

Document-Based Assessment for U.S. History

SECOND EDITION

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INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, the use of document-based assessments in the social studies and in other subject areas has become commonplace. In New York State, document-based questions are required parts of state assessments taken by all students in grades 5, 8, 10, and 11. Savvy teachers in other states and in thousands of schools across the United States (and elsewhere) are embracing their use, too. These educators recognize the importance of having students learn to “struggle” with raw data to make up their own minds about important questions in history and in their own present-day world. “Struggling” with DBQs requires students to examine various and often contradictory information, combine it with their existing knowledge, and formulate an intellectually defensible written response to an important question. During the process, students must analyze the meaning of data and information and evaluate their significance. But then they must go further—next, to synthesize what they have learned into a forceful generalization, and finally, to write a logical and persuasive essay that is supported by relevant evidence. Few, if any, instructional tasks are as ambitious and intellectually challenging, and few are as personally creative.

The use of document-based assessments complements some of the best of contemporary educational reforms and traditional educational ideals. Document-based assessments provide students with richer, more authentic, performance-based assessments, replacing simple-minded, and single-dimensional “bubble in the answer” kinds of tests. Additionally, this type of assessment reinforces students’ literacy skills, requiring close reading, deep understanding, and clear, forceful written prose. It challenges students, raising standards of academic expectations, and providing them with rigorous and rewarding intellectual tasks. It helps students to escape the tyranny of the textbook and the misleading acceptance of “the correct answer.” Students come to recognize the malleability and fluidity of historical interpretation. Perhaps of greatest significance, use of document-based assessments affirms students and legitimizes their thinking, asking them to be historians and helping them find meaning in history.

This revision of the 1999 edition updates all data and information (especially economic and demographic) and also includes four totally new document-based assessments. The new items all deal with social history and all touch on topics and themes of special interest to young people, issues that have remained strangely contemporary and controversial.

What Is a Document-Based Question?

This book contains 22 document-based questions, or DBQs. Each is an essay question that addresses a significant theme or topic in U.S. history. You will find that many are open-ended, posing broad questions that invite debate and will lead different students to different interpretations. Following each key question are a variety of documents. Most are primary sources, offering “eye-witness” reports from people who actually lived during the time being discussed, or who actually took part in the events being examined. These primary sources can take various forms, including diaries, letters, speeches, newspaper or magazine accounts, testimony, and reports. Other materials considered primary sources are maps, pictures, graphs, and charts. If we were examining the reason why the Pilgrims came to Plymouth in 1620, for example, a good primary source might be *Of Plymouth Plantation*, the account of William Bradford, a leader of the Pilgrims. However, sometimes secondary sources are included as well. These are accounts reported by those who were not actually present during the event or time being described, but who have studied the primary sources and have reached conclusions based on this evidence. *The Founding of New England*, a book written in 1921 by the historian James Truslow Adams, would provide a good secondary source about the motives of the Pilgrims coming to America in 1620. As you might expect, secondary sources are typically not as authoritative as primary sources can be. Remember, even two eyewitnesses to the same event can disagree about just what happened, and they will often disagree about *why* it happened. Even primary sources can be flawed, biased, and invalid.

How to Use and Teach DBQs

The document-based questions in this book can be used by teachers in a variety of ways—as independent student assignments, classroom exercises, formal student assessments, group projects, or as preparation for classroom seminars and debates, to suggest only a few. They were designed to be used after students have studied a topic or unit, so that they bring to the task some foundational knowledge and understanding of the question.

You will find a number of aids for teaching and grading DBQs at the back of the book. The grading key includes brief summaries and discussions of the documents in each DBQ. You will also find two sample student essays with teacher-assigned grades and comments. The first twelve DBQs include short summary questions after each document. These are designed to help students learn to analyze and interpret documents and to focus their analysis on the question. The last ten DBQs do not contain questions for each document. It is assumed that

most students, after sufficient practice, will no longer need this extra help. Obviously, students' abilities differ. Teachers may want to stop using these questions earlier in the school year, or they may want to develop their own questions for the documents in the last ten DBQs as well.

How much time will it take for students to carefully complete each of these DBQs? If students have little or no previous experience with this method, you will have to “go slow” early in the year. You might, for instance, devote two or three class periods to the first few DBQs you do. And, you might have students do these first DBQs in small groups—or even as a whole-class activity. As the year progresses and students become more proficient, you can shorten the process. These questions were originally designed for use with eleventh-graders. However, with practice, and when used as assessments at the end of a unit's study, able students from the ninth grade and above should be able to try their hand at this approach. Most students should be able to complete one within a class period.

GETTING STARTED: GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS

The 22 document-based questions (DBQs) in this book are designed to help you become a better historian and a better citizen. Examining real evidence about important questions in history, then weighing evidence against what you already know in order to reach an opinion, approximates what historians do. These skills are authentic to the historical process. However, of equal importance, they are authentic to the democratic process – to what responsible citizens do in examining civic issues, formulating positions, and taking stands on these positions. Writing answers to document-based questions will help you improve your thinking skills, learn to detect biases, weigh evidence, develop logical solutions, and express yourself in clear, thoughtful, and persuasive prose. Good luck!

How to Begin

1. First of all, carefully read the question. Be sure that you know what is being asked.
2. Ask yourself: How would I answer this question if I had no documents to examine? Presumably you've studied the topic in class, read about it in your textbook, and, perhaps, have learned more from supplemental readings. You're not beginning the process "cold." You know a lot about the topic already, and you've probably formulated some opinions. Don't discount this knowledge. As you read the documents, build upon this preexisting understanding.
3. Before you begin to examine the documents, take a few minutes to jot down what you already know about the topic and the question. Names, dates, events, and other items that pertain to the question and topic should be included.
4. Now, after reading the question again, carefully read each document. Underline things of special importance, and write brief notes in the margin. Ask yourself: How does this document help to answer the question? What is its basic point? What biases does it contain? How credible is it? How does it change or reinforce my beliefs about the topic and question?
5. Many of the document-based questions include brief questions after each document. These questions are designed to help you focus on the main idea of the document, and to help you analyze and interpret its meaning. Provide brief, but accurate, answers to these questions. They will help you when you write your essay answer.
6. At this point, formulate a thesis statement that directly answers the question. Take a stand and state a position – one that both your preexisting knowledge and the documents support.
7. Briefly outline your essay so that you prove your thesis with supportive evidence and information *both from the documents and from knowledge you already have*. Remember, this knowledge comes from your classwork, discussions, and reading beyond the documents.
8. Carefully write your essay. Cite supporting evidence from documents within your essay in a way that strengthens and validates your thesis. Allude to these documents and other evidence in well-written, fluid prose. For instance, do not say: "As Document 1 states . . ." Instead, say: "As President Kennedy said in his inaugural address . . ."

HOW ARE ANSWERS SCORED? A SCORING RUBRIC

Here is a scoring rubric that identifies the recommended criteria used in grading DBQ essay answers. You might want to try to grade some of your own answers, or answers written by classmates. And, you might ask your teacher to duplicate one or two of the best answers in your class so that everyone can see examples of good DBQ essays.

5	<p>Strong thesis – responds directly to the question</p> <p>Uses documents completely and accurately; weighs the importance and validity of evidence</p> <p>Cites considerable relevant information from outside learning</p> <p>Displays a thorough understanding of the topic and related issues</p> <p>Well structured, well written; proper spelling, grammar, mechanics</p>
4	<p>Thesis stated – answers the question</p> <p>Uses documents correctly; recognizes that all evidence is not equally valid</p> <p>Cites some relevant information from outside learning</p> <p>Shows an understanding of the topic and related issues</p> <p>Clearly written and coherent; some minor errors in writing</p>
3	<p>Addresses the question but has weak structure and focus</p> <p>Uses most documents correctly – simplistic analysis; does not always weigh the importance and validity of evidence</p> <p>Includes little relevant information from outside learning</p> <p>Shows basic, though simplistic, understanding of the topic and related issues</p> <p>Weaker organization; some errors in writing detract from essay’s meaning</p>
2	<p>Poor focus; fails to answer the question adequately</p> <p>Some documents used correctly; some only paraphrased or misunderstood; fails to recognize any difference in the validity of evidence</p> <p>Includes little information from outside learning – what is included is irrelevant.</p> <p>Shows little understanding of the topic and related issues</p> <p>Poorly organized; many errors in standard English</p>
1	<p>Fails to address the question; confusing and unfocused</p> <p>Fails to use documents correctly; simply paraphrased or misunderstood</p> <p>Includes no relevant information from beyond the documents</p> <p>Shows almost no understanding of the topic or related issues</p> <p>Disorganized; littered with errors in standard English</p>
0	<p>No thesis; no attempt to address the question</p> <p>Ignores or misuses the documents</p> <p>Includes no information from beyond the documents</p> <p>Shows no understanding of the topic or related issues</p> <p>Lacks any organization; little attempt made; blank paper</p>

DBQ 1: CLASH OF CULTURES

Historical Context

Historians estimate that when Columbus first landed in the large Caribbean island of Hispaniola (today's Haiti and Dominican Republic) there were over one million natives living on that one island alone. Thirty years after the Spanish had arrived, the native population numbered fewer than 20,000. Only two percent of the original number of natives still remained. This experience was repeated again and again as European settlers and their descendents spread throughout North and South America. Native peoples were pushed aside, and their lands were confiscated. Their cultures were crushed. And most native people perished.

From our vantage point in the present, historical events sometimes seem almost inevitable. Because we know "how the story ends," we assume that the course of history was somehow determined, almost fated. But this is not true. Events and human decisions in the past shaped history just as the events and decisions of our time will affect our future.

Was the destruction of America's native cultures inevitable and unavoidable? Could the violence have been avoided? If other more broadminded people had been in charge, and different decisions had been made, could some type of mutual accommodation have been possible? Or, considering the time and situation, were tolerance, respect, and understanding simply out of the question?

■ **Directions:** The following question is based on the accompanying documents (1–8) in Part A. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of each document and the author's point of view. Be sure to

1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about this topic. How would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
2. Now, read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes. Answer the questions that follow each document.
3. Based on your own knowledge and on the information found in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answers the question.
4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. The essay should be logically presented and should include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge outside of the documents.

Question: Was it inevitable and unavoidable that violence and dispossession were outcomes of the centuries-long confrontation of Native Americans with European settlers and their American descendents?

DBQ 1: CLASH OF CULTURES, *CONTINUED*

**PART
A**

The following documents will help you understand the nature and extent of the cultural conflicts between Native Americans and the European colonists. Examine each document carefully, and answer the question or questions that follow.

Document 1

In 1493, upon returning from his first voyage to America, Christopher Columbus wrote a report to the Spanish government. This excerpt comes from that report.

This is a land to be desired . . . never to be relinquished. Here in a place most suitable and best for its proximity to the gold mines and for [transportation to Europe] . . . I took possession of a large town [from the natives]. I have made fortifications there, and I have left in it men, with arms and artillery and provisions for more than a year.

Why did Columbus seize this town? _____

How do you suppose the natives felt about the actions of Columbus and his men?

Document 2

During the century after Columbus' voyage, the Spanish government sent a number of military expeditions to America to explore the New World and conquer the natives. One of these was led by the conquistador Francisco Coronado, who in the 1540s led an army through the region that centuries later became the southwestern United States. What follows is a short excerpt from the orders he and other conquistadores were given.

You must explain to the natives . . . that there is only one God in heaven, and the emperor on earth to rule and govern it, whose subjects they must all become and whom they must serve.

With orders like this one, how do you suppose Coronado and his men treated the natives?

(continued)

DBQ 1: CLASH OF CULTURES, *CONTINUED*

Document 3

A century after the Spanish first colonized sections of the New World, the English and their descendents began to settle along the eastern seaboard of North America. As their settlements spread westward, conflicts with native peoples continued. Benjamin Franklin, who was a thoughtful observer of eighteenth-century American life, made this 1784 observation about the differences between the cultures of the Native Americans and colonial settlers.

Savages we call them, because their manners differ from ours, which we think [are perfect, and] they think the same of theirs Our laborious manner of life, compared with theirs, they [think] slavish and [inferior]; and the learning, on which we value ourselves, they regard as frivolous and useless.

What cultural differences between eighteenth-century Americans and native peoples did Franklin note in this statement?

Document 4

Tecumseh was a Shawnee leader during the early 1800s. He tried to stop the expansion of American settlement into the Great Lakes region by allying his followers with the British against the United States in the War of 1812. This is an excerpt from one of his speeches.

Where today are the Pequot? Where are the Narragansett, the Mohican, the Pokanoket and many other once powerful tribes of our people? They have vanished before the avarice [greed] and oppression of the white man, as snow before a summer sun.

What, according to Tecumseh, was to blame for the destruction of Native American cultures?

(continued)

DBQ 1: CLASH OF CULTURES, *CONTINUED*

Document 5

Here is another excerpt from Tecumseh’s speech.

... The land ... belongs to all. No tribe has a right to sell, even to each other, much less to strangers Sell a country! Why not sell the air, the great sea, as well as the earth? Did not the Great Spirit make them all for the use of his children?

What traditional Native American belief about land and its ownership was Tecumseh explaining here?

How did this belief differ from the viewpoints of the European settlers and their American descendents?

Document 6

Red Jacket was a Seneca leader of the late 1700s and early 1800s. This excerpt comes from a speech he made to a group of missionaries in Buffalo, New York, in 1805.

... our [lands] were once large, and yours were very small; you have now become a great people, and we have scarcely a place left to spread our blankets; you have got our country, but are not satisfied; [now] you want to force your religion upon us.

What actions of the American settlers was Red Jacket protesting in this speech?

Were these complaints justified? _____

(continued)

DBQ 1: CLASH OF CULTURES, *CONTINUED*

Document 7

In 1820, U.S. Secretary of War John C. Calhoun issued this directive about dealing with Native Americans.

[They] must be brought gradually under our authority and laws It is impossible, with their customs, that they should exist as independent communities in the midst of civilized society. They are not, in fact, an independent people, . . . nor ought they to be so considered. They should be taken under our guardianship; and our opinions, and not theirs, ought to prevail, in measures intended for their civilization and happiness.

How does this government directive describe relations between the American government and native peoples?

Document 8

U.S. Secretary of Interior Caleb Smith wrote this in a report in 1862.

The rapid progress of civilization upon this continent will not permit the lands which are required for cultivation to be surrendered to savage tribes for hunting Government has always demanded the removal of the Indians when their lands were required for agricultural purposes . . .

What, according to this statement by a U.S. government official, justifies the “removal of the Indians” from their lands?

**PART
B**

Was it inevitable and unavoidable that violence and dispossession were outcomes of the centuries-long confrontation of Native Americans with European settlers and their American descendents?

DBQ 2: ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Historical Context

By the mid-eighteenth century, the thirteen American colonies that were later to become the United States contained well over one million inhabitants. The vast number of Colonial Americans made their livings as farmers. But differing climates, geography, and social practices made for great variation in the nature of work in different regions and in the level of economic success enjoyed by different American colonists.

■ **Directions:** The following question is based on the accompanying documents (1–6). As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of each document and the author’s point of view. Be sure to

1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about this topic. How would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
2. Now, read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes. Answer the questions that follow each document.
3. Based on your own knowledge and on the information found in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answers the question.
4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. The essay should be logically presented and should include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge outside of the documents.

Question: Americans often consider their country a “land of opportunity.” How much economic opportunity truly did exist in Colonial America, and what factors affected the colonists’ opportunities to succeed?

DBQ 2: ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES, *CONTINUED*

**PART
A**

The following documents deal with the types and extent of economic opportunities that existed in Colonial America. Examine each document carefully, and answer the question or questions that follow.

Document 1

This is an excerpt from a popular college textbook explaining the causes of Bacon’s Rebellion of 1676. *Colonial America* was written by Oscar T. Barck, Jr., and Hugh Talmadge Lefler and published by Macmillan Company (1967, p. 209).

... Bacon’s Rebellion . . . was the first instance in the colonies “in which the common people rose not only against the royal governor, but also the rule of the privileged class.”

How does this document help to address the question of this DBQ? _____

Document 2

This excerpt is from *An Account of Pennsylvania . . .* (1698) by Gabriel Thomas. Thomas was a Welsh Quaker who settled in Pennsylvania in the 1680s.

... poor people (both men and women) of all kinds, can here get three times the wages for their labor they can in England or Wales.

What factors might help explain why wage rates were so much higher in the American colonies than in England and Wales?

Document 3

This excerpt is from Gottlieb Mittelberger, a German schoolteacher who traveled to Pennsylvania in the early 1750s. (Reprinted by permission of Harvard University Press from *Journey to Pennsylvania* by Gottlieb Mittelberger, Oscar Handlin, ed.)

(continued)

DBQ 2: ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES, CONTINUED

[Speaking of indentured servants] Many parents in order to pay their fares in this way . . . must barter and sell their children as if they were cattle. . . . No one in this country can run away from a master who has treated him harshly and get far. . . . Our Europeans who have been purchased must work hard all of the time. . . . Thus let him . . . who can do this by manual labor in his native country stay THERE rather than come to America.

Was America “a land of opportunity” for indentured servants? Explain.

Can both Documents 2 and 3 be valid, or do they contradict each other? _____

Document 4

These excerpts are from Andrew Burnaby, *Travels Through the Middle Settlements in North America* (1775). Burnaby was a young Englishman who traveled through the American colonies in the years just before the American Revolution.

The trade of this colony [Virginia] is large and extensive. Tobacco is the principal article of it. . . . Their manufactures are very inconsiderable. Boston . . . in New England, is one of the largest and most flourishing towns in North America . . . it is supposed to contain 3000 houses, and 18 or 20,000 inhabitants. . . . The buildings are in general good; the streets open and spacious . . . and the whole has much the air of some of our best country towns in England. The country round about it is exceedingly delightful.

What view does Burnaby give you of the level of economic opportunities in Colonial America? _____

Document 5

This excerpt is from Thomas Anburey, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of America* (1778). Anburey was a British officer during the American Revolution who, as a prisoner of war, was marched from Boston to Charlottesville, Virginia. He published his observations of America after returning to England. *(continued)*