DOCUMENTS

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Ben Franklin

A New American Identity?

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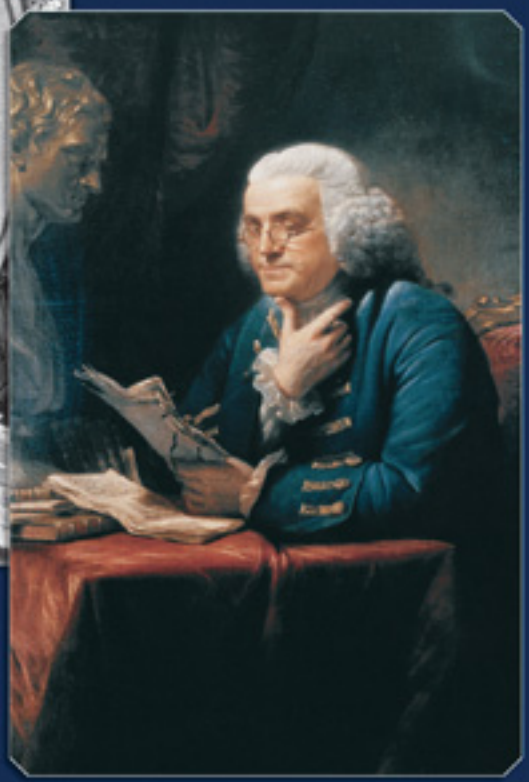

Debating the DOCUMENTS

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HS489 v2.0

MindSparks®

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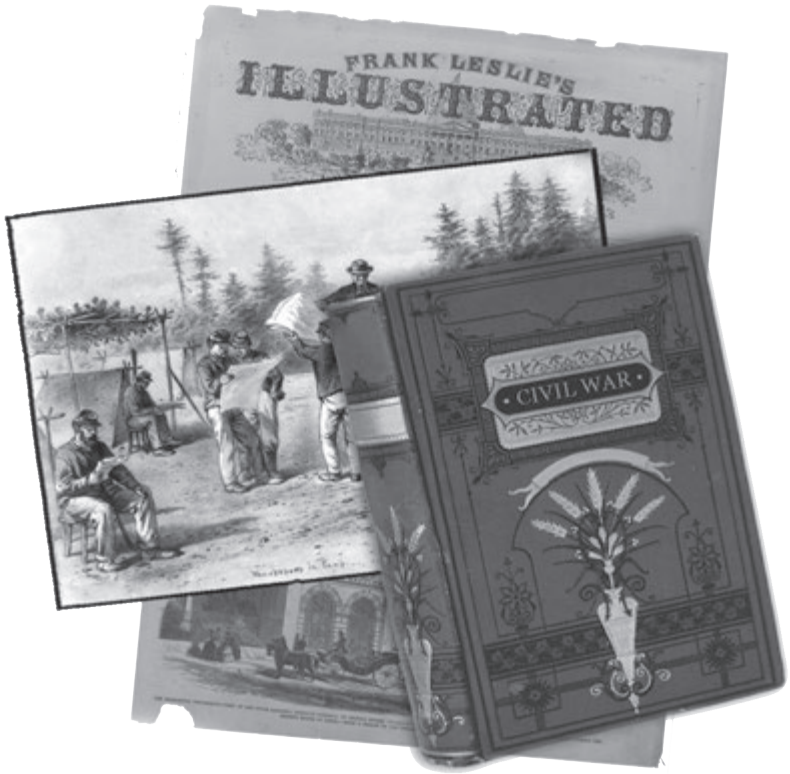
Teacher Introduction

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.

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):

In what ways did Franklin come to be seen as the ideal of a new American personality? Should he be seen this way? Why or why not?

- 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.

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. The DBQ is on page 20.

Franklin: America's First Citizen?

Benjamin Franklin was was born in Boston in 1706. He learned the printing trade from his brother, and began writing newspaper articles at age 12. At 17, he decided to take charge of his own life. He ran away to Philadelphia where he opened a print shop. At 23 he bought his own newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. He married and began to raise a family.

Leaving home, seeking his own way in life, working hard, and striving for success. In these ways, Franklin was already living out what many see as the typical American success story. It's just one of many reasons Franklin is often called "The First American."

When Franklin was born, most people in the British colonies of North America saw themselves as British subjects who were also members of a particular colony or town. That is, they were Virginians, or citizens of Maryland, or Bostonians. Yet during Franklin's life, these colonists united against British rule and won their independence in the American Revolution. In 1787, they wrote a new constitution creating a powerful federal government. They became one nation. And as they did so, most of them came to think of themselves as "Americans."

But what did it mean to be an American? Some historians say the story of Franklin's life answers that question. Let's take a look at a few of the details of that life.

Franklin became one of the most famous people of his age. He was a self-educated man who carried out scientific experiments, on electricity, for example. He also invented useful devices such as bifocals or the Franklin stove. He was the sort of practical problem-solver that Americans have always admired. Franklin's practical attitude showed up in other ways as well. He was a model active citizen working to make his local community better through volunteer effort. He helped set up a militia and a volunteer fire company for Philadelphia. He organized America's first hospital and first subscription library. He helped found Pennsylvania's first university.

His writing also took a practical form. In 1732, he began to publish the yearly editions of his *Poor Richard's Almanack*, full of helpful advice for ordinary citizens. His autobiography was used in schools for many years as a way to give students good advice about making their own way in the world.

Franklin's career as a statesmen helped guide Americans through the colonial years and into their first years as a new nation. He helped write the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution of 1787. However, his main role was as a diplomat overseas. In the 1750s, he began many years of representing the colonies in England. During the American Revolution, he was in Paris winning French military aid for the American side. He later helped negotiate the peace treaty ending that war.

The French came to admire Franklin greatly. Ordinary people loved his plain manner. Educated aristocrats saw him as the perfect ideal of the Enlightenment—a thoughtful man, tolerant of religious differences, who used reason to achieve greatness in many fields. Franklin played on this image and used it to win French support for his country. In doing so, he was also typical of something very American; he was a celebrity, some would even say a great self-promoter.

Do Franklin's character and life story help to define what it means to be an American? The documents here will help you debate this question. And they will help you learn more about one of the nation's most fascinating founders.

Ben Franklin Time Line

1706 — Franklin is born in Boston, Massachusetts, on January 17.

1723–1730 — In 1723, he runs away to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In 1728, he opens a print shop there. The next year, he becomes the owner of *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. In 1730, he marries Deborah Read Rogers.

1731–1737 — In 1731, Franklin joins a local Freemasons lodge. He founds the first lending library. The next year, 1732, he begins to publish his annual editions of *Poor Richard's Almanack*. In 1736, he sets up the Union Fire Company in Philadelphia (later he founds the first American fire-insurance company). In 1737, he is chosen to be postmaster of Philadelphia.

1746–1752 — He carries out his electrical experiments. He performs his famous kite experiment in 1752.

1754 — Franklin introduces a plan of colonial union at the Albany Congress.

1757–1762 — He is in London as a representative of the Pennsylvania Assembly.

1760s–1770s — Off and on, he is in London and France, representing various colonies.

1775–1776 — Franklin returns to Philadelphia and is elected to the Continental Congress. The next year, he signs the Declaration of Independence. He then goes to France as an American Commissioner.

1778 — He helps arrange and then signs a treaty of alliance with France.

1783–1785 — With John Adams and John Jay, he works out the details of the peace treaty with Great Britain. This ends the American Revolution. In 1784, he invents bifocals. He returns to Philadelphia the next year.

1787 — Franklin serves as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention.

1789 — He is elected president of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery.

1790 — At age 84, Benjamin Franklin dies in Philadelphia on April 17.

Visual Primary Source Document 1

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC4-3576.

Information on Document 1

This portrait of Franklin was painted by artist David Martin in 1766. It shows Franklin seated at a table reading documents. The spectacles Franklin wears may be meant to call attention to his own invention of bifocals, eyeglasses that enabled the wearer to see both near and far. Franklin is depicted in this portrait as a thoughtful man of science. As if to add to this point, the artist shows Franklin facing a bust of Isaac Newton, who was probably still the most famous scientist of all in Franklin's age.