

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

The Impact of the Printing Press in China and Europe

Each society mastered this technology early, but the impact of printing on each varied substantially. Why?



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Debating the DOCUMENTS

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in Primary Source Documents

The Impact of the Printing Press in China and Europe

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:

- 2** Development and interaction of cultures.

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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 invention of a printing press using movable type was a truly revolutionary development.” Do you agree or disagree? 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.

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.

The Impact of the Printing Press

“It’s revolutionary!” This phrase is overworked in our day, to say the least. Whether it is some new electronic gadget, the latest fashion statement, a diet fad sweeping the nation, or an innovative TV series, we often are told that “it’s revolutionary.” New forms of technology are often said to be revolutionary. And it is true that a single technological breakthrough may change life for millions. Still, it is safe to say that most of the things that get called “revolutionary” today are nothing of the sort.

Yet many historians do use this term for one technological breakthrough—printing. Or to be precise, the printing press with movable type. Printing is the process of rapidly producing many copies of a written document or any drawing or design. In 1436, Johannes Gutenberg of Germany adapted the heavy screw of an olive press to force an inked block onto a piece of paper. Later, he created small pieces of metal type for the letters of the alphabet. These could be arranged on a printing plate to print a sheet of paper, then removed and rearranged to be used again. Suddenly, a book that once took months or years to copy by hand could now be copied over and over in days.

In Europe, Gutenberg’s press came as the Renaissance was inspiring thinkers, writers and artists in Italy and elsewhere. A few decades later, Martin Luther launched the Reformation, which would transform Europe’s religious and political life. Then *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres* by Nicolaus Copernicus was printed in 1543. It was followed by observations, theories, and mathematical analyses of moving objects on Earth and in the heavens. This string of breakthroughs together launched the era of modern science. Finally, an age of exploration began, opening up whole new regions and continents to merchants, settlers, map-makers, and writers.

Did the printing press cause all this revolutionary change? It certainly gave it a huge boost. It

allowed Luther to spread his ideas via books and pamphlets, and it made possible the widespread access to the Bible so strongly stressed by the Reformation. Printing enabled scientists to share and check one another’s findings far more carefully and rapidly than in the past. It spread the news of the New World widely, thereby exciting interest in and support for exploration and colonization. Without the printing press, it is hard to image these momentous changes unfolding as quickly or spreading as widely as they did.

Yet if printing was so revolutionary in Europe, what about China? After all, it was actually China that first invented paper, printing, and movable type. Yet China experienced no cultural upheaval of the sort that accompanied movable type in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and beyond. China invented paper in the second century CE. By the ninth century, it was using woodblock printing to produce entire books. In woodblock printing, an entire page is carved in relief on a woodblock, which is then inked and pressed against a sheet of paper. Sometime after 1041, Pi Sheng then created movable pieces of type out of clay.

Of course, movable type was not as useful for Chinese writing, given the thousands of individual characters it uses, as compared with European languages based on an alphabet of just twenty-six letters. Whether for this reason or others, no great cultural upheavals accompanied the development of printing in China. China was inventive and prosperous during these centuries. Yet its Confucian values and imperial political system continued to guide it for most of this time.

So why was the impact of printing so different in China and in Europe? The sources for this lesson will help you think about, debate, and discuss this in greater depth.

The Printing Press Time Line

104 CE

• • • The Chinese invent paper by this date, at least.

618–906

• • • Tang Dynasty, China. Carved wooden blocks are inked and pressed onto paper, enabling the printing of many copies of a document.

868

• • • *The Diamond Sutra*, a Buddhist scripture, is printed. It is the first dated example of a book produced by block printing.

1023

• • • The Song Dynasty issues true paper money.

1041

• • • Artisan Pi Sheng in China invents movable type made out of clay.

1241

• • • Books are printed in Korea using movable type.

1309

• • • Europeans manufacture paper for the first time. Invented in China centuries earlier, paper probably first enters Europe via the Muslim world.

1377

• • • Block-printed playing cards appear in Europe. Such cards had long been produced in China.

1392

• • • Foundries that can produce bronze type are opened in Korea.

1423

• • • In Europe, the first recorded use of block printing.

1436

• • • Johannes Gutenberg begins work on a printing press.

1440

• • • Gutenberg completes his wooden press, which uses movable metal type.

1454

• • • Gutenberg prints indulgences, which are notes sold by the Pope that reduce punishment in purgatory for sins committed in this life.

1455

• • • Gutenberg's famous 42-line Bible is available for sale.

1476

• • • William Caxton sets up his printing press in Westminster, England.

1499

• • • Printing is established in at least 250 European cities. Some estimate that 15 million copies of 30,000 book titles are printed.

1517

• • • Luther posts his "95 Theses" on the cathedral door at Wittenberg, launching the Protestant Reformation.

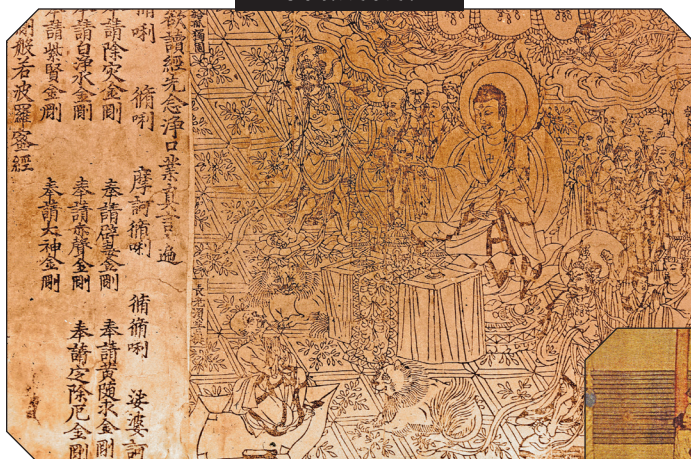
1543

• • • Nicolaus Copernicus's *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres* is printed. It depicts the universe with the Earth and other planets revolving around the sun. Efforts to confirm this "heliocentric" theory led to the work of Kepler, Galileo, Newton, and a scientific revolution.

DOCUMENTS 1 & 2

Visual 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. This is *The Diamond Sutra*, the earliest known example of a complete book produced using block printing. A sutra is a Buddhist document recording what is said to be a discourse by Buddha. *The Diamond Sutra* was first translated from Indian Sanskrit into Chinese around 400 CE; this particular version of it was block printed in 868 CE. It is a long scroll, not a book with separate pages as we are used to. It was found in 1907 in a cave in northwest China, along the Silk Road. Although not the first example of block printing, it is the first dated, block-printed book.

Document 2. This Chinese painting on silk shows young Confucian scholars awaiting the posting of the results of their civil service examinations. Confucius stressed filial piety, obedience to superiors, decorum, and order. The classics attributed to him became the core of China's civil service exams used to select young scholars for the imperial government's vast central bureaucracy. Because of China's printing technology, copies of this classical literature became widely available, giving many individuals a chance to advance in careers in government service.