

The Importance of Teaching All Truths

by Hector Bojorquez



Subject

Social Studies
U.S. Government



Grade Level

6-8
9-12



Time

Varies



Description

There has never been a time in U.S. education when standards, objectives and curricula were not embroiled in some controversy. The first American reader “The New England Primer” published in 1690, had a sole purpose to teach everyone to read the Bible. Some 50 years later, Benjamin Franklin formed the American Philosophical Society to further education, science and the secular ideas of the Enlightenment. This society influenced many of the founding fathers and mothers, including Thomas Jefferson. Simply, controversies around these contradictory purposes in U.S. education have been with us since the beginning.

Thomas Jefferson embodies those and other controversies to this day. He has become one of the most polarizing personalities in U.S. history because of his nonconsensual exploitation of enslaved woman, Sally Hemmings, and the very fact that he owned slaves. These are absolutely important facts that should be taught about Thomas Jefferson. We should also teach that he held racist personal views and that while he thought that slavery was an abomination to democracy, he offered few solutions that could be seen as anything but a repudiation of his own principles.

These are all important facts that our students must know in tandem with his highest aspirations. Our students should know his personal paradoxes along with his contributions to democracy.

The following facts should also be taught as they are not opinions and are important to current debates:

- Thomas Jefferson was a firm believer in the strictest separation of church and state.
- Thomas Jefferson believed in the moral teachings of Christianity on equal footing with all other religions.
- Thomas Jefferson did not believe in what he considered to be supernatural teachings of any religion.
- Thomas Jefferson wished to influence Christian education away from ideas he saw as irrational by rewriting the Bible without miracles.

These are historical facts that can be found throughout the following online resources.

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Resources

[The Jefferson Montecello, Livestreams and Podcasts](#)

[Why Thomas Jefferson Rewrote the Bible Without Jesus' Miracles and Resurrection, History.com](#)

[Thomas Jefferson and Religious Freedom, The Jefferson Montecello](#)

[Establishment Clause \(Separation of Church and State\), The First Amendment Encyclopedia](#)

[Religion and the Founding of the American Republic, Library of Congress](#)

[Separation of Church and State, National History Education Clearinghouse](#)



Teaching with Primary and Secondary Sources

Teaching with primary and secondary sources is the 6-8 Social TEKS in Texas because it helps students establish the difference between an article or artifact around a historical event or issue and texts that were written to report on, summarize or interpret an event. It also helps students understand the difference between evidence, historical accuracy and historical interpretations and propaganda.

A sample lesson in this skill could be taught in the high school course, "United States Government." The correlated TEKS are Chapter 13, Subchapter C, Rule §113.44 (a)(b)(1),(2) and (a)(c)(1)(B).

- 113.44 (a)(b)(1,2) Support the teaching of the essential knowledge and skills, the use of a variety of rich primary and secondary source material such as the complete text of the U.S. Constitution, selected Federalist Papers, landmark cases of the U.S. Supreme Court (such as those studied in Grade 8 and U.S. History Since 1877), biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, speeches, letters, and periodicals that feature analyses of political issues and events is encouraged.
- 113.44 (a)(c)(1)(B) Identify major intellectual, philosophical, political, and religious traditions that informed the American founding, including Judeo-Christian (especially biblical law), English common law and constitutionalism, Enlightenment, and republicanism, as they address issues of liberty, rights, and responsibilities of individuals.



Lesson Guiding Context

Thomas Jefferson was an intellectual man of his time who believed that all natural mysteries could be explained by ever-growing scientific discoveries. He did not

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believe in miracles or in supernatural explanations. However, he was a great believer in the moral lessons found in the New Testament of the Christian Bible. Because of this tension, he “edited” the New Testament and removed mentions of any supernatural events, such as resurrection and miracles.



Secondary Resource Activity

Have students find information about his religious opinions using the secondary resources on the [Monticello website](#). These can be articles, websites and documents. The [Monticello website](#) is the portal to online information about Thomas Jefferson’s 5,000-acre plantation and a resource concerning Jefferson’s life and times. Students will:

- Use the search engine within the Monticello website, or
- Use a Google site search feature by typing the following into the search box: site: [Monticello website](#). “Jefferson Bible” (see [more information on this tip.](#))
- Write a brief summary of what they find.

Remind students that a primary resource refers to the actual texts, objects or artifacts themselves. This is where you can explain about the usefulness of the primary resources to present facts.



Primary Resource Activity

Ask students to find the “Jefferson Bible” in the [National Museum of American History’s website](#) and the [Smithsonian website](#). The National Museum of American History’s website contains digital versions of primary resources that students can view. Students will:

- Use the search engine within the American museum website.
- Use the search engine within the Smithsonian website.
- Write a brief summary of what they find.



Summary

Ask students to answer these journal prompts over a three-day period

- Why is it important to know what Thomas Jefferson thought about religion?
- How did Thomas Jefferson’s views on religion influence the constitution?
- Why did people from his time think that religion and state (government, etc.) should be separated?

This activity helps students have confidence in understanding the truth and evidence behind issues that some may find uncomfortable. Any truth and all knowledge is simply unassailable when we find the primary resource, the proof itself behind our history.