

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

Rivers and Civilizations What's the Link?

*Human interaction with the environment shaped
technology, social life, and the rise of complex societies.*



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Debating the DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

Rivers and Civilizations What's the Link?

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):

Why did most of the earliest civilizations arise along the banks of major rivers, and how does this geographical setting help explain the key features of those civilizations?

- 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.

Rivers and Civilizations

Why do historians call some societies “great civilizations”? Value judgments are always involved. Yet, most historians agree that a real dividing line was first crossed in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia (in present-day Iraq and Kuwait) about 5,000 years ago. In crossing that dividing line, a combination of farm surpluses, technology, economic specialization, cities, writing, and other achievements helped form the first complex civilizations.

What explains this? There were many factors, but two seem most important: agriculture and a great river. The first agricultural villages began to appear more than 10,000 years ago. Yet, only after around 3500 BCE did the first complex civilizations emerge along certain great rivers. Why? First, the annual flooding of such rivers supplied new fertile soil regularly. Farm output on it soared when people cooperated enough to build and manage dikes, dams, canals, and other means of channeling and controlling river waters. Managing floods also took human effort and social cooperation beyond what small, isolated villages could supply.

In ancient Egypt, the Nile made possible the surplus crops needed to feed others as they labored on that civilization’s famous construction projects. From the pyramids to the tomb of Tutankhamen, from written hieroglyphics to elaborate religious ceremonies, ancient Egyptian civilization soared to great heights. Century after century, the Nile also played a key role in ancient Egypt’s long-lasting stability. Its highly regular annual floods kept the lands fertile, allowing the agricultural cycle to repeat itself predictably, year after year. The Nile, surrounded by deserts on each side and the sea to its north, united Egypt and kept it protected for much of its long history.

“Mesopotamia” means “land between the rivers”—the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers to be exact. Starting with the Sumerian city-states in the third millennium BCE, a series of civilizations arose there. Canals, dikes, ziggurats, bronze

weapons and tools, cuneiform script, and Hammurabi’s law code are only a part of what made these early societies significant. Unlike Egypt, ancient Mesopotamia was surrounded by hostile outsiders who faced few natural barriers. This resulted in a steady rise and fall of empires and much more political instability than Egypt experienced. But it also meant a constant infusion of new ideas, making Mesopotamia a kind of melting pot of the ancient world.

Another early river valley civilization arose in the Indus River valley, on the edge of the Indian subcontinent. It flourished from around 2500 BCE to 1700 BCE. Its water-control systems included great baths and elaborate drainage systems that may have had religious as well as practical significance.

China also emerged on a broad plain surrounding the lower reaches of the Yellow River in northern China. Unlike the other civilizations just named, Chinese civilization developed in much greater isolation. For this reason, China was distinct and unusual in many ways. Yet the same key features of ancient civilizations elsewhere were also present in China: agriculture, roads, canals, bronze and iron, early forms of religion, a powerful coordinating kingship, writing, and literature.

Even more isolated and unique were the earliest civilizations of the Americas. The Maya were not so much dependent on rivers as on a form of agriculture adapted to marshlands. Yet as with the river valley civilizations, Mayan agriculture also required a good deal of cooperative effort and coordination. It, too, fostered the growth of a complex society with many features in common with the river valley civilizations of Africa and Eurasia.

It is these features the sources for this lesson help you focus on as you discuss and debate the link between rivers and civilizations.

Rivers and Civilizations Time Line

3500–2700 BCE

• • • Around 3500 BCE, the Sumerians settle in Mesopotamia. Before 3000 BCE, the Sumerians develop writing in cuneiform on clay tablets. Sumerian city-states form. The wheel is in use there. Around 3100 BCE, Upper and Lower Egypt are united under Menes, the first Pharaoh. Irrigation and other water control projects are developed.

2700–2200 BCE

• • • During the Egyptian Old Kingdom (2700–2200 BCE), the great pyramids are built. Also during the Old Kingdom, Egyptian hieroglyphics become standardized. The Indus (Harappan) civilization arises along the Indus river in northwestern India (today's Pakistan) starting around 2600 BCE. In Mesopotamia in 2340 BCE, Sargon takes over much of Sumerian territory, establishing the Akkadian empire.

2200–1700 BCE

• • • The Akkadian empire lasts until 2125 BCE, when the Sumerians return to power for about a century in the Third Dynasty of Ur. Soon after that, the first Babylonian Empire arises in Mesopotamia (approximately 1900–1600 BCE). Hammurabi rules there from 1792 to 1750 BCE and produces his famous law code. In Egypt during the Middle Kingdom (approximately 2050–1650 BCE), the Pharaohs are at the height of their power. Around 1900 BCE, the Indus River civilization begins to collapse.

1700–1100 BCE

• • • In the 1600s, a Semitic people, the Hyksos, invade and rule over Lower Egypt for a century. Then Egypt's New Kingdom emerges and rules from 1578–1085 BCE. In China, the Shang Dynasty (approximately 1570–1050 BCE) is the first for which historians have clear evidence. Oracle bones carved with inscriptions have been found at the Shang capital of Anyang. These are the earliest examples of Chinese writing. (Legend describes an earlier Xia Dynasty as the time when the Chinese first built irrigation and drainage systems to tame the waters of the Yellow River.) During this time, the Indus River civilization disappears. In the 1500s or later, Aryans migrate into the Indus valley and then into the Ganges valley. By around 1200 BCE, the Olmec civilization begins to appear in Mesoamerica. It is based on rich soils in swampy lowland areas of what is now southern Mexico near the Gulf of Mexico. Large statues are built. Luxury artifacts from far away suggest a sizable trading network.

1100 BCE–900 CE

• • • Throughout the Eurasian landmass, new civilizations arise after about 1200 BCE, as the iron age and other changes end the sole dominance of the older river valley civilizations. Meanwhile, by 1000 BCE, the Maya in Mesoamerica have begun to build burial mounds and other kinds of ceremonial architecture. They will develop writing by around 700 BCE and will be carving complex solar calendars in stone by 400 BCE. Maya civilization reaches its height from about CE 200–900, with city-states, palaces, pyramids, carved stone texts, and more.

DOCUMENTS 1–3

Visual Primary Source Documents 1–3

**Document 1**

The Granger Collection, New York

**Document 2****Document 3**

Documents 2 & 3, © David A. Burack

Information on Documents 1–3

Document 1. This tomb painting from the Eighteenth Dynasty (1550–1292 BCE) shows an Egyptian ship being loaded with wheat for transport along the Nile. Since most people in ancient Egypt lived and farmed within just a few miles of the Nile, the river could easily be used to transport and trade food surpluses in ships like this throughout the entire realm.

Documents 2 & 3 show ruins at Harappa, which, along with Mohenjo-Daro, was a major city of the Indus River civilization in present-day Pakistan. Document 2 shows a covered drain, which collected household wastes and drained the streets. Document 3 shows a large well and bathing platforms. Archaeologists think the baths found at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro may be evidence that washing and cleanliness had a religious or ritual meaning.