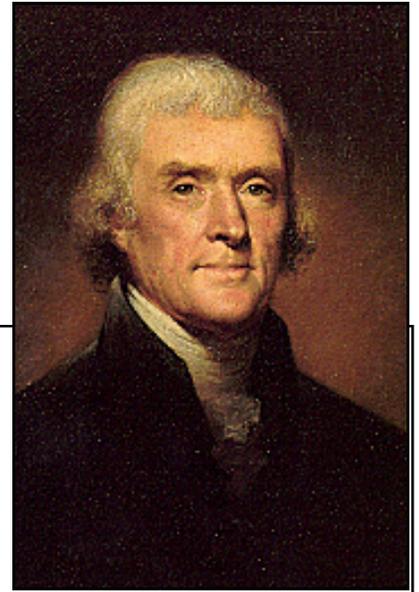


Teaching Guide

SEGMENT 8, WEBISODE 1

Please note: Each segment in this Webisode has its own Teaching Guide



Thomas Jefferson



Segment Overview

With the Revolutionary War in its second year, Richard Henry Lee followed the instructions of the Virginia Convention, and on June 7, 1776, presented a resolution to the Continental Congress, “That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.” In response, the Continental Congress, acting as the central colonial government, appointed a Committee of Five members to draft a statement presenting the colonies’ case for independence to the world. Thomas Jefferson later wrote that the other committee members “unanimously pressed on myself alone to undertake the draught (sic).” Between June 11 and 28, Jefferson toiled at a custom-made portable desk in his temporary, second-story lodgings in Philadelphia to write the birth certificate of a new nation. He sent the declaration to Benjamin Franklin and John Adams for revisions, made what he called a “fair copy” incorporating their changes, and forwarded it to Congress. Congressional discussion resulted in some deletions and alterations but essentially the document remained Jefferson’s words. Late on the afternoon of July 4, church bells rang out over Philadelphia: the congress had officially adopted the Declaration of Independence.

Teacher Directions

1. Ask the students to discuss.
 - Have you ever tried to convince your parents (or guardians) to allow you to do something special?
 - How did you make a good argument to persuade them to your point of view?
 - Did you think that your point of view was just good common sense?
2. Explain to the students.

When the colonies wanted to convince England and the world that they should be free and independent, their representatives in the Continental Congress thought it important to explain their reasons. So they appointed Thomas Jefferson to write their argument in a declaration. Jefferson made what he thought was a common sense case for their point of view. The argument that Jefferson wrote is perhaps the most masterfully written state paper in the whole of western civilization.



Let's Discuss



Teacher Directions

1. Introduce Thomas Jefferson as the main author of the Declaration of Independence.

Like Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson knew how to write. Other members of the Continental Congress agreed that Jefferson was the perfect man to draft the colonies' Declaration of Independence. For seventeen hot days in June 1776, Jefferson toiled in his second-story rented room in Philadelphia to craft a clear, forceful case for the colonies' right to be free and independent states.

The twenty-three year old lawyer struggled to express the powerful ideals of freedom and democracy in strong, beautiful language. What he accomplished is perhaps the most masterfully written state paper in the whole of western civilization.

2. Ask the students how they might construct such an important document. What points or topics might they include? How would they organize the document?

Explain that Jefferson divided the declaration into five sections and that each section had a specific purpose.

- Introduction
- Preamble
- Indictment of King George III
- Denunciation of the British people
- Conclusion

3. Read the Introduction to the students.

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

4. Discuss with the students.

- What was the purpose of the Introduction?
- What do you think the Introduction means?

5. Share the following information with the students.

In that long, amazing sentence, Jefferson says it is necessary for the colonies to be free from Britain. And he tells you to read on if you want to know why.

6. Ask the students.

What do you think is the most important word in Jefferson's amazing one-sentence introduction?

7. Explain to the students.

The most important word is *necessary*. In Jefferson's day, the word *necessary* meant that fate, nature, and God decreed it. That's quite a powerful threesome. Jefferson tells us that the colonies' independence from Britain is inescapable, inevitable, and unavoidable. There is no choice for either Britain or the colonies—independence is absolute and inescapable. Jefferson knew how to pick a word to make a point.

11. Read the Preamble to the students.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

9. Discuss with the students.

- What was the purpose of the Preamble?
- What do you think the Preamble means?

10. Share the following information with the students.

Jefferson loved poetry and music (he played the fiddle), and he knew how to write and make speeches. He must have loved writing the Preamble. In it he used the sound and sense of language to tickle the reader's ear and eye. His words sound like music. Try singing the Preamble. Notice that Jefferson's preamble song is a strong, beautiful argument for the right of people to overthrow a bad government and create a better one.

Jefferson used common sense ideas with which everyone could agree. Everyone could agree that they should have life, liberty and the right to seek happiness. Everyone could agree that government should help them stay safe and happy. Everyone could agree that they must change the government if it abused its power. Everyone could agree that revolution was right and necessary, if the government oppressed the people.

11. Explain the word indictment and read the Indictment of King George III to the students.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt towns, and destroyed the Lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

12. Discuss with the students.

- What was the purpose of the Indictment of George III?
- What do you think the Indictment of George III means?

13. Share the following information with the students.

The Indictment of King George III is nothing more than a list of all the bad things the king had done to the colonies. Sam Adams called it George III's "Catalogue of Crimes." In short, King George has oppressed his people in America and ignored their rights as Englishmen.

And Jefferson says, "Here is a list of facts to prove it!" As a lawyer, Jefferson knew how to list facts in a legal case. In his day, the term *fact* most often meant an evil deed or crime. So Jefferson lists each of the king's crimes, beginning with the words, "He has." And what has King George done? He has abused his power by suspending colonial laws. He has dissolved colonial legislatures. He has obstructed justice. And one act the colonists really hated: He has stationed an army in the colonies during peacetime. (George even made the colonists board soldiers in their homes!)

14. Explain the word denunciation and read the Denunciation of the British people to the students.

Nor have we been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would

inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

15. Discuss with the students.

- What was the purpose of the Denunciation of the British?
- What do you think the Denunciation of the British means?

16. Explain to the students.

Jefferson says that the colonists tried hard to get the British people to understand and help them. Again Jefferson draws up a list—this time of all the ways the colonists tried to convince their fellow-citizens in Britain. But the British people ignored the colonies' pleas as if they were deaf. So the British people share the king's blame.

17. Explain the word conclusion and read the Conclusion to the students.

18. Discuss with the students.

- What was the purpose of the Conclusion?
- What do you think the Conclusion means?

19. Explain to the students.

This is the end, says Jefferson. The actions of the king and the British people leave the colonies no choice but to become free and independent states. Jefferson ends the declaration perfectly. He says the colonists put their trust in God and make a promise to each other. They will support the Declaration of Independence with their lives, their fortunes, and their honor. Which is exactly what they did!

Teacher Directions

1. Discuss the following situation with the students.

Thomas Jefferson was a complicated man—he thought slavery was wrong, yet he owned slaves. He also wrote the Declaration of Independence in which he said that all men are created equal.

2. Ask the students.

- What do you think about Jefferson and slavery?
- How can you explain the difference between Jefferson's beliefs and his actions concerning slavery?





Moving Toward Freedom

Teacher Directions

1. Open the discussion of Jefferson and slavery with the following quote.

My opinion has ever been that, until more can be done for them, we should endeavor, with those whom fortune has thrown on our hands, to feed and clothe them well, protect them from ill usage, require such reasonable labor only as is performed voluntarily by freemen, and be led by no repugnancies to abdicate them, and our duties to them.

2. Discuss Jefferson's quote with the students.
3. Working in small teams, students use the Student Sheet: *Jefferson and Slavery* to form an opinion about Jefferson's views on slavery.
4. Discuss the teams' reactions to Jefferson's views with the students.

Although Jefferson called the institution of slavery an abominable crime, he owned slaves all his life. He expressed disappointment in his efforts to end or restrict slavery and believed that no solution could be found in his lifetime. Although he did include a passage condemning slavery in the Declaration of Independence, it was stricken in revision. Jefferson felt responsible for the welfare of those enslaved on his plantation even as he doubted their ability to succeed in a free white world. He said that freeing enslaved persons "is like abandoning children." Jefferson's overall solution to the slavery problem was to return the enslaved people to their own African homeland or some other land where they could live as "free and independent people" and to provide them with implements and skills to establish their own nation. In his lifetime, great debts forced Jefferson to sell almost a hundred slaves, and upon his death, required the auction of most of the others. He freed only seven slaves, all of them skilled artisans who Jefferson felt could succeed as freedmen.

Teacher Directions

Use the following activities with your students.

Art — Students make a quill pen from a feather and try writing with their colonial pen.

Science — Students plant herbs that could be found in the kitchen garden at Jefferson's home. Students research the different meanings and uses of herbs, such as those used for medicine or to dye clothes.

Physical Education — Students play colonial games.



Connections

Jefferson and Slavery

Library of Congress



The laws do not permit us to turn them loose, if that were for their good.

As far as I can judge from the experiments which have been made, to give liberty to, or rather to abandon persons whose habits have been formed in slavery is like abandoning children.

I congratulate you, my dear friend, on the law of your State, for suspending the importation of slaves, and for the glory you have just acquired by endeavoring to prevent it forever. This abomination must have an end. And there is a superior bench reserved in heaven for those who hasten it.

Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that these people [blacks] are to be free. Nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government. Nature, habit, opinion has drawn indelible lines of distinction between them.

Do not mistake me. I am not advocating slavery. I am not justifying the wrongs we have committed on a foreign people... On the contrary, there is nothing I would not sacrifice to a practicable plan of abolishing every vestige of this moral and political depravity.

I can say with conscious truth that there is not a man on earth who would sacrifice more than I would to relieve us from this heavy reproach in any practicable way.

The rights of human nature [are] deeply wounded by this infamous practice [of slavery].

I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep forever: that considering numbers, nature

and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation, is among possible events: that it may become probable by supernatural interference! The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest.

As it is, we have the wolf by the ears, and we can neither hold him nor safely let him go.

I have supposed the black man in his present state might not be [equal to the white man]; but it would be hazardous to affirm that equally cultivated for a few generations, he would not become so."

—Thomas Jefferson