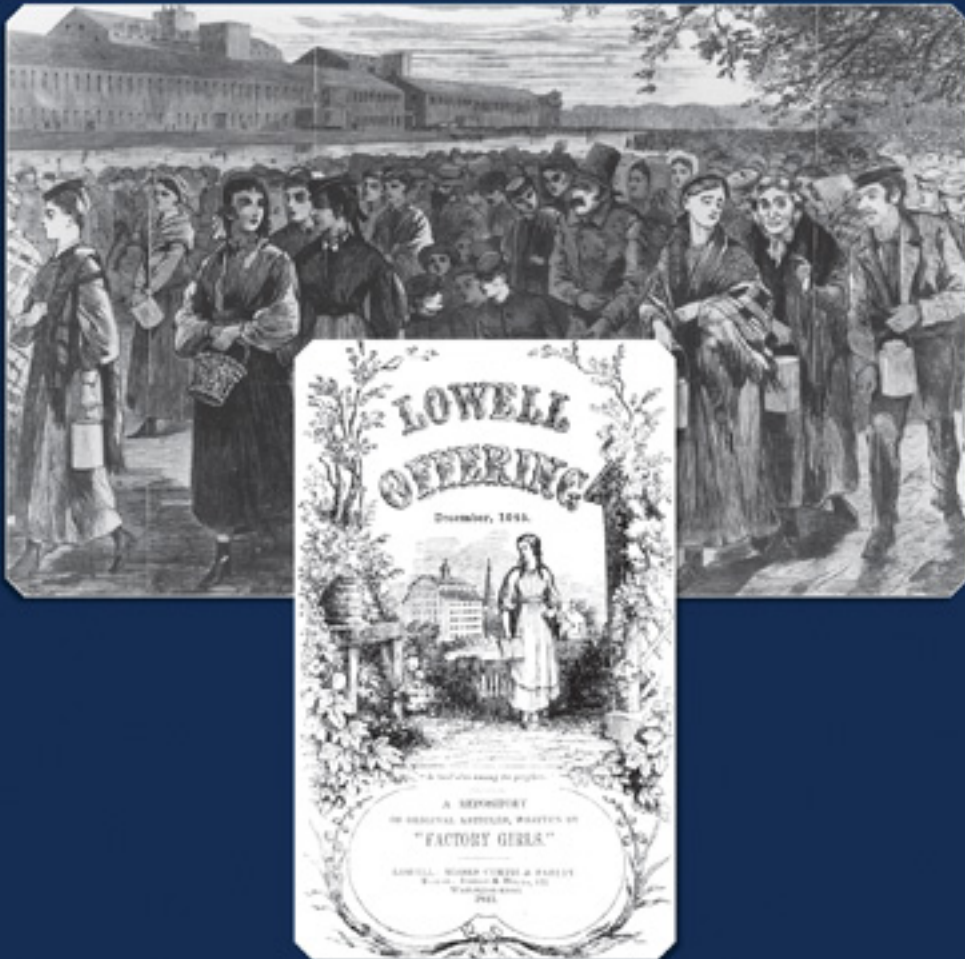


DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

The Lowell Experience

How successful were Lowell's founders in their efforts to create an ideal industrial community?



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Debating the
DOCUMENTS

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Teacher Introduction

★ *Using Primary Sources*

Primary sources are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past era or historical event. They are the raw materials, or the evidence, on which historians base their “secondary” accounts of the past.

A rapidly growing number of history teachers today are using primary sources. Why? Perhaps it's because primary sources give students a better sense of what history is and what historians do. Such sources also help students see the past from a variety of viewpoints. Moreover, primary sources make history vivid and bring it to life.

However, primary sources are not easy to use. They can be confusing. They can be biased. They rarely all agree. Primary sources must be interpreted and set in context. To do this, students need historical background knowledge. *Debating the Documents* helps students handle such challenges by giving them a useful framework for analyzing sources that conflict with one another.



*“Multiple,
conflicting
perspectives are
among the truths
of history.
No single
objective or
universal account
could ever put an
end to this endless
creative dialogue
within and
between the past
and the present.”*

From the 2011 Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct of the Council of the American Historical Association.

INTRODUCTION

★ *The Debating the Documents Series*

Each *Debating the Documents* booklet includes the same sequence of reproducible worksheets. If students use several booklets over time, they will get regular practice at interpreting and comparing conflicting sources. In this way, they can learn the skills and habits needed to get the most out of primary sources.

Each *Debating the Documents* Booklet Includes

- **Suggestions for the Student and an Introductory Essay.** The student gets instructions and a one-page essay providing background on the booklet's topic. A time line on the topic is also included.
- **Two Groups of Contrasting Primary Source Documents.** In most of the booklets, students get one pair of visual sources and one pair of written sources. In some cases, more than two are provided for each. Background is provided on each source. *Within each group, the sources clash in a very clear way.* (The sources are not always exact opposites, but they do always differ in some obvious way.)
- **Three Worksheets for Each Document Group.** Students use the first two worksheets to take notes on the sources. The third worksheet asks which source the student thinks would be most useful to a historian.
- **One DBQ.** On page 20, a document-based question (DBQ) asks students to write an effective essay using all of the booklet's primary sources.

★ *How to Use This Booklet*

1. Have students read “Suggestions for the Student” and the Introductory Essay.

Give them copies of pages 5–7. Ask them to read the instructions and then read the introductory essay on the topic. The time line gives them additional information on that topic. This reading could be done in class or as a homework assignment.

2. Have students do the worksheets.

Make copies of the worksheets and the pages with the sources. Ask students to study the background information on each source and the source itself. Then have them take notes on the sources using the worksheets. If students have access to a computer, have them review the primary sources digitally.

3. “Debate the documents” as a class.

Have students use their worksheet notes to debate the primary source documents as a class. Urge students to follow these ground rules:

- Use your worksheets as a guide for the discussion or debate.
- Try to reach agreement about the main ideas and the significance of each primary source document.
- Look for points of agreement as well as disagreement between the primary sources.
- Listen closely to all points of view about each primary source.
- Focus on the usefulness of each source to the historian, not merely on whether you agree or disagree with that source’s point of view.

4. Have students do the final DBQ.

A DBQ is an essay question about a set of primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, students write essays using evidence from the sources and their own background knowledge of the historical era. (See the next page for a DBQ scoring guide to use in evaluating these essays.)

The DBQ assignment on page 20 includes guidelines for writing a DBQ essay. Here are some additional points to make with students about preparing to write this kind of essay.

The DBQ for this Booklet (see page 20):

“Lowell’s founders hoped to create an ideal industrial community. But industrial reality in time prevented their dream from coming true.” Explain this statement and assess its validity. (That is, explain why you do or do not agree with it.)

- Analyze the question carefully.
- Use your background knowledge to set sources in their historical context.
- Question and interpret sources actively. Do not accept them at face value.
- Use sources meaningfully to support your essay’s thesis.
- Pay attention to the overall organization of your essay.

INTRODUCTION

★ *Complete DBQ Scoring Guide*

Use this guide in evaluating the DBQ for this booklet. Use this scoring guide with students who are already familiar with using primary sources and writing DBQ essays.

Excellent Essay

- Offers a clear answer or thesis explicitly addressing all aspects of the essay question.
- Does a careful job of interpreting many or most of the documents and relating them clearly to the thesis and the DBQ. Deals with conflicting documents effectively.
- Uses details and examples effectively to support the thesis and other main ideas. Explains the significance of those details and examples well.
- Uses background knowledge and the documents in a balanced way.
- Is well written; clear transitions make the essay easy to follow from point to point. Only a few minor writing errors or errors of fact.

Good Essay

- Offers a reasonable thesis addressing the essential points of the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least some of the documents and relates them to the thesis and the DBQ.
- Usually relates details and examples meaningfully to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some relevant background knowledge.
- May have some writing errors or errors of fact, as long as these do not invalidate the essay's overall argument or point of view.

Fair Essay

- Offers at least a partly developed thesis addressing the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least a few of the documents.
- Relates only a few of the details and examples to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some background knowledge.
- Has several writing errors or errors of fact that make it harder to understand the essay's overall argument or point of view.

Poor Essay

- Offers no clear thesis or answer addressing the DBQ.
- Uses few documents effectively other than referring to them in “laundry list” style, with no meaningful relationship to a thesis or any main point.
- Uses details and examples unrelated to the thesis or other main ideas. Does not explain the significance of these details and examples.
- Is not clearly written, with some major writing errors or errors of fact.

Suggestions to the Student

★ *Using Primary Sources*

A primary source is any record of evidence from the past. Many things are primary sources: letters, diary entries, official documents, photos, cartoons, wills, maps, charts, etc. They are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past event or time period. This *Debating the Documents* lesson is based on two groups of primary source documents. Within each group, the sources conflict with one another. That is, they express different or even opposed points of view. You need to decide which source is more reliable, more useful, or more typical of the time period. This is what historians do all the time. Usually, you will be able to learn something about the past from each source, even when the sources clash with one another in dramatic ways.

★ *How to Use This Booklet*

1. **Read the one-page introductory essay.**

This gives you background information that will help you analyze the primary source documents and do the exercises for this *Debating the Documents* lesson. The time line gives you additional information you will find helpful.



2. **Study the primary source documents for this lesson.**

For this lesson, you get two groups of sources. The sources within each group conflict with one another. Some of these sources are visuals, others are written sources. With visual sources, pay attention not only to the image’s “content” (its subject matter) but also to its artistic style, shading, composition, camera angle, symbols, and other features that add to the image’s meaning. With written sources, notice the writing style, bias, even what the source leaves out or does not talk about. Think about each source’s author, that author’s reasons for writing, and the likely audience for the source. These considerations give you clues as to the source’s historical value.

3. **Use the worksheets to analyze each group of primary source documents.**

For each group of sources, you get three worksheets. Use the “Study the Document” worksheets to take notes on each source. Use the “Comparing the Documents” worksheet to decide which of the sources would be most useful to a historian.

4. **As a class, debate the documents.**

Use your worksheet notes to help you take part in this debate.

5. **Do the final DBQ.**

“DBQ” means “document-based question.” A DBQ is a question along with several primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, write an essay using evidence from the documents and your own background history knowledge.

Lowell: The Historical Background

The Industrial Revolution began in England, and the wealth and power it gave that nation soon became apparent to the rest of the world. However, some less appealing features of industrialism became apparent as well.

In England's new factory towns, entire families—men, women, and children—worked long hours to support themselves in cramped, rat-infested slum quarters. The rural regions they left behind may well have been worse than this. Still, industrialism clearly meant new forms of dire poverty for many, along with an overall rise in national wealth.

In 1810, Francis Cabot Lowell, a member of Boston's wealthy merchant class, visited textile mills in England. He came away with detailed memories of the design of certain machines and was able to build a working power loom in America. This enabled Lowell and his "Boston Associates" to build a fully mechanized cotton textile mill in Waltham, Massachusetts. After Lowell's death, the Boston Associates found a better site at East Chelmsford, in northern Massachusetts, along the Merrimack River. It was there that a vast expansion of the textile industry would take place. This industrial center was later renamed Lowell.

Lowell's founders wanted their city to avoid the harmful features of industrialism. They designed a planned community where the largely female labor force was to be protected by owners concerned for both their spiritual and physical well-being. These owners hoped to prove that the new industrial order could actually strengthen America's democratic, small-town virtues.

Lowell's first mills started operating in the 1820s. Into the 1840s, its workforce was largely made up of young women from surrounding New England farms. They came to Lowell to work, usually for a year or so at a time, to add to the family income and get a taste of life outside their small communities. In Lowell, they were supervised in dormitories. Strict rules protected them and confined them. Even church attendance was sometimes required.

For a time, the ideal seemed close to the reality. But within two or three decades, the dream faded. Soon, a more typical factory town took its place. By 1850, Lowell produced a fifth of the nation's cotton cloth, and it was the largest industrial center in the nation. The Lowell Machine Shop also sold textile manufacturing equipment, machine tools, and locomotives. But the dream of Lowell as a model industrial community was fading. Facing stronger competition, the mills had to lower prices and make up for losses by lowering wages as well. Many of the New England female workers were driven away and replaced by a diverse group of European immigrants.

Still, for a time, Lowell combined state-of-the-art technology with social planning to become a major center of the early Industrial Revolution in America.

The Lowell Experience Time Line

1812

• • • Francis Cabot Lowell returns from England. Mechanic Paul Moody helps him build a working power loom.

1817

• • • Lowell dies.

1821

• • • Lowell's Boston business partners choose a location on the Merrimack River as the site for the Lowell textile mills.

1822

• • • Irish work gangs take part in digging the first power canals.

1826

• • • The town of Lowell is incorporated. It has a population of 2,500. About 2,000 of its citizens are textile workers.

1831

• • • Open violence occurs between Irish and Yankee workers.

1834

• • • Lowell textile businesses cut wages. This leads to one of the first strikes led by female workers.

1836

• • • Lowell has about 18,000 people. Nearly 9,000 are textile workers.

1840

• • • Female workers begin writing and publishing *The Lowell Offering*.

1840s

• • • Irish workers begin to find jobs in the textile mills. In 1847, famine in Ireland forces thousands of men, women, and children to move to America.

1844

• • • The Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (LFLRA) is organized. It demands a 10-hour workday. This was one of the first long-lasting labor organizations for working women in the United States.

1850

• • • Lowell is producing around 50,000 miles of cloth a year. It is the largest industrial city in the United States. Its population of 33,000 makes it the second largest city in Massachusetts.

1853

• • • More strikes and protests take place in Lowell; some are successful.

1855

• • • The Irish now make up more than one-fourth of Lowell's population.

DOCUMENT 1

Visual Primary Source Document 1



American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA

Information on Document 1

For a time, Lowell relied on female workers from surrounding New England towns who lived in supervised dorms while working in the Lowell mills. Cultural teachings were not neglected at Lowell. The *Lowell Offering* was a literary magazine that published articles, stories, and poems written by factory girls. In addition, evening lectures,

plays, and other cultural events were provided. Newspapers, magazines, and books were available through lending libraries. Literary circles, Sunday schools, and other church activities, as well as Lowell's shops and stores, provided these rural women much wider cultural horizons and a real sense of independence.