DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints in Primary Source Documents

Loyalists and Patriots

As the American Revolution began, why did some colonists choose to rebel while others did not?

Debating the DOCUMENTS

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Contents

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):

What would lead an American colonist to remain a Loyalist in the face of the rebellion against Great Britain after 1776?

- 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.

Loyalty and Patriotism in the American Revolution

On July 2, 1776, the American colonists voted to separate for good from Great Britain. Two days later, they approved the Declaration of Independence. Thirteen British colonies in North America had declared themselves to be a new nation.

By that day, the American Revolution had actually been underway for some time. Fighting between British soldiers and colonial militias began at Concord and Lexington near Boston, on April 19, 1775. On that day, some colonists clearly favored a final break with Great Britain. Yet, even by July 4, 1776, more than a year later, many colonists still could not accept the idea.

In other words, the American Revolution was not a simple thing. Those who fought the British called themselves "Patriots." They were, in fact, rebels. By the laws they themselves had accepted, they were outlaws. And not everyone in the colonies agreed with these "outlaws," not even all those who were angry with Great Britain.

For years, the colonists had protested specific British acts—acts to tax them in certain ways, to limit their settlement of the western lands, and to control their colonial assemblies. Yet until 1776, the colonists protested as British citizens. They directed their anger at Parliament or at King George III. But their loyalty was still to Great Britain. They still felt they were simply defending rights long due to them as members of that nation. Their deepest sense of identity was British.

The American Revolution forced such people to make a painful choice—either hold to their British identity and loyalty or cross the line and join with the rebels. In the end, most colonists did join with the rebels. Yet a large share of them did not. They were "Loyalists," Americans who remained true to older, more traditional notions of patriotism and loyalty.

This split into "Loyalist" and "Patriot" sides means the American Revolution was also a civil war. That is, it was a war between groups of colonists. It was a war that often divided former friends and close neighbors.

It was a war of ideas as well, for loyalty to Great Britain was not necessarily unthinking loyalty. It was often based on an age-old tradition of beliefs about Parliament, the King, and the rights of all British subjects. At the same time, those who turned against Great Britain also did so in the name of noble ideas, the ideas of liberty and equality described in the Declaration of Independence.

Learning about this great split may lead you to feel more sympathy for those who chose to remain loyal to Great Britain. Some Loyalists did act for personal or selfish reasons. Yet others acted on firm beliefs about their highest duty. They often acted with great courage as well.

Yet studying this split may lead you to realize how big a risk the leaders of the Revolution also took. They had to go against everything they had been taught. And their choice, also, was full of dangers. When they pledged "our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor" to the Revolution, men like George Washington and John Hancock could easily have lost all three.

The primary sources in this booklet will help you better understand both sides in this civil war and this war of ideas. You will get a better understanding of the Revolution itself. And you will have a chance to debate the meaning of loyalty and patriotism in a time of dramatic and confusing change.

Loyalists and Patriots Time Line

1774 In the spring, England passes the Coercive Acts to punish Boston for the Boston Tea Party. In September, the First Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia to protest the Coercive Acts. A Declaration of Rights claims that the colonists are "entitled to all English liberties." Colonial militia, called minutemen, begin to organize.

1775 Colonial minutemen fight the British at Lexington and Concord. The Second Continental Congress opens and begins to act as a government. Royal Governor Lord Dunmore in Virginia calls on slaves owned by Patriots (not Loyalists) to join his army. About 300 accept the offer. Overall, a few thousand blacks actually do become Loyalists. About 5,000 also serve in the Continental army fighting the British.

1776 In January, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* is published. It calls on Americans to demand independence. On July 4, Congress adopts the Declaration of Independence. The British fleet and army arrive at New York and will control it and Long Island for the rest of the war. The largest share of Loyalists live there, many arriving from other areas during the war.

1777 Washington clears the British out of most of New Jersey. After the British take Philadelphia, Washington's forces retreat to Valley Forge, where they spend a terrible winter. In October, however, the Americans win a turning-point victory aganst the British at Saratoga, New York.

1778 After Saratoga, France and America form an alliance to fight the British. British Loyalists and American Indians massacre American settlers in the Wyoming Valley of northern Pennsylvania and later at Cherry Valley, New York.

1779 Loyalists raid coastal towns in Connecticut, burning Fairfield and Norwalk, and parts of New Haven harbor. In August, American forces defeat the combined Indian and Loyalist forces at Elmira, New York.

1780 The British seize Charleston, South Carolina. In October, British General Cornwallis gives up on his invasion of North Carolina after Americans capture a Loyalist force of 1,000 men aiding him.

1781 Cornwallis surrenders at Yorktown, ending British hopes of winning the war. Fighting on a smaller scale continues. The Articles of Confederation are ratified.

1782 Peace talks take place in Paris. Loyalists begin leaving America, many heading to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Some Loyalist and Indian forces continue to attack settlers in certain frontier regions.

1783 Congress ratifies the Articles of Peace. The war is officially over. About 33,000 Loyalists set sail from New York for England and Canada. In all, a total of about 100,000 Loyalists flee America.

Visual Primary Source Document 1

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-111117

Information on Document 1

This engraving by Thomas Phillibrown depicts a scene from the American Revolution. The engraving was published in 1856. It is based on a picture by Alonso Chappel, who was born in 1828. Therefore, it is important not to see this as a primary source from the time of the American Revolution. The engraving is titled *Incident in Cherry Valley—fate of Jane Wells*. In the scene, Jane Wells is pleading for her life as a man attempts to protect her from an American Indian who is about to kill her. The house behind them is being burned by Loyalists and American Indians led by Major Walter Butler and Mohawk Chief Joseph Brant, in Cherry Valley, New York.