

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

Women's Lives Before the Modern Era

Women's lives and attitudes toward women varied greatly within and among the world civilizations.



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Debating the DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

Women's Lives Before the Modern Era

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 Theme:

- 5** Development and transformation of social structures.

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Contents

Teacher Introduction	1
Suggestions to the Student	5
Introductory Essay	6
Women's Lives Before the Modern Era Time Line	7
First Group of Documents	8
Study the Documents	10
Comparing the Documents	12
Comparison Essay	13
Second Group of Documents	14
Study the Documents	16
Comparing the Documents	18
Comparison Essay	19
Document-Based Question	20
Worksheet Answers and Guidelines	21
Visual Primary Sources	23

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):

Compare images and attitudes toward women in China, Europe, and the Islamic civilization in the centuries 600–1500 AD. How similar were these attitudes across these cultures?

- 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.

Women's Lives Before the Modern Era

From 600–1450 CE, the experiences of women were closely tied to the nature of the family and its role in society. Much less is known about the lives of women than of men in those centuries. Evidence about women and about family life in general is harder to find and evaluate. This has made it difficult to recover the history of one entire half of the human race.

Women in past cultures faced greater limits on what they could do than men. But was this simply due to harsh and unfair cultural attitudes? Or was it mainly due to the inevitable demands of physical labor and the child-bearing tasks women faced? Historians often ask whether gender is “constructed” or “natural.” That is, are different male and female roles due to the natural, biological differences between men and women, or are they constructed or created by society?

The images of women in various cultures give us some evidence for dealing with this question — images of the daily lives of ordinary women, and of famous or even mythic women who seem to represent admired female qualities. The sources in this lesson are a collection of such images. What they show is variety from one culture to another, but also patterns common to all cultures. In those patterns, disdain for women and limits on them can be found. Yet so also can admiration and avenues for unique self-development. In other words, there is plenty of room for debate about the roles women played, how women were perceived, and why.

For example, in China, Confucian values of order and familial loyalty focused above all on the father as the center of family life. Women were barely mentioned in the Confucian classics. Sons were favored over daughters, and female infanticide was widely practiced. Yet within the family, mothers and mothers-in-law were highly honored and given real power over domestic matters. Moreover, in upper-class Chinese society, there were always gifted women with literary and other

talents who found ways to express themselves and have an impact.

In the Islamic realms, the Qur’an defines women as subordinate to men in many ways. A Muslim man could have more than one wife, but women could not have more than one husband. Women’s interactions outside the home were often severely limited. The family exercised rigid control over women, especially regarding their dealings with men. Yet the Qur’an also insisted on equal dignity and respect for both men and women. There is good reason to think it actually gave women greater protection in marriage and in property rights than they had under earlier tribal customs. Muhammad, after all, wanted to weaken tribal ties, which were often based on strict descent through the male heads of families and clans.

In Europe, as in other civilizations, most women lived hard lives, working alongside men in fields and shops. In the Middle Ages, craft and merchant guilds often excluded women. An idealized view of women was a key part of the code of chivalry for knights and other nobles. It defined women as weak and in need of protection. Yet it also insisted they be honored and loved, either from afar or in marriage. Some strong women played roles in the political life of the feudal age—for example, a powerful aristocrat like Eleanor of Aquitaine, a religious figure such as Hildegard of Bingen, or a crusading fighter like Joan of Arc.

As all this suggests, and as these sources show, attitudes toward women were complicated and often divided in these centuries before the modern age.

Women's Lives Before the Modern Era Time Line

530

The likely date when Saint Benedict establishes his rule for the monastery of Monte Cassino. The Benedictine rule becomes standard for monasteries in Western Europe. Saint Benedict's sister Scholastica presides over a community of religious women who probably also adopted a version of the rule.

610

According to Islamic traditions, Khadija, Muhammad's first wife, is first to accept his teachings as the basis for Islam. A strong woman, she becomes an admired model for women in Islamic societies.

900s

Foot binding becomes popular in China for girls of wealthier classes who do not have to work in the fields. In foot binding, a young girl's feet are wrapped tightly in cloth and deformed to produce an unnatural arch. Though extremely painful and unhealthy, it is seen as a mark of great beauty.

1000-1010

Japanese author Murasaki Shikibu, a member of the imperial court of Japan, writes *The Tale of Genji*, one of the first and most famous novels ever written.

1098-1179

The lifetime of Hildegard of Bingen. Hildegard composes music and musical plays and becomes famous for her theological and visionary writings. She is often sought out for advice by bishops, popes, and kings.

1122-1202

The lifetime of Eleanor of Aquitaine. She marries Louis VII of France, later divorces him to marry Henry II, the future King of England, all the while controlling her own lands in Southern France.

1170s

Chrétien de Troyes's poems on the legend of King Arthur include *Lancelot, the Knight of the Cart*. It gives expression to the medieval concept of "courtly love." The lover adores his mistress and seeks to be worthy of her by acting bravely and honorably. Chrétien may have written the poem at the request of his patroness Marie, countess of Champagne, the daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine.

1360-1436

The lifetime of Dorotea Bocchi. She is an Italian physician who teaches medicine and philosophy at the University of Bologna, where her father previously did the same. Outside of Italy, women in Europe are generally banned from teaching or practicing medicine.

1412-1431

The lifetime of Joan of Arc. She leads the army of Charles VII against the English, ending the English siege of Orleans. She is later captured, ransomed by the English, accused of witchcraft, and burned at the stake. Her legend spreads and helps foster intense French patriotic feelings.

1486

Heinrich Kraemer and Johann Sprenger, two German Dominican monks, publish *Malleus Maleficarum (The Hammer of Witches)*. It becomes the standard book on witchcraft. It promotes the view that most witches are women working for the devil. It fuels two centuries of very intense witchcraft hysteria aimed mainly against women.

DOCUMENTS 1 & 2

Primary Source Documents 1 & 2

Document 1



The Granger Collection, New York

Document 2



The Granger Collection, New York

Information on Documents 1 & 2

Document 1. From *Très Riches Heures* (*The Book of Hours*) of Jean, Duke of Berry, in the fifteenth century. This illumination shows the month of June. In it men and women both are mowing, raking, and stacking hay on the outskirts of Paris. It is true that women worked in the home. However, as this image makes clear, “the home” also often meant the fields where most work in the Middle Ages took place.

Document 2. This detail from a twelfth-century Northern Song (China) scroll painting shows two women beating silk in a trough. For a very long time, China kept its knowledge of how to manufacture silk a secret from the rest of the world. In Song times, women carried out most of the phases of this manufacturing process—in line with an old Chinese saying, “Men till, women weave.”