

LESSON 8

from **Letter Regarding Thomas Jefferson** (letter)
by John Adams

You **inquire** why so young a man as Mr. Jefferson was placed at the head of the Committee for preparing a Declaration of Independence, I answer; It was the Frankfort advice, to place a Virginian at the head of every thing. Mr. Richard Henry Lee, might be gone to Virginia, to his sick family, for aught I know, but that was not the reason of Mr. Jefferson's appointment. There were three committees appointed at the same time. One for the Declaration of Independence, another for preparing articles of Confederation, and another for preparing a treaty to be proposed to France. Mr. Lee was chosen for the Committee Confederation, and it was not thought **convenient** that the same person should be upon both. Mr. Jefferson came into Congress, in June, 1775, and brought with him a **reputation** for literature, science, and a happy talent of composition. Writings of his were handed about, remarkable for the peculiar **felicity** of expression. Though a silent member in Congress, he was so prompt, **frank**, **explicit**, and **decisive** upon committees and in conversation, not even Samuel Adams was more so, that he soon seized upon my heart; and upon this occasion I gave him my vote, and did all in my power to procure the votes of others. I think he had one more vote than any other, and that placed him at the head of the committee. I had the next highest number, and that placed me the second. The committee met, discussed the subject, and then appointed Mr. Jefferson and me to make the [draft], I suppose because we were the two first on the list.

The sub-committee met. Jefferson proposed to me to make the [draft] I said, "I will not." "You should do it." "Oh! no." "Why will you not? You ought do it." "I will not." "Why?" "Reasons enough." "What can be your reasons?" "Reason first—You are a Virginian, and a Virginian ought to appear at the head of this business. Reason second—I am **obnoxious**, suspected, and unpopular. You are much otherwise. Reason third—You can write ten times better than I can." "Well," said Jefferson, "if you are decided, I will do as well as I can." "Very well. When you have drawn it up, we will have a meeting."

A meeting we accordingly had, and [I looked] the paper over. I was delighted with its high **tone** and the flights of oratory with which it abounded, especially that concerning negro slavery, which, though I knew his Southern brethren would never suffer to pass in Congress, I certainly never would oppose. There were other expressions which I would not have inserted, if I had drawn it, particularly that which called the King a tyrant. I thought this too personal. I never believed George to be a tyrant in disposition and in nature; I always believed him to be **deceived** by his courtiers on both sides of the Atlantic, and in his official capacity only, cruel.

Your friend and humble servant,
John Adams

Exercise I: Context Clues

Read the passage above, paying special attention to the words in dark type. These are the Master Words you will study in this lesson. As you read, look for context clues in the sentences and paragraphs around each Master Word. Circle any words and phrases that give clues to the meaning of the Master Words.

Master Words

Place a check by words you feel you know; underline words you don't know.

| | | | | |
|------------|----------|----------|-----------|------------|
| convenient | decisive | felicity | inquire | reputation |
| deceive | explicit | frank | obnoxious | tone |