

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
In Primary Source Documents

From Hunter-Gatherers to Farmers and Herders

Continuity and change led to the most crucial transformation of life in the ancient world.



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Debating the DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

From Hunter-Gatherers to Farmers and Herders

The 2017 World History Course and Exam Description of the College Board Advanced Placement Program* lists five themes that it urges teachers to use in organizing their teaching. Each World History *Debating the Documents* booklet focuses on one or two of these five themes.

The Five Themes

- 1. Interaction between humans and the environment.** (demography and disease; migration; patterns of settlement; technology)
- 2. Development and interaction of cultures.** (religions; belief systems, philosophies, and ideologies; science and technology; the arts and architecture)
- 3. State-building, expansion, and conflict.** (political structures and forms of governance; empires; nations and nationalism; revolts and revolutions; regional, transregional, and global structures and organizations)
- 4. Creation, expansion, and interaction of economic systems.** (agricultural and pastoral production; trade and commerce; labor systems; industrialization; capitalism and socialism)
- 5. Development and transformation of social structures.** (gender roles and relations; family and kinship; racial and ethnic constructions; social and economic classes)

This Booklet's Main Themes:

- 1** Interaction between humans and the environment.
- 4** Creation, expansion, and interaction of economic systems.

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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.

NOTE: If you are using these materials with an AP world history class, an honors class, or some other group of advanced and/or more knowledgeable students, you may want to make more written sources available to them on this topic. Do a basic Internet search for sources that provide additional perspectives and then add to the sources provided here.

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):

“The term ‘Neolithic Revolution’ is deceptive. The shift from hunting and gathering to farming and herding was just not that abrupt.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

- 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.

Hunter-Gatherers to Farmers & Herders

Studying the past is not easy. The evidence we have to go on can be misleading in many ways. Moreover, the further back we go, the less evidence we have. Yet it is this evidence (the primary sources) that historians use to write their accounts of what happened long ago.

Our earliest hominid ancestors first appeared in East Africa five million years ago, or perhaps even somewhat earlier. Our own species, *Homo sapiens*, arrived several hundred thousand years ago. Many scholars say modern humans, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, descended from an ancestor who lived about 200,000 years ago, probably in East Africa (though some scholars say we emerged in several places independently).

In any case, for most of this time, the only clues we have to our past are skeletons, stone tools, animal bones, the remains of campsites, and a few other things that managed to survive over many millennia. We also have a little evidence of what humans thought and felt—mostly in the form of rock drawings, cave paintings and designs, ritual figurines, ceremonial burials, etc. However, what any of these things mean is not that clear.

History is all about change. Yet it may seem that very little changed during our first one hundred thousand years or more of existence. However, that is not really so. The evidence is scanty, yet after about 40,000 BCE, it increases rapidly, and it varies much more from region to region and from millennium to millennium. This evidence can in fact teach us much if we look at it closely and if we use imagination and our ability to reason about it.

We know, for example, of ancient rock drawings in Africa or Australia, some from more than 40,000 years ago. Cave art in Europe dates back 32,000 years or more. In France, we have the Lascaux cave complex and artwork from 15,000 years ago or more. Cave art of striking beauty

and skill has also been found in many other parts of Europe and elsewhere. Evidence of the use of symbols to communicate ideas about religion or nature is found in signs, dots and images on some cave walls, as well as in statuettes of female figures (probably having to do with fertility).

During this time (the Upper Paleolithic), tools became more refined and varied. Humanity's survival skills were clearly improving and adapting with greater and greater speed.

Then around 12,000 years ago, perhaps the most important change of all began. This change is labeled the Neolithic Revolution. "Neolithic" means "New Stone Age." However, the change was not mainly about better stone tools. It was a shift from hunting and gathering to farming and to herding and domesticating animals. With this change came settled villages, the wheel, pottery, and more. The change was not really a "revolution." It took place over many centuries. It began in the Middle East and along the Nile, and spread east and west from there. Wheat and barley were the key crops cultivated. It developed later in China (probably independently), where it was based on millet and rice. In Mesoamerica it definitely emerged separately, based there on maize and beans.

On the basis of the agricultural surplus this change produced, population grew, copper and bronze metallurgy developed, cities appeared, writing was invented, and civilization emerged.

The theme of this lesson is "change and continuity over time." The millennia before the earliest ancient civilizations were times of change and continuity. The visual sources for this lesson focus only on tools and works of art. Yet they give you a chance to explore more than technical or artistic change. They can suggest how such change affected ideas, social organization, male and female social roles, and more. Remember to study them closely and use your imagination!

Hunters-to-Farmers Time Line

5-2.5
million BCE

The Hominidae family includes certain apes and our earliest human ancestors, the “hominids,” who walked upright (some scholars use the term “hominins”). Our immediate hominid ancestors first appear in East Africa four or five million years ago, or perhaps earlier.

2.5 million-
300,000 BCE

The *Lower Paleolithic* era. Paleolithic means “Old Stone Age.” About 2.5 million years ago, a more fully human hominid appears: *Homo habilis*. *Homo habilis* uses chipped stone scrapers and choppers. About 1.8 million years ago, *Homo erectus* appears. This species uses stone tools for hunting and is able to control fire. *Homo erectus* migrates out of Africa into other parts of the Eurasian landmass. Toward the end of this era, the earliest “archaic” forms of our own species, *Homo sapiens*, appear.

300,000-
40,000 BCE

The *Middle Paleolithic* era. Many scholars now believe modern humans began to evolve from earlier *Homo sapiens* species in Africa around 200,000 years ago. Other scholars believe modern humans evolved in several parts of the world separately. Around 150,000 years ago, Neanderthals also appear in Europe and western Asia. Their bodies are well adapted to cold climates. They may be the first to bury their dead intentionally, suggesting a belief in some sort of afterlife. Some see Neanderthals as one type of *Homo sapiens*. Others see them as a separate human species. In any case, both Neanderthals and other *Homo sapiens* create more carefully shaped handaxes and other tools for hunting, chopping wood, digging roots, scraping hides, etc. Artistic expression appears in the form of rock art and body paint.

40,000-
10,000 BCE

The *Upper Paleolithic* era. New tool traditions produce a wider variety of more finely crafted tools. Neanderthals disappear around 35,000 years ago. After that, only one fully modern human species remains, *Homo sapiens sapiens*. It is from these that we are all descended today. Early evidence exists of symbolic representation of ideas in the form of African rock art, or European cave paintings, signs, and dots. Humans live in small hunter-gatherer bands that move from place to place. Their better tools make survival easier and allow their numbers to grow. Possibly, this also makes it harder for these hunters to find all the game they need while relying only on nuts, fruits, or grains found in the wild.

10,000-
3000 BCE

The *Neolithic* era (“New Stone Age”). As population grows, some large animals die out, perhaps due to over-hunting. Hunter-gatherer bands slowly learn to foster the growth of certain wild plants. The warming climate at the end of the ice age would have encouraged this. Settled farming probably evolves slowly from it. Instead of hunting, some groups learn to herd and then domesticate animals. By 8000 BCE, permanent agricultural villages exist in North Africa and in the “Fertile Crescent” in Mesopotamia. The wheel, pottery, and better farming methods follow in those regions and elsewhere. By 3500 BCE, along the Nile and along the Tigris and Euphrates, copper, bronze, writing, city-states, and the first complex civilizations appear.

DOCUMENT 1

Primary Source Document 1



The Granger Collection, New York

Information on Document 1

“Paleolithic” means “Old Stone Age.” This era began around 2.5 million years ago when early hominids began using very crude stone tools. That early, simple stone tool tradition is called “Oldowan.” It was replaced about 1.5 million years ago by a style of toolmaking known as “Acheulean.” Acheulean stone tools first appeared in Africa, and later spread to the Middle East and Europe.

Both tool traditions were those of small bands of hunter-gatherers—that is, people who lived mainly from hunting animals and

gathering wild grains, berries, fruit, and other foods.

Acheulean tools slowly improved over time. The objects shown here are late-stage Acheulean tools found in England. They are dated to about 200,000 BCE. The largest of these tools is about six inches long. The tools are called “handaxes,” but there is no absolute certainty as to how they were used. Probably they were all-purpose tools for digging, hammering bone, butchering animals, scraping hides, chopping wood, etc.