Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) was an American Founding Father, one of the main authors of Declaration of Independence, and the third President of the United States. The Declaration of Independence was a document that declared the original Thirteen Colonies of the United States to be free from Great Britain. Jefferson also owned slaves. In this short story, a woman enslaved on one of Jefferson's farms describes her life of slavery. As you read, take notes on how the narrator, Hannah, describes Thomas Jefferson.

With Liberty and Justice for All?
By Dianne Swann-Wright

Thomas Jefferson wrote about “liberty and justice for all.” He also was a slaveholder. Mr. Jefferson held about 200 men, women, and children in bondage at any given time. As enslaved people, they did not have the right to come and go as they pleased, and most of the time slaves were not paid for the work that they did. A woman named Hannah was one of the enslaved people who lived at Poplar Forest, a farm owned by Thomas Jefferson. Imagine that you could talk to Hannah. Listen to these imaginary memories Hannah might have shared. What questions would you ask her?

---

[1] Mr. Jefferson will arrive in two days. It will take him just about this long to get from Monticello, the plantation where he lives most of the time to his large farm, Poplar Forest, which is my home. He will travel on horseback over land and cross a river to get here. Mr. Jefferson's arrivals add excitement to everyone's day. The men and women who work here in his fields, the children who live here with their parents, and the man in charge of the plantation when Mr. Jefferson is not here — all look forward to his visits.

My life as an enslaved person is very different from that of slaves who live on other plantations. Mr. Jefferson likes special foods, and I have learned to prepare them. Many of the vegetables I serve him have been grown here following Mr. Jefferson's specific directions. My children — all 10 of them — either live with me here or at one of Mr. Jefferson's other plantations such as Monticello or Bear Creek. I see them as often as I can but I still miss them very much. One fear that I have is that one of my children will break a law and will be punished or sent away. As an enslaved parent I am not in charge of them. Mr. Jefferson, their slave master, gets to tell them what to do and where to go.

I live in a community with some people I have known all of my life. My home does not look at all like one of Mr. Jefferson's big houses. I live in a cabin with my husband and children. There is not a lot of room inside to work or play. I often cook for my family over an open fire in the yard. I wash my family's clothes in a nearby stream. My children play outside whenever they can. Sometimes we even eat outside. Most of the time we sleep in the cabin — especially in the winter when it is very cold.

---

1. slavery
2. an area of land on which food and goods are grown
I have been working since I was a young girl. My first job was to look after the younger children and keep them safe from harm. I also gathered wood for the fire and helped carry water to be used in the slave cabins and in the main house. It was not hard work but it kept me very busy.

Most enslaved children do not go to school. Sometimes, but not very often, slaves learn to read and write. I learned to write and even wrote a letter to Mr. Jefferson one time when I heard that he was not feeling well. I told him that his house and furniture were all safe. I also said that he should be thankful for all of his blessings. I believe in God.

Mr. Jefferson said that all men were created equal and that everyone was supposed to have liberty and justice. He did not mean this for enslaved people like me or the other people he held in bondage. He meant it for men like himself. Slavery was a big problem for Mr. Jefferson. He said that it was like "holding a wolf by the ears." It was dangerous to keep slavery and dangerous to let it go. He did speak out against slavery but not very much during my lifetime. (I am 27 years younger than Mr. Jefferson.)

In my letter to Mr. Jefferson, I signed my name "your humble Servant Hannah." I have always tried to be a good cook and housekeeper. I have also tried to get my children to do the same. My hope is that one day my children and their children will have the liberty and justice that Mr. Jefferson wrote about in the Declaration of Independence.

"With Liberty and Justice for All?" from Appleseeds by Dianne Swann-Wright. Copyright © 2006 by Carus Publishing Company. Reproduced by permission. All Cricket Media material is copyrighted by Carus Publishing Company, d/b/a Cricket Media, and/or various authors and illustrators. Any commercial use or distribution of material without permission is strictly prohibited. Please visit http://cricketmedia.com/info/licensing2 for licensing and http://www.cricketmedia.com for subscriptions.
Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which sentence best expresses a theme of the short story?
   A. The lives of enslaved people weren't so different from the lives of free people.
   B. Slaves didn't have the freedom and equality that was promised to all men in the Declaration of Independence.
   C. Even when slaves were freed, they still didn't have the same rights as people born free.
   D. Slaves didn't have any rights because they were left out of the Declaration of Independence.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
   A. “The men and women who work here in his fields, the children who live here with their parents, and the man in charge of the plantation when Mr. Jefferson is not here — all look forward to his visits.” (Paragraph 1)
   B. “I often cook for my family over an open fire in the yard. I wash my family's clothes in a nearby stream. My children play outside whenever they can.” (Paragraph 3)
   C. “I told him that his house and furniture were all safe. I also said that he should be thankful for all of his blessings. I believe in God.” (Paragraph 5)
   D. “Mr. Jefferson said that all men were created equal and that everyone was supposed to have liberty and justice. He did not mean this for enslaved people like me or the other people he held in bondage.” (Paragraph 6)

3. What does paragraph 2 reveal about Hannah?
   A. It shows that life for Hannah on the plantation isn't as bad as it could be.
   B. It suggests that Hannah is happy with her life on the plantation with her family.
   C. It stresses how little control Hannah has over her own life and decisions.
   D. It shows how Mr. Jefferson is a good boss to Hannah and the other workers.

4. What does paragraph 7 contribute the story?
   A. It concludes the story by offering a hopeful note about the future that Hannah wants for her children.
   B. It suggests that Hannah and her children will be freed from slavery soon, thanks to Mr. Jefferson.
   C. It reveals how truly upset Hannah is about her enslaved state and the enslavement of her children.
   D. It reveals that Hannah is responsible for getting Mr. Jefferson to think about equality for all.
5. What is the difference between what Mr. Jefferson says in the Declaration of Independence and what he does? Use details from the story in your answer.
Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In the short story, Hannah describes how Thomas Jefferson promotes liberty and justice for all, but keeps slaves. Why do you think Jefferson believed that it was acceptable to keep slaves, despite his beliefs in freedom and equality?

2. Thomas Jefferson is responsible for writing the Declaration of Independence and contributing to the founding of America. Despite these accomplishments, why do you think it’s important that we also remember his wrongdoings, such as keeping slaves? Do you think the bad that he did erases the good, or vice versa?