

DBQ: Thomas Jefferson on Education.

Using the documents below and your personal knowledge of the eras listed, address the following prompt:

The following letters were all written by Thomas Jefferson between 1771 and 1825. The letters address Mr. Jefferson's opinions regarding education in the late 18th to early 19th century. To what extent are Mr. Jefferson's beliefs on education practical as foundations for education for secondary students in the 21st century?

DOCUMENT A

"A Gentleman's Library" [edited list]

To Robert Skipworth with a List of Books

From: Monticello, August 3, 1771

FINE ARTS.

Observations on gardening. Payne. 5/
Webb's essay on painting. 12mo 3/
Pope's Iliad. 18/
----- Odyssey. 15/
Dryden's Virgil. 12mo. 12/
Milton's works. 2 v. 8vo. Donaldson. Edinburgh 1762.
Hoole's Tasso. 12mo. 5/
Ossian with Blair's criticisms. 2 v. 8vo. 10/
Capell's Shakespear. 12mo. 30/
Dryden's plays. 6v. 12mo. 18/
Addison's plays. 12mo. 3/
Otway's plays. 3 v. 12mo. 9/
Rowe's works. 2 v. 12mo. 6/
Thompson's works. 4 v. 12mo. 12/
Young's works. 4 v. 12mo. 12/
Home's plays. 12mo. 3/
Mallet's works. 3 v. 12mo. 9/
Mason's poetical works. 5/
Moliere. Eng. 15/
Farquhar's plays. 2 v. 12mo. 6/
Vanbrugh's plays. 2 v. 12mo. 6/
Steele's plays. 3/
Congreve's works. 3 v. 12mo. 9/
Garric's dramatic works. 2 v. 8vo. 10/
Foote's dramatic works. 2 v. 8vo. 10/
Rousseau's Eloisa. Eng. 4 v. 12mo. 12/

POLITICKS, TRADE.

Montesquieu's spirit of the laws. 2 v. 12mo. 6/
Locke on government. 8vo. 5/
Sidney on government. 4to. 15/
Ld. Bolingbroke's political works. 5 v. 8vo. pound 1.5
Montesquieu's rise & fall of the Roman governmt.
Petty's Political arithmetic. 8vo. 5/

RELIGION.

Locke's conduct of the mind in search of truth. 12mo.
Xenophon's memoirs of Socrates. by Feilding. 8vo. 5/
Epictetus. by Mrs. Carter. 2 v. 12mo. 6/
Antoninus by Collins. 3/
Seneca. by L'Estrange. 8vo. 5/
Cicero's Offices. by Guthrie. 8vo. 5/
Cicero's Tusculan questions. Eng. 3/
Hume's essays. 4 v. 12mo. 12/

LAW.

Ld. Kaim's Principles of equity. fol. pound 1.1
Blackstone's Commentaries. 4 v. 4to. pound 4.4
Cunningham's Law dictionary. 2 v. fol. pound 3

HISTORY. ANTIENT.

Bible. 6/
Rollin's Antient history. Eng. 13 v. 12mo. pound 1.19
Stanyan's Graecian history. 2 v. 8vo. 10/
Sallust by Gordon. 12mo. 12/
Tacitus by Gordon. 12mo. 15/
Caesar by Bladen. 8vo. 5/
Josephus. Eng. 1.0

HISTORY. MODERN.

Robertson's History of Charles the Vth. 3 v. 4to. pound
Bossuet's history of France. 4 v. 12mo. 12/
Davila. by Farneworth. 2 v. 4to. pound 1.10.
Hume's history of England. 8 v. 8vo. pound 2.8.
Clarendon's history of the rebellion. 6 v. 8vo. pound 1.10.
Keith's history of Virginia. 4to. 12/
Stith's history of Virginia. 6/

NATURAL PHILOSOPHY. NATURAL HISTORY &c.

Nature displayed. Eng. 7 v. 12mo.
Franklin on Electricity. 4to. 10/
Macqueer's elements of Chemistry. 2 v.
Duhamel's husbandry. 4to. 15/

DOCUMENT B

An Honest Heart... A Knowing Head"

To Peter Carr

From: Paris, August 19, 1785

...An honest heart being the first blessing, a knowing head is the second. It is time for you now to begin to be choice in your reading; to begin to pursue a regular course in it; and not to suffer yourself to be turned to the right or left by reading any thing out of that course. I have long ago digested a plan for you, suited to the circumstances in which you will be placed. This I will detail to you, from time to time, as you advance. For the present, I advise you to being a course of antient history, reading every thing in the original and not in translations. First read Goldsmith's history of Greece. This will give you a digested view of that field. Then take up antient history in the detail, reading the following books, in the following order: Herodotus, Thucydides, ... Diodorus Siculus, Justin. This shall form the first stage of your historical reading, and is all I need mention to you now. The next, will be of Roman history.* From that, we will come down to modern history. In Greek and Latin poetry, you have read or will read at school, Virgil...Homer...Sophocles. Read also Milton's Paradise Lost, Shakspeare, Ossian, Pope's and Swift's works, in order ot form your style in your own language. In morality, read Epictetus...Plato's Socratic dialogues, Cicero's philosophies...

DOCUMENT C

"On European Education"

To John Banister, Jr.

From: Paris, October 15 1785

...But why send an American youth to Europe for education? What are the objects of an useful American education? Classical knowledge, modern languages, chiefly French, Spanish and Italian; Mathematics, Natural philosophy, Natural history, Civil history, and Ethics. In Natural philosophy, I mean to include Chemistry and Agriculture, and in Natural history, to include Botany, as well as the other branches of those departments. It is true that the habit of speaking the modern languages, cannot be so well acquired in America; but every other article can be as well acquired at William and Mary college, as at any place in Europe.

DOCUMENT D

"Education of a Future Son-In-Law"
To Thomas Mann Randolph, Jr.

From: Paris, August 27, 1786

The foundations which you have laid in languages and mathematics are proper for every superstructure. The former exercises our memory while that and no other faculty is yet matured & prevents our acquiring habits of idleness. The latter gives exercise to our reason, as soon as that has acquired a certain degree of strength, and stores the mind with truths which are useful in other branches of science. At this moment then a second order of preparation is to commence. I shall propose to you that it be extensive, comprehending Astronomy, Natural Philosophy (or Physics), Natural History, Anatomy, Botany & Chemistry. No inquisitive mind will be content to be ignorant of any of these branches. But I would advise you to be contented with a course of lectures in most of them, without attempting to make yourself master of the whole. This is more than any genius joined to any length of life is equal to. You will find among them some one study to which your mind will more particularly attach itself. This then I would pursue & propose to attain eminence in.

DOCUMENT E

"The Grand Recipe For Felicity"
Martha "Patsy" Jefferson

From: May 21, 1787

... The object most interesting to me for the residue of my life, will be to see you both developing daily those principles of virtue and goodness which will make you valuable to others and happy in yourselves, and acquiring those talents and that degree of science which will guard you at all times against ennui [boredom], the most dangerous poison of life. A mind always employed is always happy. This is the true secret, the grand recipe for felicity. The idle are the only wretched. In a world which furnishes so many employments which are useful, and so many which are amusing, it is our own fault if we ever know what ennui is, or if we are ever driven to the miserable resource of gaming, which corrupts our dispositions, and teaches us a habit of hostility against all mankind.

DOCUMENT F

"The Homage Of Reason"

To Peter Carr

From: Paris, August 10, 1787

...I inclose you a sketch of the sciences to which I would wish you to apply in such order as Mr. Wythe shall advise....:

1. Italian. I fear the learning this language will confound your French and Spanish. Being all of them degenerated dialects of the Latin, they are apt to mix in conversation.
2. Spanish. Bestow great attention on this, & endeavor to acquire an accurate knowledge of it. Our future connections with Spain and Spanish America will render that language a valuable acquisition.
3. Moral Philosophy. I think it lost time to attend lectures in this branch.
4. Religion. Your reason is now mature enough to examine this object. In the first place divest yourself of all bias in favour of novelty & singularity of opinion. Indulge them in any other subject rather than that of religion.
5. Travelling. This makes men wiser, but less happy. When men of sober age travel, they gather knowledge which they may apply usefully for their country, but they are subject ever after to recollections mixed with regret, their affections are weakened by being extended over more objects, & they learn new habits which cannot be gratified when they return home.

DOCUMENT G

"Reading The Law"

To John Garland Jefferson

From: New York, June 11. 1790

All that is necessary for a student is access to a library, and directions in what order the books are to be read. This I will take the liberty of suggesting to you, observing previously that as other branches of science, especially history, are necessary to form a lawyer, these must be carried on together. I will arrange the books to be read into three columns, and propose that you should read those in the first column till 12. o'clock every day: those in the 2d from 12. to 2. those in the 3d. after candlelight, leaving all the afternoon for exercise and recreation, which are as necessary as reading: I will rather say more necessary, because health is worth more than learning.

DOCUMENT H

"Freedom Of Mind"

To William Green Munford

From: Monticello, June 18, 1799

Dear Sir--I have to acknowledge the receipt of your favor of May 14 in which you mention that you have finished the 6. first books of Euclid, plane trigonometry, surveying & algebra and ask whether I think a further pursuit of that branch of science would be useful to you. There are some propositions in the latter books of Euclid, & some of Archimedes, which are useful, & I have no doubt you have been made acquainted with them. Trigonometry, so far as this, is most valuable to every man. There is scarcely a day in which he will not resort to it for some of the purposes of common life. The science of calculation also is indispensable as far as the extraction of the square and cube roots; algebra as far as the quadratic equation & the use of logarithms are often of value in ordinary cases: but all beyond these is but a luxury;...but not to be indulged in by one who is to have a profession to follow for his subsistence. In this light I view the conic sections, curves of the higher orders, perhaps even spherical trigonometry, algebraical operations beyond the 2d dimension, and fluxions. There are other branches of science however worth the attention of every man. Astronomy, botany, chemistry, natural philosophy, natural history, anatomy. Not indeed to be a proficient in them; but to possess their general principles & outlines, so as that we may be able to amuse and inform ourselves further in any of them as we proceed through life & have occasion for them. Some knowledge of them is necessary for our character as well as comfort.

DOCUMENT I

"Education Of A Grandson"

To Thomas Jefferson Randolph.

From: Washington, November 24th, 1808

Be a listener only, keep within yourself and endeavor to establish with yourself the habit of silence, especially in politics.

DOCUMENT J

"Female Education"

To Nathaniel Burwell

From: Monticello, March 14, 1818

...A plan of female education has never been a subject of systematic contemplation with me. ...A great obstacle to good education is the inordinate passion for novels. ... For a like reason, too, much poetry should not be indulged. ...The French language, become that of the general intercourse of nations, and from their extraordinary advances, now the depository of all science, is an indispensable part of education for both sexes.

The ornaments too, and the amusements of life, are entitled to their portion of attention. These, for a female, are dancing, drawing, and music.

I need say nothing of household economy, in which the mothers of our country are generally skilled, and generally careful to instruct their daughters. We all know its value, and that diligence and dexterity in all its processes are inestimable treasures. The order and economy of a house are as honorable to the mistress as those of the farm to the master, and if either be neglected, ruin follows, and children destitute of the means of living.

DOCUMENT K

"Habits Of 'A Hard Student'"

To Dr. Vine Utley

From: Monticello, March 21, 1819

I was a hard student until I entered on the business of life, the duties of which leave no idle time to those disposed to fulfill them; and now, retired, and at the age of seventy-six, I am again a hard student. ...and I never go to bed without an hour, or half hour's previous reading of something moral, whereon to ruminate in the intervals of sleep.

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**NEH Seminar
Thomas Jefferson: Personality, Character and Public Life**

**Boston University
Professor Peter Gibbon
July 19, 2006**