

Lesson Plan

A Complex Legacy

Book: *Thomas Jefferson*

Series: Influential Presidents

Level: Beacon

Objective

To help students examine the positive and negative aspects of Thomas Jefferson's life and legacy.

Supplies

- *Thomas Jefferson* book
- Paper and pencils

Before the Activity

Read through the *Thomas Jefferson* book, or assign it to students to read on their own.

Activity

The *Thomas Jefferson* book describes the beliefs and actions our third US president is known for. Some these beliefs and actions led to beneficial changes, but others were hurtful, especially to people of color. As a result, Jefferson's legacy is complicated.

Ask students to read through the book again. As they read, they should find four helpful things Jefferson did as president and four of his beliefs or actions that were harmful. Students should write these details on a piece of paper, along with the page numbers where they found them. Then, students should use these notes to write a short essay explaining Jefferson's legacy. This essay should have two paragraphs:

- The first paragraph should list four positive parts of Jefferson's legacy. Students should put the page number where they found each fact in parentheses at the end of the sentence describing it.
- The second paragraph should explain four negative parts of Jefferson's legacy. Once again, students should put the page number where they found each fact in parentheses at the end of the sentence.

Evaluation

Collect the essays at the end of class. Using the attached sample essay as a guide, give students 1 point for identifying each positive impact, 1 point for each negative impact, and 1 point for citing a page number after each fact, for up to 16 points total. Note: The sample essay includes more than four facts in each section, so students' essay can be shorter.

Standards

This lesson may be used to address the Common Core State Standards' reading standards for informational text, grade 4 (RI 4.1, 4.2), and the National Council for the Social Studies standard 6.

Example Essay:

As president, Thomas Jefferson did some things that helped the United States. In 1803, the Louisiana Purchase made the country much bigger (p. 15). Jefferson sent people to map and explore the added land (pp. 18–19). He gave books to the Library of Congress (p. 20). In 1807, he signed a law that made it illegal to bring enslaved people into the United States (p. 24). Jefferson also helped the United States stay out of a war between the British and French (pp. 26–27).

However, some of Jefferson's beliefs and actions caused harm. By adding the Louisiana Purchase, Jefferson took over land where American Indians had been living for years (p. 17). He tried to change these Native peoples' ways of life (p. 18). He wanted to make them act like white people (p. 17). Although Jefferson believed slavery was wrong, his actions didn't line up with his beliefs (p. 27). Jefferson owned slaves (p. 10, p. 24). When he was president, most slaves still allowed slavery (p. 24). And he wrongly believed white people were smarter than Black people (p. 24).