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NEH Institute Project  
Thomas Jefferson: Personality, Character, and Public Life  
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This project is not so much a unit of lessons that can be used on consecutive days as it is a series of lessons, all relating to Thomas Jefferson, which can be used in several different units. It is designed for use with college preparatory or honors level high school juniors taking a survey course on American history. Each lesson is designed to fill a 45-50 minute period.

The main goal of these lessons is to expose students to historical information in order to foster higher-level thinking skills. Specific objectives include enabling the students to be able to:

1. Explain the content of early U.S. History
2. Evaluate internet sources
3. Analyze primary sources
4. Synthesize arguments based on independent research

The “unit” will consist of the following lessons. A narrative of the instructional process for each lesson is provided below:

1. Understanding the Declaration of Independence
2. Writing the Declaration of Independence
3. Political Divisions in the Washington Administration
4. Thomas Jefferson as President Part I
5. Thomas Jefferson as President Part II

### **Lesson I – Understanding the Declaration of Independence**

The teacher should begin the class with a 5-minute Socratic dialog on the historical background of the Declaration of Independence, making use of the timeline at the top of the students’ note sheet.

The next 5 minutes should be devoted to defining the sections of the Declaration. The teacher should ask students to write definitions for each of the four terms listed on the sheet, then compile a list on the board in order to create the best definition. This section of the lesson should allow the students to predict what each section of the Declaration will be about, as well as show them how to organize an argument.

For the next 25-30 minutes, the students and teacher should read through the Declaration together in order to break it down, with the students following the instructions on the sheet, and the teacher asking the suggested discussion questions.

The conclusion of the class (the final 10 minutes) should be devoted to discussing the last question on whether Jefferson makes a convincing case. The teacher should ask the students to

use the events of the 1760s and 1770s that led to the Declaration as evidence for their arguments. This will serve both as a review of prior knowledge and as a way to get students to construct an argument.

The teacher may collect and grade the students' note sheets as a form of assessment, or rely on the concluding discussion to assess whether the students have achieved their objectives.

## **Lesson II – Writing the Declaration of Independence**

For this lesson, each student will need to use a computer. Now that students have come to understand the meaning of the Declaration, they will explore some of Jefferson's influences. The handout directs students to a website with links to several primary sources. Students should be allowed at least 30 minutes to explore the primary source documents on the website and to prepare written answers to the questions.

Depending on how long the students spend reading the document, the final 10-15 minutes of class should serve as a summary of what the students found. The teacher should note that not all students will have the same answers to all questions, and different answers should lead to discussion.

The teacher should also leave time to discuss the two discussion questions (listed under #6 on the directions handout) about scholarly websites and the evolution of the language of the documents.

## **Lesson III – Political Divisions in the Washington Administration**

This class will begin with the teacher handing out and explaining, in approximately 5 minutes, the first two columns of the "First Party System" handout, so that the students know which men belonged to which party and what the political philosophy of each party is. Students will then be broken into groups and given the handout "Political Divisions in the Washington Administration."

Depending on class size, each group will be assigned one or more of the topics. Each group will be given approximately 15-20 minutes, and is responsible for preparing a brief summary of the events pertaining to its topic, explaining why there was disagreement, and evaluating which party had the best proposed solutions. Depending on the resources available, students may communicate this information to the rest of the class via Smartboard, poster paper, or verbally. As each group presents, all students should fill out the 3<sup>rd</sup> column of the First Party System chart. Again, this may be collected as a form of assessment at the discretion of the teacher.

The final 15-20 minutes of class should be devoted to a discussion of the events of the Washington administration, with each group presenting its findings and opinions. At the conclusion of the discussion, the teacher should allow 3-4 minutes for each student to write a thesis response to the following question: *During the Washington administration, did the Federalists or the Jeffersonians have a more appropriate vision for America?*

## Lesson IV & V – Thomas Jefferson as President, Parts I & II

Depending on the particular schedule, teachers may be able to fit this lesson in to one period on a block schedule, however, teachers teaching in 45-50 periods will likely need two classes.

When the students enter the room, the following question should be written on the board: *What were the elements of Thomas Jefferson's philosophy?* Students will be given 3-4 minutes to write a paragraph response to this question. Before they begin writing, however, the teacher should make clear the many different kinds of philosophy (political, religious, etc.).

The teacher should then ask students for answers, and create a list of Jefferson's beliefs on the board.

Then, the teacher should give out the list of topics from the Jefferson administration and go over the instructions. Students should have at least 30 minutes to prepare, and will likely need help finding and analyzing the primary sources.

Student presentations will likely take at least 30 minutes total, thus, not all of the groups will be able to present on the first day. The second day will likely feature most of the presentations, as the first day will be largely devoted to research and the analysis of primary sources.

The final 10 minutes of day two should be devoted to discussing whether Jefferson remained true to his principles while president. As there are many inconsistencies, the teacher should also pose the following discussion questions:

- Is it acceptable for political leaders to compromise their principles for practical ends?
- Should history not regard Jefferson as highly because he did not always remain true to his principles?

As the presentations and discussion take place, students should fill out the "Jefferson Administration" table. Again, this may be used as an assessment at the discretion of the teacher.

## Declaring Independence

September, 1774	First Continental Congress meets to discuss a response to the Coercive Acts
April, 1775	Colonists fight a small battle with British troops at Lexington and Concord
May, 1775	The Second Continental Congress meets to discuss whether fighting can be ended or if revolution should occur
November 1775	King George refused the Olive Branch Petition (written by John Dickinson)
January, 1776	Paine's <i>Common Sense</i> makes the case for independence
May, 1776	Second Continental Congress is urged by Virginia to declare independence
June, 1776	Second Continental Congress votes to declare independence, appoints 5 men to write a statement of reasons for independence

The Declaration of Independence is said to have four sections. Write what each section means in your own words:

1. Preamble –
2. Declaration of Rights –
3. List of Grievances –
4. Resolution –

**Preamble** – “Translate” the preamble into your own words (it’s the first paragraph of the Declaration)

**Declaration of Rights** (second paragraph)

What rights does the Declaration say that all men have?

According to the Declaration, what should a people do if their rights are being violated?

**List of Grievances** (a bunch of statements, mostly beginning with “He” or “For”) – In your own words list examples of complaints against the King:

**Resolution** (last paragraph) – What do the colonists resolve to do?

## Declaring Independence (Teacher Version)

### Teacher discussion questions listed in italics

September, 1774	First Continental Congress meets to discuss a response to the Coercive Acts
April, 1775	Colonists fight a small battle with British troops at Lexington and Concord
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November 1775	King George refused the Olive Branch Petition (written by John Dickinson)
January, 1776	Paine's <i>Common Sense</i> makes the case for independence
May, 1776	Second Continental Congress is urged by Virginia to declare independence
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The Declaration of Independence is said to have four sections. Write what each section means in your own words:

5. Preamble –

6. Declaration of Rights –

7. List of Grievances –

8. Resolution –

**Preamble** – “Translate” the preamble into your own words (it’s the first paragraph of the Declaration)

- *Is “impel” the best word to describe the need for the colonists to separate?*

**Declaration of Rights** (second paragraph)

What rights does the Declaration say that all men have?

- *What did Jefferson mean by “all men are created equal?”*
- *Is Jefferson making true statements in the “declaration of rights” section? Is everything really “self-evident?” Are these ideas radical for 1776?*

According to the Declaration, what should a people do if their rights are being violated?

- *Were the colonists rights violated?*
- *Were rights violated in such a way as to justify violence?*

**List of Grievances** (a bunch of statements, mostly beginning with “He” or “For”) – In your own words list examples of complaints against the King:

- *Who was really responsible for the colonists’ grievances? Why would Jefferson blame the king instead?*
- *Which grievances are valid? Which are exaggerated?*

**Resolution** (last paragraph) – What do the colonists resolve to do?

- *Does Jefferson make a convincing case for independence? Would you have been ready to fight the best army in the world after reading this?*

## Writing the Declaration of Independence Internet Activity

1. Go to <http://trackstar.4teachers.org/trackstar/> (or do a search for “trackstar 4 teachers”)
2. On the right side of the page, locate the box that says, “Find a Track.” Enter 359196 into the “View Track #” box.
3. You should be brought to a web page that has “Writing The Declaration of Independence” as the title.
4. Click the “View in Frames” box.
5. The left side of the web page has a list of links. Click on each link in order. The top right side of the web page has instructions/questions for each web site that you will view (you may need to scroll down to see the questions). Below those instructions is the website that you have clicked on. Please answer all of the questions that are asked in your notebook.
6. As you read, please keep the following discussion questions in mind for a discussion at the end of the period:
  - a. What are some aspects of the websites that indicate that they are acceptable resources for scholarly research?
  - b. What accounts for the differences in the language, form, and style of the primary sources?

## **List of all questions from Writing Declaration of Independence Internet Activity**

### **Magna Carta**

1. What elements of the Magna Carta are reflected in the Declaration of Independence?

### **Mayflower Compact**

2. What is it that the colonists are agreeing to do?

3. In what way does Jefferson's "theory of government" reflect the attitudes of the colonists headed for Plymouth?

### John Locke

4. List Locke's ideas that Jefferson used in declaring independence.

### Declaration – Original Draft

5. What is Jefferson's argument in the deleted paragraph?

6. Why do you believe this paragraph was eventually deleted?

### John Adams's History of the Declaration

7. Why was Jefferson selected to write the Declaration?

8. According to Adams, why were some parts of the original draft deleted?

## **Political Divisions in the Washington Administration**

### Foreign Policy

Relationship with Native Americans  
British-French Conflict and the Jay Treaty  
Pinckney Treaty  
Washington's Farewell Address

### Domestic Policy

Formation of Cabinet  
National Bank  
Tax Policy  
Whiskey Rebellion  
Washington's Farewell Address (and political parties issue)

For your group's assigned topic:

1. Using the materials in the room, research any events related to your topic and prepare a brief summary of those events
2. Explain the parties' differing views on the issues
3. Evaluate the parties' proposals and select the one you believe to be the most effective

## **Thomas Jefferson as President**

### Events

*Marbury v. Madison*

Louisiana Purchase

Barbary Pirates

Lewis and Clark Expedition

Embargo Act

Your group will:

1. Prepare a summary of the events
2. Find at least one primary source related to the event and explain how it helps further our understanding of the event. You may use any of the source books in the room or the internet.
3. Evaluate Jefferson's role in the event (if any) and his position on the event. Were the actions taken by the United States wise?
4. Explain whether the actions taken were consistent with Jefferson's philosophy.

### The Jefferson Administration (1801-1809)

Event (year and definition)	Jefferson's role in the event	Good or bad policy, and why?	Consistent with T.J.'s philosophy, and why?

