

Teacher Page: Resource Sheet #03

Teaching Tip: To many Jefferson critics, this passage of the Declaration of Independence is the most poignant source of debate as to the author's consideration of American citizens. On the one hand, Jefferson seems to speak to the equality of all potential American citizens, but his own personal behavior tends to dispute his words. Teachers may choose to enhance the selection by choosing further words from the Declaration.

Source: Thomas Jefferson in the *Declaration of Independence*, 1776

Document Analysis:

1. In your opinion, who is Thomas Jefferson referring to in the Declaration of Independence when using the term "all men?"
This answer can be very confusing. Some students may insist that Jefferson was referring to all citizens, male and female, black and white and that these words would support an argument opposing slavery. Others may offer that Jefferson only meant the truly privileged of his day; white, male property owners and argue that this expression would be in support of slavery.
2. According to Jefferson, who provided the people with their inalienable rights?
We assume that he is using God as the provider of these rights. Teachers may want to mention Jefferson's attitudes about religion and separation of church and state.
3. Does Jefferson mention slavery at all in this document? In what context?
Slavery is not mentioned directly, but students may address the words "liberty and the pursuit of happiness" as logical references to slavery.
4. How could this document be used to argue that Jefferson supported slavery?
Based on these words alone, there is little evidence that Jefferson supported slavery. The challenge will be to avoid using prior and general knowledge of Jefferson's life to produce a pro-slave opinion.
5. How could this document be used to argue that Jefferson opposed slavery?
Jefferson's statement that "All men are created equal," may be enough evidence to answer this, but encourage the students to seek more evidence in the words.