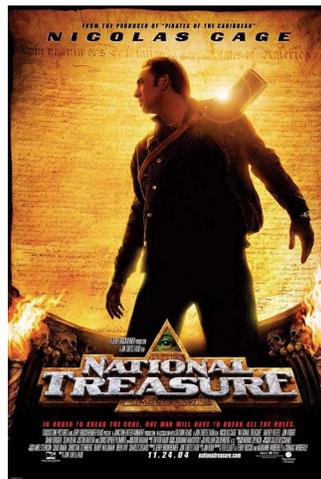


# National Treasure: Fact, Fiction, and Conspiracy



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HIS 6710-C02: Teaching American History  
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## National Treasure: Fact, Fiction, and Conspiracy

### I. Proposal: Final Draft

### II. Abstract:

Secret societies, hidden symbols, intellectuals with secrets to hide- these are themes that are focusing a renewed interest in history with the public. Recent books and movies, such as the *Da Vinci Code*, which focus on these themes, have also sparked many popular public debates surrounding the truth behind the myths. This project was a series of lessons that allowed students to investigate the history of the Freemasons and their relationship to the Founding Fathers while blending pop culture and research-grounded history. The students engaged in researching information around the history of the Freemasons, how the Founding Fathers were connected to the Freemasons, the Freemasons heritage in our government and national symbols, and whether the Mason conspiracy is a valid historical argument.

Through research and production of an informational video program, the students investigated the Freemason's supposed influence on American history through an examination of the popular movie *National Treasure*. In my past classroom experience, many students had already seen the movie, and they eagerly brought it into discussions that focus on the Declaration of Independence. This project allows students to build upon and expand their existing notions of the Declaration of Independence and the Founding Fathers that were created while watching this video. The students watched *National Treasure* and noted all of the facts and clues that are presented on the hunt to find the treasure. The students' task was then to research the history of Freemasons, the group's relationship with the Founding Fathers, and the accuracy of the clues and theories that are presented in the movie. Last, the students created a video presenting their findings (format was determined by the students).

### III. Grade Level:

This project was used in a ninth grade Honors Civics course. The course is the upper level of the three Civics courses that are required of all freshmen at Fair Haven Union High

School. I chose to focus on my honors-level class due to time constraints and the amount of content that needs to be covered in this semester course within the structure of the school's schedule. However, the project could be easily adapted to lower level classes or upper level U.S. History or government courses.

#### IV. Seminar Impact:

The Teaching American History seminar has influenced my project in several ways. First, having completed three years of the seminar with the last grant, I have learned how crucial it is to have students work with students through engaging teaching methods. We discussed the use of role-play, which my past students have found to be extremely minds and hands-on, especially if it involves a video camera. As a result, I wanted to incorporate this teaching method into my project when dealing with the Declaration of Independence.

Second, I found Michael Dwyer's summer presentation, "The Iconography of the Revolution: Symbols that Shaped American Values," to be very thought-provoking. It was interesting to see the visual images of American history and their interpretations by historians. Many students do not think of items such as symbols and paintings to be historical artifacts that can be interpreted to gain an understanding of a particular period or people in history. I want the students to grow in their knowledge and understanding of being an historian by engaging students on the use of visual images as primary sources. Students would see how the images gave them an insight into American history and period pop culture.

#### V. Central Questions:

- Who are the Freemasons?
- Which Founding Fathers were members of the Freemasons? What was the extent of each member's participation?
- Were the Founding Fathers influenced by their participation in the Freemasons either ideologically or symbolically when creating our government and national symbols?
- What is a symbol? What are some national symbols found in the United States?
- In what national symbols can Americans find a connection to the Freemason heritage?
- Is the argument about the conspiracy between the Freemasons and the creation of our fledgling nation, as presented in *National Treasure*, valid?
- How accurate is the information and clues that are presented in the movie *National Treasure*?

#### VI. Challenge Questions<sup>1</sup>:

- Why are symbols significant to human culture? How are our lives made easier or perhaps harder through the use of symbols?

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<sup>1</sup> Since this project is geared towards an advanced class, these questions are for students who want to further extend their research.

- How do the symbols of the Freemasons reflect those found in other cultures? Do they have the same or different meanings?
- What other prominent figures in American history were Freemasons? Can an argument be made that their participation in the group influenced their actions?
- Can you use American symbols and historical events to create your own fictional treasure hunt story like that found in *National Treasure*?

#### VII. Lesson/Unit Length:

This project was an in-depth look into the men who created and guided our fledgling country, thus this project took several weeks. The unit should take approximately eighteen class periods. At Fair Haven Union High School, each class period is forty minutes and meets daily for the entire school year.

#### VIII. Key Ideas:

- Symbols are an important tool in understanding a culture and are filled with great meaning and value.
- The Freemasons are a fraternal organization dating back centuries and has included many prominent historical figures. These men followed the mutual ideology that there is some form of divine being determining our destiny.
- Many of the Founding Fathers were Freemasons.
- Symbols of the United States may have ties to Freemason symbolism, but that these symbols can also have multiple interpretations.
- We cannot always believe the information contained in movies, even if they are based on historical events or figures. To truly gain understanding and context in which to place the movie, research must be conducted before an opinion on the validity of the story is formed.

#### IX. Intended Learning Outcomes:

- Students will be able to form both lower and higher-order questions, and they will be able to conduct research to answer these questions.
- Students will be able to use research to determine and discuss the historical accuracy of a film.
- Students will work collaboratively to write, create, produce, and film their own video media project.
- Students will gain an understanding of how cultures use symbols to convey meanings and ideas.
- Students will learn about the Freemasons and the connection between the organization and the Founding Fathers.
- Students will be able to identify supposed Freemason symbolism in our national symbols.
- Students will argue the validity of the supposed conspiracy between the Freemasons and the Founding Fathers as presented in the movie *National Treasure*.

## X. National History Standards:

### Historical Thinking

- Standard 1: Chronological Thinking
- Standard 2: Historical Comprehension
- Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation
- Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities

### Historical Eras

- Era 3: Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s)

## XI. Vermont Standards:

### Communication

- 1.3 Reading Comprehension
- 1.4 Reading a Range of Texts
- 1.13 Clarification and Restatement
- 1.14 Critique
- 1.15 Speaking
- 1.16 Artistic Dimensions
- 1.18 Information Technology
- 1.19 Research
- 1.20 Communication of Data
- 1.21 Selection

### Reasoning and Problem Solving

- 2.1 Types of Questions
- 2.2 Problem Solving Process
- 2.6 Application
- 2.7 Information
- 2.12 Flexibility

### Personal Development

- 3.3 Respect
- 3.10 Teamwork
- 3.13 Roles and Responsibility

### Civic/Social Responsibility

- 4.3 Cultural Expression

### History and Social Studies

- 6.1 Causes and Effects in Human Societies
- 6.2 Uses of Evidence and Data
- 6.3 Analyzing Knowledge
- 6.4 Historical Connections
- 6.10 Types of Government
- 6.19 Identity and Interdependence

## XII. Preparation for Teaching:

- Lessons on the events leading to the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the document itself, and the debates over its ratification.
- Reserve the library/computer lab and have the librarian pull all project-related books off the shelves. (Also, I will pull books from my personal collection.)

- Obtain a copy of *National Treasure*.
- Create a project rubric that will serve as a guide and assessment tool.
- Posterboard to create the class list of research questions.
- Help students locate any props they need for their video.
- Video recorder and appropriate tape.
- ... and any other items that are needed as the project develops.

### XIII. Primary Sources:

Dwyer, Michael. English Department Chair/Social Studies Educator, Otter Valley Union High School.

Former Vermont State Teacher of the Year, Michael Dwyer is an outstanding professional with a plethora of knowledge on how to engage students with content area materials. He has an extensive range of knowledge about various periods and topics in American history, including knowledge on American symbols. He is an excellent source of topical and educational information.

Jefferson, Thomas. *The Declaration of Independence*. 1776.

The Declaration of independence is one of the central and most prominent documents found in the history and creation of our nation. This document eloquently declares American independence from the control of Great Britain, as well as stating the reasons why our country felt it was necessary to separate from our colonizers. Since the movie focuses around the writing of this central document, students need to have an understanding of what the document was trying to do during this critical and complex period of our history. The Declaration of Independence can be found in a variety of different sources, including the internet where you can find annotated copies of the document for lower level students.

Prints or pictures of American artifacts that involve possible Masonic symbology.

In this project, the students will need to investigate a variety of American artifacts that are viewed as clues in the movie *National Treasure*, such as a \$100 bill and the national seal. The artifacts will be viewed to check the accuracy of the clues and facts. The artifacts can be viewed through both prints and pictures in books and on the internet. It is helpful to have some of the artifacts bookmarked in the books or on websites once the students have developed their questions, so that the specific artifacts can be referenced easily.

### XIV. Secondary Sources<sup>2</sup>:

Berkin, Carol. *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence*. New York: Vintage Books, 2005.

In this book, Carol Berkin, a professor of American History at Baruch College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, explores the lives and roles of women during the American Revolution. She examines the lives, struggles, and ordeals women from every walk of life faced during this arduous

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<sup>2</sup> These sources represent a majority of the information that helped form the basis of my project and current extended thoughts on the American Revolution. In addition, the students used a variety of additional books and internet sites to conduct their individual research.

and adventurous time in American history. Berkin's examination of Revolutionary women explores a topic and theme that are otherwise forgotten in our collective history. I found this book useful for generating ideas for future projects and discussions in the classroom. Although not directly related to my project, I would recommend this book to fellow educators to expand their period knowledge of social history.

Brinkley, Alan. *American History: A Survey*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003.

Geared for college-level classrooms, this textbook is a relatively in-depth survey of American history. Alan Brinkley, a professor of American history and provost at Columbia University, is able to combine and mix both top-down and bottom-up approaches to studying history. The chapter surrounding the American Revolution provides readers with an overview of the period, period pictures and other visual artifacts, and a list of additional sources to consult for further study. Since I used this textbook in a college survey course, it may not be appropriate for all high schools students to read; however, it can be used as a reference for the teacher or higher-level readers.

Butterfield, Herbert. *The Whig Interpretation of History*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1965.

Herbert Butterfield, a professor of history in the 1930s, looks at American history using a Whig interpretation. In this method of historical interpretation, historians look at events of the past in terms of the events' relationship to the present. In the book, Butterfield places a very rational and logical framework on the study of history and how events fit together in a series cause-and-effects relationships. I found this book to be written for a professional in the field of study, and it would not be a useful resource for students in the high school-level classroom. Mainly, I found Butterfield's book to be interesting from a historiography perspective.

Center for Civic Education. *We The People: The Citizen and the Constitution*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Calabasas, CA: Center for Civic Education, 2001.

This textbook is an overview of American civics and government that is used in the Honors Civics course at Fair Haven Union High School. The Center for Civics Education has organized this book into units and lessons that focus on the origins of the ideas that formed the foundations of our government, the creation of our government, the powers of the branches, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. The intention is to use the textbook in association with a series of exercises, but it can also stand in support to individual classroom activities. Each lesson contains objectives, critical thinking questions, pictures, cartoons, and content assessment questions. This book is very student and teacher friendly, and is available in a variety of reading levels and grade levels. For my class, *We The People* was used to gain a background knowledge on the events that led to the Revolution, the Founding Fathers, and as a discussion of the ideas that are found in the Declaration of Independence.

Claremont Institute. *A User's Guide to the Declaration of Independence*. <http://www.founding.com>.

Found while conducting a Google search of the Declaration of Independence, this website was designed through a grant to, "make the documents and principles of the American founding accessible to educators and students of all ages." This website contains information about the Founding Fathers, the Declaration

of Independence, the Constitution, and other primary sources written by prominent figures of the period. The section on the Declaration of Independence has a full-text version of the document, pictures of the original document, discussion of its principles and historical context, and a glossary of terms. The website was user-friendly and was helpful to the students in understanding of the primary source documents.

Fischer Davis Hackett. *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Suggested by Michael Dwyer in his summer seminar presentation, this intriguing book examines the ideas of liberty and freedom through paintings, prints, folk art, symbols, etc. from the American Revolution through 9/11. With a mix of both written discussion and pages of pictures, the book allows readers of a variety of ages to explore symbology in American history. Not only does Fischer, a professor at Brandis, describe the symbols, but he discusses each in terms of their historiography. Also, he has the visual artifacts arranged by time period, so students can easily focus on the chapters related to the American Revolution and the specific symbols the students are researching.

Fradin, Dennis Brinell. *The Signers: The 56 Stories Behind the Declaration of Independence*. New York: Walker & Co., 2002.

Presented in chapters by state, Brinell tells the story of each of the signers of the Declaration of Independence in this book for middle-level readers. Each signer's entry contains information on his life before, during, and after the signing of the Declaration. The book also includes prints of bust wood engravings of each signer. The students found this book helpful during the project because they were able to easily access basic biographical facts about the Founding Fathers. The information, although useful, had to be supplemented with further information about each of the men, which was easily found on a variety of respected websites.

Harwood, Jeremy. *The Freemasons*. London: Hermes House, 2007.

This book is a basic introduction to the organization and history of the Freemasons. Harwood's book is a mix of information and visual images that allows readers to understanding the ideas and concepts that he discusses. My students also enjoyed his discussion of Masons' symbols and their meanings. This is a good source for basic information for high school research, but should be supplemented with additional scholarly resources on the fraternal group.

*National Treasure*. Directed by Jon Turteltaub. 131 minutes. Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2004. DVD.

This action-packed hit film follows the adventures of historian and treasure hunter Benjamin Gates and his friends as they search for a hidden Freemason treasure. The legend passed down through the Gates' family is that the Founding Fathers placed a secret treasure map on the back of the Declaration of Independence. The treasure hunt leads viewers through a gamut of American history, symbols, and prominent figures that all contribute to the meanings behind the clues leading to the treasure. The film is a Disney production, so it is rated PG. Due to its pop culture popularity and adventurous plot, the students are easily able to follow and understand the storyline. The film is a fictional product that focuses on ideas that are based in fact, so the story should only be taken at face value and not for its historical accuracy.

O'Connell, Mark, and Raje Arie. *The Complete Encyclopedia of Signs & Symbols*. London: Hermes House, 2006.

This book contains an extensive collection of symbols found throughout the world in various periods of history. The book, arranged by theme and alphabetically, is in a very user-friendly format. My students found the reading level to be on par with their abilities, but they did need some help with specific content area vocabulary. The book is geared for readers to gain a basic level of knowledge, but further resources need consulting for a deeper understanding of the meanings behind the symbols.

Vinci, John, ed. *ColonialHall.com*. Last Modified 27 Feb. 2007. <http://www.colonialhall.com>.

This is a multi-age user-friendly website that explores the lives of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence. The website contains an annotated version of the Declaration of the Independence and biographies, portraits, and pictures of the homes of the Founding Fathers. On the website, users can also link to other sites with Declaration of Independence-related information. The information on this site is basic and should be cross-referenced with other noted sources; however, this site is a good starting point for many students.

#### XV. Activities:

- Days 1-4: After having read, studied, and discussed the Declaration of Independence, the students spent the first five days of this project watching the movie *National Treasure*. The first day, I gave and reviewed with the students the project rubric. While watching the video, the students compiled a list of facts and clues to research.
- Day 5: The class spent the period sharing their lists of clues, facts, and questions they had accumulated. They created one master list, and then divided the research among themselves.
- Days 6 & 7: The students spent these class periods using books, articles, and the internet to conduct their research.
- Day 8: The students used this period to share the results of their individual findings with their classmates.
- Days 9-12: These days were for the students to concentrate on planning, writing, and organizing their video project. In the project, they needed to discuss the historical accuracy of the facts and clues presented in the movie *National Treasure*. They also discussed whether or not a valid argument can be made for a supposed conspiracy between the Founding Fathers and the Freemasons.
- Days 13-17: These days were spent actually recording the project.
- Day 18: Finally! We watched our video. The product of our past days of hard work. The students also completed their written self-reflection and assessment for their roles in the project.

#### XVI: Accommodations:

Although this project is geared towards honors-level students, with some modifications and accommodations, any group of students has the potential to complete this project. Within any group of individuals, there are usually a variety of learning styles. Thus this project employs a variety of teaching methods to meet the needs of all learners in the classroom. Students watch a video, formulate questions, conduct text and internet research, and finally create a video project. Students' roles include: producer, writer, cameraman, prop master, costume designer, actor, and any other number of positions that are needed for the success of the entire group. As a result, everyone can participate in this activity based on their individual abilities, learning styles, and comfort levels.

### XVII. Assessment:

- **Formal:** The formation of questions, the research, and the participation in the video media project is assessed through the use of a teacher-made rubric (following this section). The students are given the rubric at the beginning of the project to serve as a guide for their work. The rubric allows me to assess their research, project, and presentation. The rubric is used as both a teacher-assessment and a self-assessment.
- **Informal:** Throughout the project, I will continually be informally assessing the students. I will assess the students' comprehension and understanding of the ideas in the movie and the materials we study based on the probing questions that I ask and the questions they develop. Also, the students are graded daily on their in-class participation.



Ms. Carini  
Honors Civics

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## National Treasure

### Fact, Fiction, & Conspiracy

Secret societies, hidden symbols, intellectuals with secrets to hide; these are the themes that are bringing a renewed interest in history to the public. Books and movies, such as *The Da Vinci Code*, that focus on these themes have created not only a renewed interest in history worldwide, but they have also sparked many popular and public debates about their truth. The purpose of this project will allow us, as a class, to investigate the history of the Freemasons and their relationship to the Founders, blending current pop culture with researched-grounded history. You will engage in researching information focusing on who the Masons are, how the Founding Fathers were influenced through their participation in the Masons, how we see the Mason heritage in our government and national symbols today, and whether the Mason conspiracy is a valid historical argument.

Through research and production of an informational video program, you will investigate the Freemason's supposed influence in American history through an examination of the popular movie, *National Treasure*. This project will allow you to build upon and expand your existing notions about the Declaration of Independence. You will be asked to watch the video and note all of the clues and facts that are given to find the treasure. Your task will be to research the Freemasons, the group's relationship to the Founders, and the accuracy of the clues and the facts that are presented in the movie. Last, you will create a video in which you will present your findings in a format to be determined by the group.



# National Treasure



## Fact, Fiction, & Conspiracy

Requirements	Comments	Points Earned
The Movie: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students watch the movie</li> <li>You have compiled a list of facts and clues to check from the video</li> </ul>		/10
Research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The class compiles a list of all facts and clues that will need checking</li> <li>You research and have found information about the history of the Freemasons</li> <li>You have researched answers to your assigned questions</li> <li>You have reported your findings back to the class</li> </ul>		/20
Content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The program focuses on the fact, fiction, &amp; history surrounding <i>National Treasure</i></li> <li>The program examines:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The history of the Freemasons</li> <li>How the Masons relate to the Founders</li> <li>Accuracy of the facts and clues presented in the video</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		/30
Production/Creation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All members in the class are included in the production</li> <li>Each member has a role or task to complete</li> <li>Everyone's voice is heard</li> <li>The project shows creativity &amp; originality</li> </ul>		/20
Filming: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Everyone fulfills his/her role during the taping</li> <li>No major problems erupt</li> </ul>		/10
Written Critique: Students evaluate... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The quality of the project</li> <li>Analyze what went well &amp; what needs work</li> <li>Evaluate your own performance &amp; participation</li> </ul>		/15
Individual Responsibility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You helped &amp; participated in the planning process</li> <li>You fulfilled your role to the best of your ability</li> </ul>		/15

**TOTAL: /120**