

Using Primary Source Documents
**EXPLORING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND HISTORICAL
PERSPECTIVES DURING GEORGE WASHINGTON'S PRESIDENCY**

Goals:

Students will interpret primary documents to determine historical perspective. They will make connections between documents and events and ideas in history. Interpreting primary sources will allow the students to more adequately grasp and support trends, ideas, and events in history.

The broader aims of this unit will include an analysis of the major accomplishments of the presidency of George Washington. Furthermore, students will reflect on the intent and purpose of the Bill of Rights, especially how the First Amendment pertains to the free exercise of religion and disestablishmentarianism. At the end of this unit, students will relate the presidency of George Washington to other events in history, understand who supported the Bill of Rights and why, effectively interpret primary documents, and relate to and appreciate different historical perspectives. Students will be expected to be able to do the following at the end of this unit:

- Identify and interpret primary source documents
- Interpret ideas and events from different historical perspectives
- Interpret excerpts from notable documents
- Identify the basic principles of the Bill of Rights, especially the First Amendment
- Describe the major accomplishments of George Washington's presidency

Objectives:

Students will be able to analyze primary source documents, interpret the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights, and look at historical topics from different perspectives. This lesson will be conducted during a 90-minute block in the sixth grade history class, United States History to 1877. The lesson incorporates homework, individual work, and collaborative work in a small group setting. The following Virginia SOLs are addressed in this lesson:

- **USI.1a, d, h:** The student will develop skills for historical and geographical analysis, including the ability to:
 - a. Identify and interpret primary and secondary source documents to increase understanding of events and life in United States history to 1877
 - d. Interpret ideas and events from different historical perspectives
 - h. Interpret patriotic slogans and excerpts from notable speeches and documents
- **USI.7b, d:** The student will demonstrate knowledge of the challenges faced by the new nation by:
 - b. Identifying the basic principles of the new government established by the Constitution of the United States of America and the Bill of Rights
 - c. Describing the major accomplishments of the first five presidents of the United States

Prerequisites:

1. Introduction and familiarity with the first ten amendments, or the Bill of Rights
2. Assignment to briefly describe the historical context and perspective of various religious groups in early America in order to obtain background information for document analysis: Baptist, Presbyterian, Quaker, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Anglican

Materials:

- Worksheets: timeline, document analysis, RAFT
- Background information on religions, Bill of Rights, and George Washington
- Dictionaries and thesauruses
- Chalkboard or overhead projector

Lesson Description:

This lesson focuses on interpreting primary source documents while studying the presidency of George Washington and addressing the perspectives of different religious traditions in the late eighteenth century. There is precedence placed on reading and interpreting primary source documents with some of the interpretation being supplemented by the teacher, because of the age and level of the students. Activities included in this lesson involve creating a comparison chart, brainstorming, cooperative learning, analyzing and interpreting a document, and producing different historical perspectives through creative writing. The purpose of this lesson is to develop and encourage historical analysis of primary source documents through the lens of the Bill of Rights, religious freedom, and George Washington's presidency.

Lesson Procedure:

Introduction –

1. Present student research/description of religious traditions (10 minutes)
2. Complete chart discerning between established religion and dissenting religions (5 minutes); *see Document 1*
3. Brainstorm/think critically: Who would these religious groups have written to in order to try and secure their rights to free exercise? *First President George Washington* (5 minutes)
4. Sequence events with a short timeline (5 minutes); *see Document 2*

Main Activity – Analysis of Documents

1. Teacher guided analysis of one letter, George Washington's reply to Moses Seixas, Sexton of the Hebrew Congregation of Newport (20 minutes); *see Document 3*
2. Student group analysis of letter, George Washington's reply to an address sent by the General Committee of the United Baptist Churches in Virginia – each group will interpret the same letter and contribute to class discussion (15 minutes); *see Document 3*
3. Students will give a brief presentation of group analysis, followed by discussion (10 minutes)

Assignment –

1. RAFT writing assignment to develop different perspectives on the topic of religious freedom. Extension and/or tiering may be done here if there are various academic levels within the class (10 minutes in class, completion at home); see *Document 4*

Closure –

1. Questions – to relate to Thomas Jefferson's *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom*, James Madison and Bill of Rights, George Washington, and religious freedom/free exercise/conscience (5 minutes)
2. Discussion of RAFT ideas, students may voice their choices and share individual ideas (5 minutes)

Assessment/Evaluation:

- Document Analysis worksheets and discussion
- RAFT rubric
- Quiz the following day – multiple choice and short answer/essay topic: How are dissenting religions and the First Amendment related?

Supplemental Resources:

- History of Religious Traditions
 - Baptist – “Center for Baptist Heritage and Studies” <http://www.baptistheritage.org/>. Baptist Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia
 - Presbyterian – “Presbyterian in America” http://www.history.pcusa.org/pres_hist/. Presbyterian Historical Society
 - Quaker – “The Religious Society of Friends” <http://www.quaker.org/>.
 - Catholic – Horvat, Marion T. “Let None Dare Call It Liberty: The Catholic Church in Colonial America.” http://www.traditioninaction.org/History/B_001_Colonies.html.
 - Jewish – “Builders of America: The Jewish Heritage” <http://www.borisamericanjews.org/>.
 - Anglican – “Anglican and Episcopal Church History” www.edecr.org/f/EC-ChurchHistory.pdf.
- General Resources on Religions:
 - “Religion in Colonial America” <http://www.uncp.edu/home/canada/work/allam/16071783/religion.htm>.
 - “Religious Tolerance” <http://www.religioustolerance.org/>.
 - “Religion and the Founding of the American Republic” <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/>. Library of Congress
 - Isaac, Rhys. *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982.
- Bill of Rights
 - “The Bill of Rights Institute” <http://www.billofrightsinstitute.org/>.
- Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom
 - Virginia Historical Society <http://www.vahistorical.org/sva2003/vsrf.htm>.

- Letters of George Washington
 - Cousins, Norman. *"In God We Trust:" The Religious Beliefs and Ideas of the Founding Fathers*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958. 58-59, 60, 61, 63. All letters abridged.
- Document Analysis
 - "Teaching with Documents" <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/primsrce.html>. Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum
- RAFT Strategy
 - "Reading Strategies: Scaffolding Students; Interactions with Texts" <http://www.greece.k12.ny.us/instruction/ELA/6-12/Reading/Reading%20Strategies/RAFT.htm>. Greece Central School District

documents follow

Document 1:

Established Religion and Dissenting Religions in Early America
Comparison Chart

	Established	Dissenting
Define these terms:	<i>Tax supported, state licensed</i>	<i>Desired protection of free practice/exercise</i>
List sects or religious groups:	<i>Anglican</i>	<i>Baptist Presbyterian Quaker Roman Catholic Jewish</i>
		What did these groups need? <i>First Amendment – Bill of Rights</i>

Document 2:

Timeline

1775		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Declaration of Independence 1776• American Revolution 1775 – 1783
1777		
1779		
1781		<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Articles of Confederation 1781-1787
1783		
1784		
1785		
1787		
1789		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• George Washington elected President April 1789• James Madison presents Bill of Rights June 1789• Ratification of Bill of Rights November 1789
1791		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dates of Washington letters 1789 – 1791• Ratification of the Bill of Rights 1791

Document 3:

Document Analysis

Date of document: _____

Type of document: _____

Author: _____

Audience: _____

Definition of unfamiliar word in document:	Synonym (Example)	Picture or sentence to further define the word:
	Antonym (Non-example)	
Definition of unfamiliar word in document:	Synonym (Example)	Picture or sentence to further define the word:
	Antonym (Non-example)	

Repeat as needed

Write a sentence or two (in your own words) of what is being said:

Write a sentence or two explaining the purpose for this letter being written:

RAFT Rubric

	4	3	2	1
Accuracy	Information, details in RAFT always accurate. Properly reflects information, ideas, and themes related to the subject.	Provides accurate information in RAFT but could use more support.	Provides information in RAFT that has some inaccuracies or omissions.	Provides information in RAFT that is incomplete and/or inaccurate.
Perspective	RAFT maintains clear, consistent point of view, tone, and ideas relevant to role played; ideas and information always tied to role and audience.	Explains how character would feel about the event(s).	Shows little insight into how character would feel or act during the event(s).	Does not accurately develop characters, thoughts or reactions to the event(s).
Focus	RAFT stays on topic, never drifts from required form or type; details and information are included that are pertinent only to developed purpose.	Spends most of the RAFT discussing issues on topic, but occasionally strays from the focus.	Spends some time discussing issues off topic.	Spends most of RAFT on issues that do not directly deal with the RAFT chosen.
Class Time	Uses class time appropriately to research the era and create well-written stories.	Seldom needs to be reminded to get back on task.	Uses library and computer time to do work for other classes and/or chat with friends or lounge on couches.	Treats research time as an open period to be seen chatting with friends and hanging out on the couches.
Mechanics	Essay contains few to no fragments, run-on sentences; rare errors or mechanical mistakes; writing is fluent.	Essay contains some fragments, run-ons or other errors; occasional mistakes; writing is generally clear.	Essay contains several sentence errors and mechanical mistakes that may interfere with ideas and clarity of ideas in writing.	Essay contains mechanical mistakes; is marred by numerous errors.

A+ (20) **A** (19) **A-** (18) **B+** (17) **B** (16) **B-** (15) **C+** (14) **C** (13) **D** (12) **F** (11 and below)

Source: <http://wit.uchicago.edu/schools/gearup/chicago/archive/yal/20072008/docs/compass/r-rubric.doc>