

We Disagreed as Rational Friends: The Politics and Friendship of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson

Description of the Interpreter Experience:

Founding Fathers and icons of Independence John Adams and Thomas Jefferson meet 250 years after their labors of Liberty to discuss, debate (and sometimes digress) about the road to Independence and the new paths of a young nation. The two presidents take on topics from the Stamp Act to slavery, from Declaration to Constitution, and from revolution to republic. Witness Adams and Jefferson in their prime, more men than legends, as they recall their decades-long association, and discuss some of their greatest battles--some side-by-side, some against each other-- through their trials and triumphs, and discover how these two men maintained friendship with, and respect for one another, as a nation unlike any other began.

Before You Go: Background Knowledge Through Scripting Lesson Plan

Suggested Grade Level: 7th or 8th Grade

Subject Area(s): Civics and U.S. History

Time Length: One to two 50-minute class periods with optional extension time for more drafting and/or other extension activities at the end of this document

OBJECTIVES

- ★ **Objective 1:** Students will discuss and synthesize the grievances and enlightenment ideas of the colonists that are contained within the Declaration of Independence
- ★ **Objective 2:** Students will discuss and synthesize the arguments about the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, the importance of a Bill of Rights, and Constitutional limits of government.
- ★ **Objective 3:** Students will discuss and synthesize the arguments about the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, the importance of a Bill of Rights, and Constitutional limits of government.

STANDARDS

- ★ **SS.7.C.G.1.5:** Describe how British policies and responses to colonial concerns led to the writing of the Declaration of Independence.
- ★ **SS.7.CG.1.6:** Analyze the ideas and grievances set forth in the Declaration of Independence
- ★ **SS.7.CG.1.7:** Explain how the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation led to the writing of the U.S. Constitution.
- ★ **SS.7.CG.1.9:** Describe how the U.S. Constitution limits the powers of government through separation of powers, checks and balances, individual rights, rule of law and due process of law.
- ★ **SS.7.CG.1.10:** Compare the viewpoints of the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists regarding ratification of the U.S. Constitution and including a bill of rights.
- ★ **SS.8.A.3.3:** Recognize the contributions of the Founding Fathers (John Adams, Thomas Jefferson) during American Revolutionary efforts.
- ★ **SS.8.A.3.7:** Examine the structure, content, and consequences of the Declaration of Independence.
- ★ **SS.8.A.3.9:** Evaluate the structure, strengths, and weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and its aspects that led to the Constitutional Convention.

MATERIALS

- ★ **Print Outs** of the Student Assignment attached.
- ★ **Civics or US History Textbook** in your classroom. Use the chapter sections on Ideals and Grievances of the Declaration of Independence and the chapter sections on Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, Federalists and Anti-federalist viewpoints.
- ★ **Optional: Laptops with Online Resources** allowing students to research online or use information in your LMS rather than using textbooks
- ★ **Optional: Crafts for “making Props”** paper, scissors, tape/glue, and/or markers/crayons for creating simple props for a skit.

BELL RINGER/HOOK (5 MIN)

Do you know how to write a script? Look at this example of how a script is formatted:

The character’s name: "What they say." **actions they do**

Example:

Hamilton: **walks up to Burr** "Pardon me, are you Aaron Burr, sir?"

Burr: "That depends who's asking?"

Sam: **shoves Hamilton away and takes a drink from his cup** "Don't listen to him or you'll all burst into song."

Write a small script of a brief conversation or moment that happened to you today.

ACTIVITY (40 MIN)

Ask students to get into “Production Teams” of 4-5 students. Students will play roles as Researchers, Script Writers, and Actors. Give them one of three topics: Authorship, Friendship or Debate. (You can also choose one for all of them to do depending on where you are in curriculum) Give them 30 min to create a small 2-3 min skit. Then have them present after that time.

A Story of Friendship, Agreement and Finding Solutions. Students, you are tasked with making a short script about Thomas Jefferson and John Adams that shows how the two men worked together to write the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson as the primary writer and Adams as one giving suggestions.

First, as a team, look at the information below and do some research on the terms from your textbook.

Thomas Jefferson wanted to focus on the ideals of a perfect government for the people. Have him describe these ideals in your skit.		John Adams wanted to focus on the British policies that were causing anger in the colonies. Have him describe these problems in your skit.	
Social Contract		Stamp Act	
Natural Rights		Quartering Act	
Consent of the Governed		Intolerable Acts	

Second, write a script together for 2-3 min of performance that follows this arc: Jefferson and Adams are sitting in a room together surrounded by crumpled papers of drafts rejected for the Declaration of

Independence. Jefferson talks about the ideals that need to be added. Adams talks about the policies that matter to him. They then agree to make a document that fits both.

If you have time, create a few props to add to the setting and story of the skit.

A Story of Authorship and Patriotism. Students, you are tasked with making a short script about Thomas Jefferson and John Adams that shows the two men discussing who should write the Declaration of Independence based on their contributions, influence, and political representation.

First, as a team, look at the information below and you can also look in the glossary of your textbook to see mentions of Jefferson and Adams biographies.

Thomas Jefferson	John Adams
Known for being reserved, intellectual, and reflective.	Known for being direct, argumentative, and energetic.
Jefferson helped reform Virginia laws and worked to reduce aristocratic privilege and expand religious freedom, especially through the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom.	Adams was one of the earliest and strongest voices calling for independence. Before many delegates were ready, he argued that reconciliation with Britain was impossible.
Jefferson was a scholar who studied Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke and was known from his ability to write.	He played a central role in persuading the Continental Congress to support revolution. Many contemporaries viewed Adams as the “engine” of independence because of his speeches and committee work.
<p>He was known for his ability to discuss philosophy, emphasizing liberty and individual rights as foundations of government.</p> <p>Jefferson believed independent farmers formed the backbone of republican government. His vision of America centered on local control and rural democracy.</p>	Earlier, after the Boston Massacre, Adams defended British soldiers in court as their lawyer. He believed in the rule of law and fair trials, even when unpopular and upset some patriots.
<p>From the State of Virginia, the largest and wealthiest Southern colony. Its economy depended on: tobacco plantations, large landholdings, and enslaved labor. Agriculture dominated economic life far more than commerce or manufacturing.</p> <p>Virginia society was shaped by a powerful planter aristocracy, rural communities, greater social inequality and Anglican traditions.</p> <p>Virginia had enormous influence because, not only was it was the most populous colony, many leading revolutionaries came from Virginia: General George Washington, Patrick Henry (“Give me liberty, or give me death!”), James Madison (future writer of the Constitution). Virginia often led Southern colonial politics and would be crucial to unify the colonies during the Revolution.</p>	<p>From the State of Massachusetts, part of the New England colonies, where the economy centered on: shipping and maritime trade, fishing, small farms, craftsmanship and commerce. Unlike the Southern colonies, Massachusetts did not rely heavily on plantation agriculture.</p> <p>Massachusetts society was shaped by Puritan religious traditions, strong town governments, high literacy and education, and community-centered politics where citizens often participated directly in local government through town meetings.</p> <p>Massachusetts became the center of resistance against British policies with the Boston Massacre, the Boston Tea Party, and the Battles of Lexington and Concord. Because of these events, Massachusetts helped ignite the Revolution and became known for radical patriot activism. But it also meant some other colonies considered the state the reason an instigator of violence and British aggression.</p>

Second, write a script together for 2-3 min of performance that follows this arc: Jefferson and Adams talk about why the other would be a better choice for writing the Declaration of Independence. In the end, they should conclude that Jefferson is the best choice and explain why.

If you have time, create a few props to add to the setting and story of the skit.

A Story of Debate, Disagreement and Perspective. Students, you are tasked with making a short script about Thomas Jefferson and John Adams that shows how the two men disagreed on the power of the federal government regarding the creation of a new US Constitution to replace the Articles of Confederation.

First, as a team, look at the information below and do some research on the terms from your textbook.

Thomas Jefferson wasn't an anti-federalist, but he did share many of their perspectives on the dangers of a federal government. Elaborate on these ideas in your own words and put them in the script.	John Adams believed in the Constitution as a solution to the problems with the Articles of Confederation. Elaborate on these ideas in your own words and put them in the script.
He feared centralized power, especially without a Bill of Rights.	He believed the Articles were too weak to function effectively because major weaknesses.
He was afraid creating a powerful executive head would lead to a tyranny.	He argued that without stronger authority, the U.S. risked instability and collapse.
He did recognize weaknesses of the articles that needed to be reformed, especially the lack of a strong central authority to regulate trade and enforce laws.	He believed that limits on government like separation of powers and federalism would help

Second, write a script together for 2-3 min of performance that follows this arc: Jefferson and Adams are arguing about the ratification of the Constitution. They debate the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and the merits of a stronger, federal government.

If you have time, create a few props to add to the setting and story of the skit.

REFLECTION/DOOR PASS (5 MIN)

- ★ **Friendship and Rivals:** After looking at the performances of your classmates, how did the relationship between Adams and Jefferson change over time from the Declaration to the Constitution?

Additional Question: At the beginning of our country, when people ran for president, the winner became president and the one who came in second became vice president. In 1796, John Adams was elected as our second president and Thomas Jefferson became his Vice President. Do you think they got along? Explain your reasoning.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- ★ **Four Corners Activity:** In <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/four-corners#how-to-do-a-four-corners-activity> Consider these debate questions:
 - The Articles of Confederation just needed to be amended, not destroyed.
 - A Bill of Rights is necessary for any country's constitution.
 - Taxation without Representation was the primary reason the Patriots wanted to start a revolution.
 - The Social Contract is the most important Enlightenment Idea to Influence the Founders.
- ★ **Compare and Contrast Jefferson vs Adams:** Have students write a compare and contrast essay or make a Venn Diagram comparing Jefferson and Adams. Recommended Sources:

- “Jefferson & Adams: Founding Frenemies” Includes videos (great for low Lexile readers) and text to compare the two founders. <https://www.history.com/articles/jefferson-adams-founding-frenemies>
- “Historians on John Adams and Thomas Jefferson” Compares the two in quotes by historians. This could be cut down for more concise comparison. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/adams-interview-historians/>
- “The Election of 1800: Adams vs Jefferson” This article compares the camaraderie and disagreements between the two men in great detail. <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/election-1800-adams-vs-jefferson>
- “Jefferson, Adams, and the Crucible of Revolution” Compares the two based on their demeanor and political style in the Continental Congress during the Declaration. (High Lexile Read) <https://constitutioncenter.org/essays/jefferson-adams-and-the-crucible-of-revolution>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ★ **The Jefferson Papers** using primary sources to look at the building blocks of how the Declaration ideas came to be and analyzing the different sections of the Declaration: <https://jeffersonpapers.princeton.edu/declaration-of-independence/>
- ★ **Primary Source Documents of Influential Documents that Inspired the Revolution and Constitution:** The Founders’ Library in the Constitution Center. This could be used to boost research and arguments if you choose a few for them to use during their debates: <https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/historic-document-library>
- ★ **1-2 Week Long Lesson Plan on Adams and Jefferson Debates: “John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and the Birth of Party Politics in America”** All lessons are free and would give the students in depth knowledge on the different perspectives surrounding the Declaration, Federalism, and the Constitution. <https://www.masshist.org/education/john-adams-thomas-jefferson-and-birth-party-politics-america>
- ★ **iCivics for more Background Knowledge:** There are multiple games and activities that can be fun for students to look at involving debates and arguments from the Revolution to the Constitution: <https://ed.icivics.org/teach>
 - “Investigation Declaration” allows students to connect enlightenment ideas with the declaration. This is a great puzzle solving game and can be fun to do as teams of students to see who can finish the game quickest.
 - “Race to Ratify” and “Constitutional Compromise” are short games that allows students to analyze the arguments for why we should or shouldn’t ratify the US Constitution and the compromises made to create the constitution, respectfully.
 - “Hey King, Get Off Our Backs” and “Wanted: A Just Right Government” are fantastic multi-day lessons with activities that walk the students through the major complaints that would lead to the declaration of independence or the major compromises that were made to build the Constitution.