

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

What Did the Great Awakening Awaken?

Did this revival of religious piety foster older authoritarian attitudes or pave the way for a new democratic spirit?



Debating the
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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):

“What did the Great Awakening awaken? It taught colonial Americans to challenge religious authority forcefully. This helped prepare them for the political revolution to come.” Assess the validity of this statement—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.

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★ *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 Great Awakening

In colonial America, religious belief shaped every aspect of life. It guided the individual and the family, work and play, community and government. The local church was where all of these were given meaning and direction.

Most Protestant colonial churches were strict. They taught that we are all sinful and that God grants grace and a place in heaven only to a faithful few. Puritan Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and many others accepted the idea that God had already decided who was saved. All a person could do was search for signs of being among the chosen few. Living a good life, studying the Bible, and attending church might be such signs. But they could not by themselves save a sinner. Only a deep faith granted by God could do that.

By the early 1700s, these beliefs were still widely held. Yet many colonists had begun to feel that people no longer took religion seriously. Colonial wealth was increasing and so were temptations to live a less godly life. Too many churchgoers were said to be only going through the motions, without real faith.

In the 1730s and '40s, this uneasy feeling gave birth to a huge revival of religion known as the Great Awakening. In this upheaval, thousands of people heard new sorts of preachers using a more emotional preaching style. The words of these preachers moved many to cry out, "What must I do to be saved?" Such terrifying awareness of sin might then shift as suddenly into an equally powerful feeling of joy and acceptance by Christ. The heart of the Great Awakening was this life-changing sense of being "reborn" as a new and better person of faith. The preachers were evangelicals who felt they could trigger this rebirth suddenly, in a flash, rather than over the course of a lifetime.

Many ordinary clergymen preaching in their own churches took part in the revivals. The key figures, however, were often "itinerants,"

preachers who moved from town to town. George Whitefield, an Englishman, was the most famous of them. His powerful, appealing voice and deep feeling could make crowds weep in fear of God's judgment and cry tears of joy at the thought of salvation. Whitefield first toured the colonies in 1739. He preached in fields and city squares, often to thousands at a time. Another key figure was Jonathan Edwards, a Congregationalist preacher in Northampton, Massachusetts. Edwards was perhaps the greatest American philosopher and religious thinker of the colonial period.

Some of the preachers, however, were not as thoughtful as Edwards. Many played on emotion and took no interest in whether the conversions they produced were real or likely to last. Some were harshly critical of those regular town ministers who stressed a calm use of reason and learning. Such hard feelings often split churches into opposed groups, so-called "New Lights" and "Old Lights." New churches appeared, and America's religious diversity became even more diverse.

The upheaval also made colonists more aware of a world beyond their town or church. This may have given them a sense of belonging to a broader "American" society rather than to one limited to a single town or colony.

The revivals also led people to become more critical of their local religious leaders. After all, salvation seemed to come from within, not necessarily from what happened in church. Did this foster a more independent spirit? Did it make Americans more willing to challenge all sorts of traditional forms of authority? If so, the Great Awakening may have prepared the colonists for the American Revolution just a few decades ahead. Did it? This is one of many questions the primary sources here can help you debate as you think about the meaning of America's first Great Awakening.

Great Awakening Time Line

1662

- • • The “Half-Way Covenant” in New England eases Puritan rules about who can be a full church member. Some see this as a move away from the strict Puritan beliefs of the first settlers.

1692–1693

- • • Salem Witch Trials: Many people are accused of witchcraft. A large number are hanged. Some see this witchcraft as a sign that God is angry at the Puritans for giving up their strict beliefs. However, this is the last significant witchcraft scare in America. The trials are called off in 1693. Some jurors soon apologize for what happened.

1690s and
early 1700s

- • • Cotton Mather is a famous Puritan leader. In many of his writings, he worries about the fading away of strict Puritan beliefs and practices.

1720s

- • • Religious revivals are led by Theodore Frelinghuysen and Gilbert Tennant in New Jersey. These are the first signs of the Great Awakening.

1734–1737

- • • Jonathan Edwards begins giving very moving sermons in Northampton, Massachusetts. Edwards is considered one of America’s greatest religious thinkers.

1739–1741

- • • Methodist George Whitefield travels between England and America several times, preaching throughout the colonies.

1741

- • • Jonathan Edwards gives the most famous Great Awakening sermon of all, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”

1741–1758

- • • The Great Awakening splits Presbyterians into groups for and against the revivals. Similar splits into “Old Lights” and “New Lights” take place among Congregationalists (Puritans) in New England.

1743

- • • Charles Chauncy writes a pamphlet called “Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England.” He is a leader of the Old Lights in Boston. In this pamphlet, he speaks out against the emotional preaching of the Great Awakening.

1747

- • • Jonathan Edwards writes *The Visible Union of God’s People*. In it, he describes how God is bringing people together because of what they shared in the Great Awakening.

1758

- • • The Presbyterians heal their Old Side/New Side split.

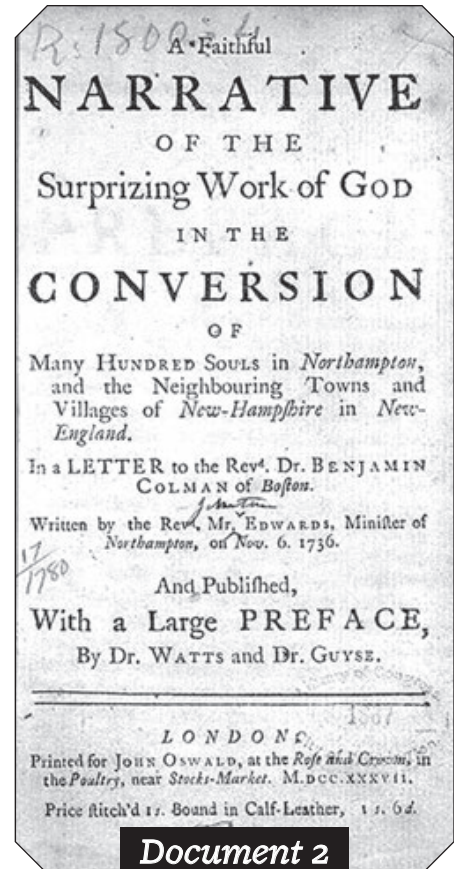
DOCUMENTS 1 & 2

Visual Primary Source Documents 1 & 2



Document 1

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-45506.



Document 2

Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division.

Information on Documents 1 & 2

The two most important figures in America's Great Awakening were George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards.

Whitefield was born in England in 1714. At the age of 22, he began preaching with a power and depth of feeling that few had ever seen. He urged listeners to feel their own sinfulness strongly, repent, and change. He often preached to huge crowds in fields, both in England and here. He made his first trip to America in 1739. The above illustration shows him preaching in his usual style.

Even before Whitefield arrived, Jonathan Edwards led a great revival of religion in his own New England town of North Hampton. Edwards held to the strictest form of his religion's traditional Puritan beliefs. He warned listeners of the overwhelming power of God and of their inability to do much to save their souls. Yet, his preaching triggered a great revival in his community. On the right is the cover from his own account of this revival, which even he seems to have found to be sudden and surprising.