



MONTICELLO DIGITAL LEARNING



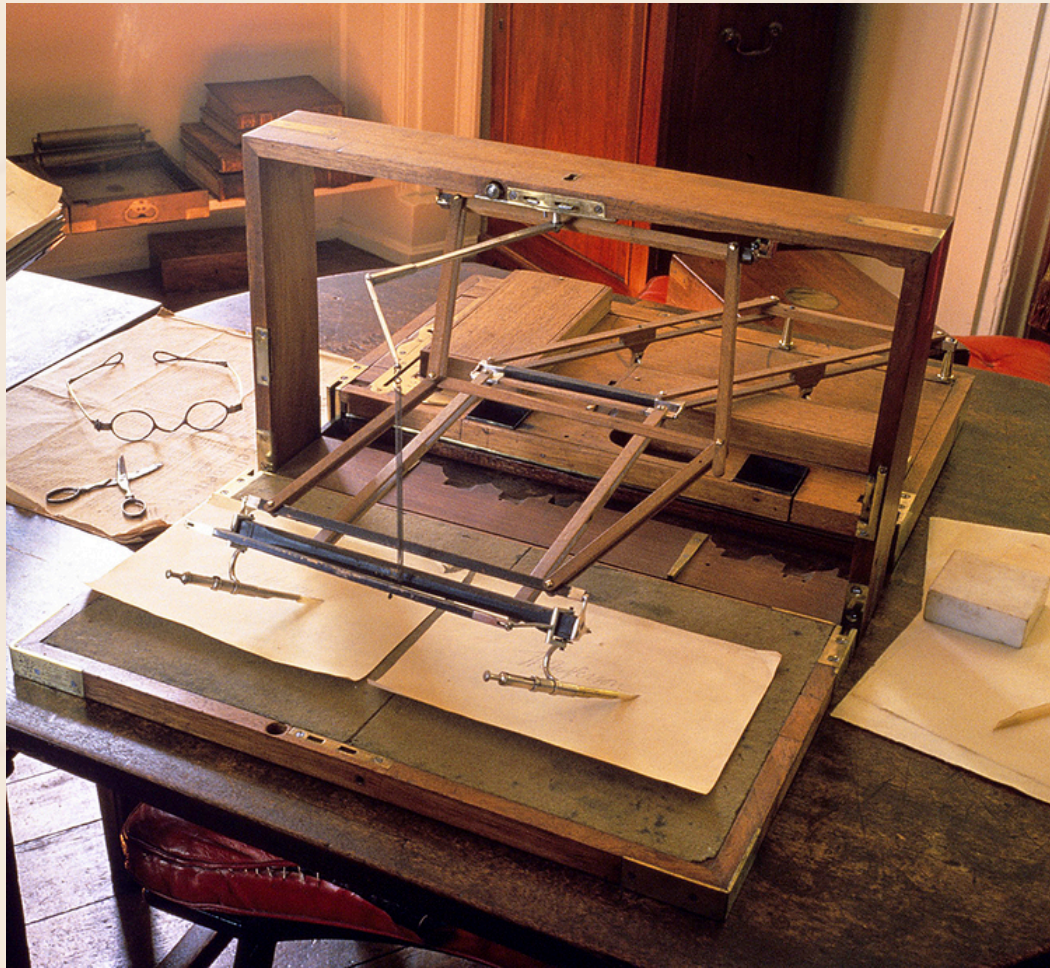
THOMAS JEFFERSON AND THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

Lesson Packet
Grades: 9 – 12



Th. Jefferson
MONTICELLO





AGENDA

- 01 Learning Objectives
- 02 Central Questions and Tensions
- 03 Timeline
- 04 Primary Sources
- 05 Classroom Activities



OBJECTIVES

- Analyze Thomas Jefferson's views on the U.S. Constitution
- Evaluate Jefferson's influence on American political principles
- Examine tensions between Federalist and Anti-Federalist views
- Interpret primary sources reflecting Jefferson's beliefs

CENTRAL TENSIONS

- Federal Power vs. States Rights
- Originalism vs. Flexibility
- Inclusion of Bill of Rights
- Term Limits

Timeline

AFTER AUTHORIZING THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE IN 1776, THOMAS JEFFERSON REMAINS AN INFLUENTIAL POLITICAL FIGURE. HE IS NOT, THOUGH, DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION. WHILE SERVING IN FRANCE AS U.S. MINISTER, HE WRITES LETTERS TO JAMES MADISON AND OTHER LEADERS SHARING HIS THOUGHTS ON THE CONSTITUTION.

1784 - 1789

Jefferson becomes U.S.
Minister to France

1787

Constitutional Convention.
Jefferson is in France
serving as U.S. Minister. He
does not attend, but writes
extensively to leaders.

1788

Constitution Ratified

1791

Bill of Rights Ratified

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. **Primary Source Annotations**
2. **Document Based Questions (DBQs)**
3. **Group Debate**



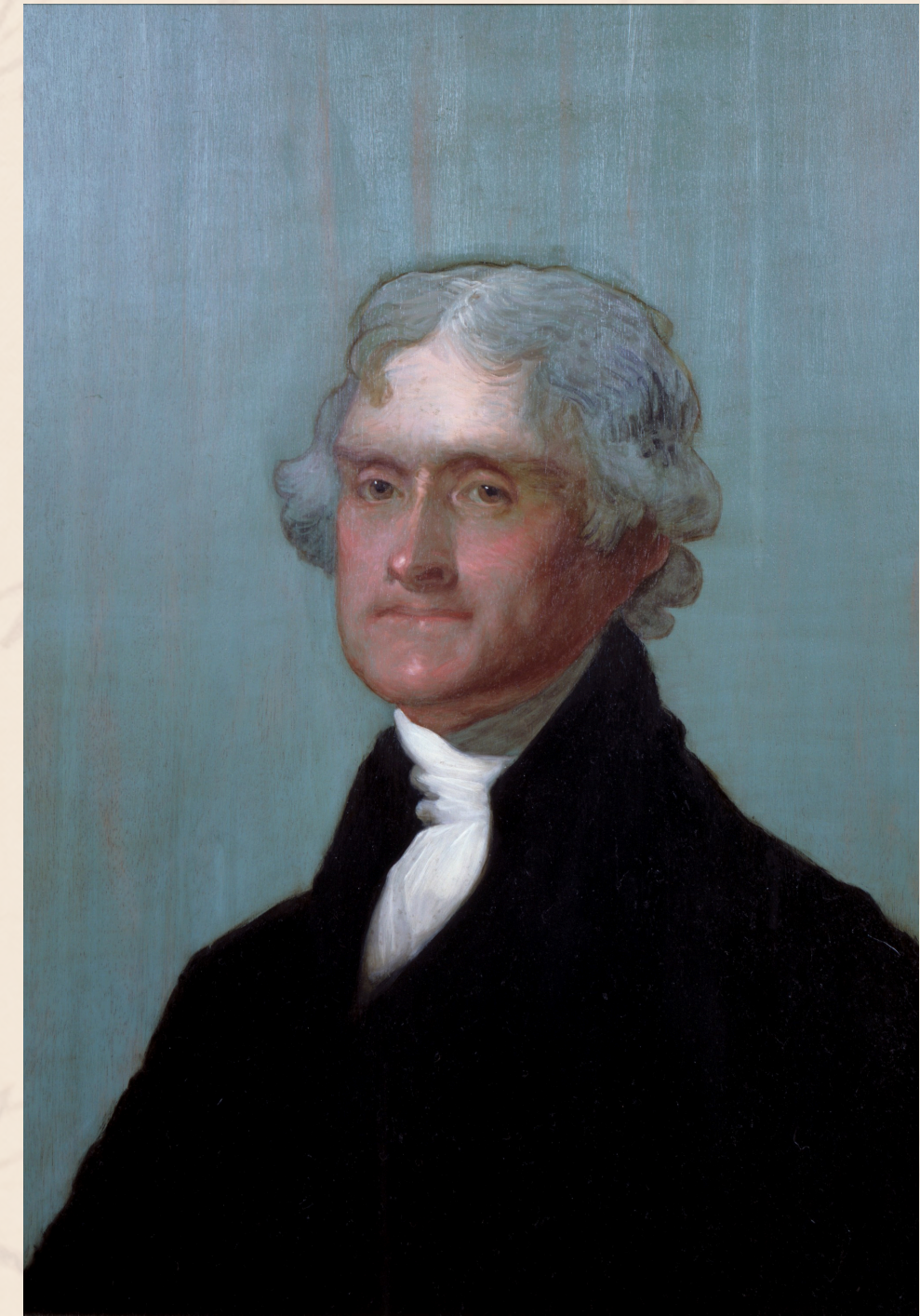
PRIMARY SOURCES

Authored by Thomas Jefferson:

- To James Madison, 20 December 1787
- To Alexander Donald, 7 February 1788
- To Francis Hopkinson, 13 March 1789
- To James Madison, 6 September 1789

Additional Sources:

- Publius (Hamilton), The Federalist 84, 28 May 1788
- Brutus, Essay 1, 1787
- Wilson, State Yard Speech, 1787



PRIMARY SOURCES ANALYSIS:

JEFFERSON LETTERS

TO MADISON, 20 DEC 1787

“There are other good things of less moment. I will now add what I do not like....”

TO DONALD, 7 FEB 1788

“ ... This would probably command the offer of such a declaration, and thus give to the whole fabric, perhaps as much perfection as any one of that kind ever had. By a declaration of rights I mean one which shall stipulate freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom of commerce against monopolies, trial by juries in all cases, no suspensions of the habeas corpus, no standing armies. These are fetters against doing evil which no honest government should decline.”

TO HOPKINSON 13 MAR 1789

“I am not a Federalist, because I never submitted the whole system of my opinions to the creed of any party of men whatever in religion, in philosophy, in politics, or in any thing else where I was capable of thinking for myself. Such an addiction is the last degradation of a free and moral agent. If I could not go to heaven but with a party, I would not go there at all. Therefore I protest to you I am not of the party of federalists. But I am much farther from that of the Antifederalists.”

01

PRIMARY SOURCES

Students in small groups:

- **Read and annotate assigned source.**
- **Complete the Primary Source**

Annotation Table:

Source	Quote	Theme	Summary of Argument
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02

DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS

1. **What were Thomas Jefferson's main concerns about the Constitution?**
2. **How do his ideas reflect broader political debates?**
3. **Does Jefferson characterize himself as a federalist or anti-federalist? Explain your answer.**
4. **What is Jefferson's argument for including a Bill of Rights?**
5. **What is an opposing argument for not including a Bill of Rights?**

03

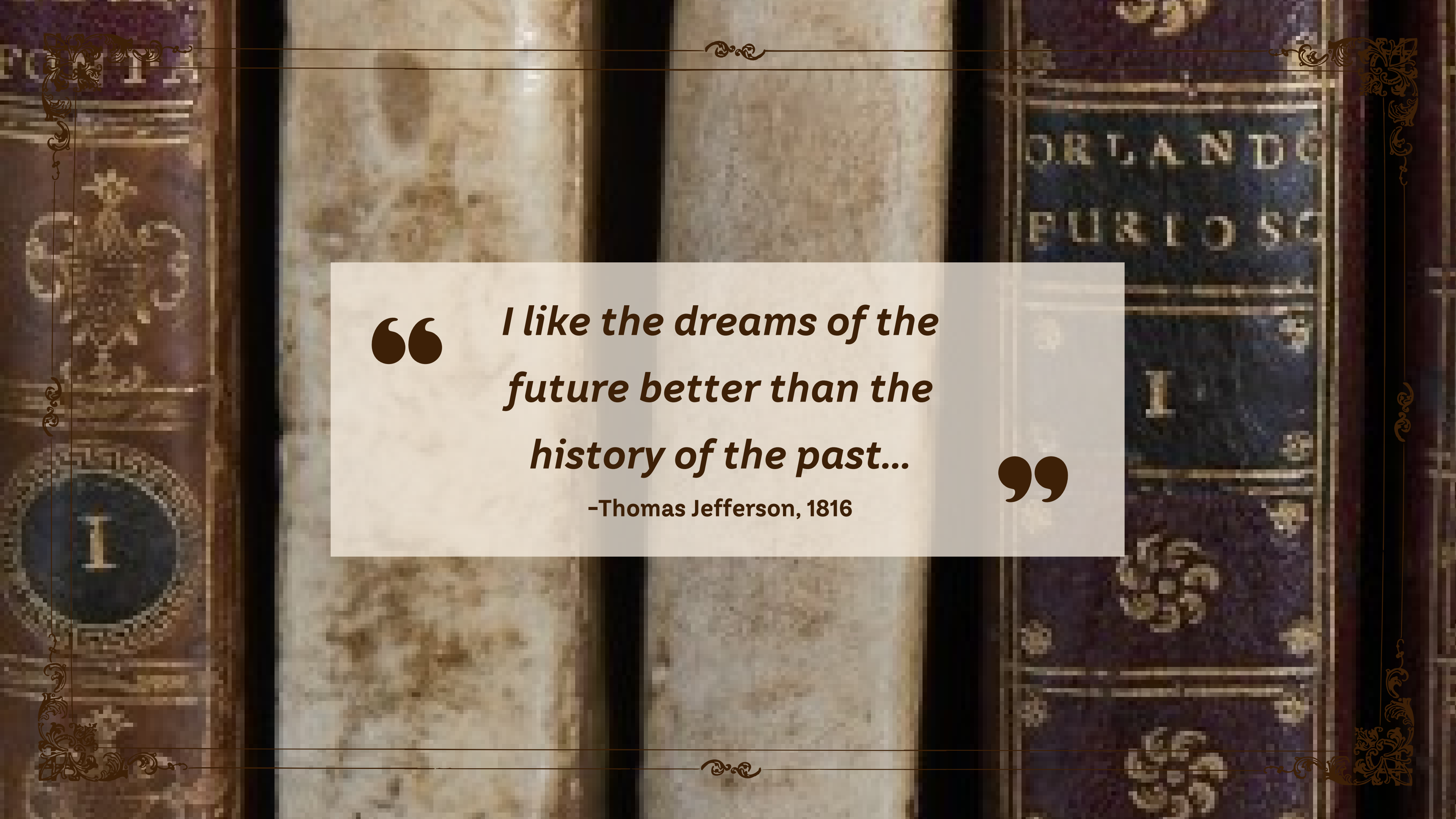
DEBATE PROPOSITIONS

Debate Topic: Including a Bill of Rights in the American Constitution limits the rights of the people.

Argue Pro vs. Con

Debate Topic 2: Jefferson argued that every generation has the right to rewrite the Constitution, stating "it may be proved that no society can make a perpetual constitution, or even a perpetual law. The earth belongs always to the living generation...They are masters too of their own persons, & consequently may govern them as they please."

Argue for or against this argument using primary sources.

The background is a close-up of an open antique book. The left cover is dark brown leather with gold-tooled circular medallions. The right cover is dark blue velvet with gold-tooled rectangular panels. The central pages are blank and aged. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is centered over the pages, containing a quote in a serif font. The quote is flanked by large, stylized opening and closing quotation marks.

***“ I like the dreams of the
future better than the
history of the past...”***

-Thomas Jefferson, 1816

THANK
YOU!



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