefferson as a fictional character change him in your opinion? Why or why not?

- What do you think was the most FUNDAMENTAL aspect of Jefferson's character?