

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

Is Population Growth a Crisis?

*World population soared in the 20th century.
Is it a monumental crisis or a manageable challenge?*



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Debating the DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

Is Population Growth a Crisis?

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:

- 1** Interaction between humans and the environment.

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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):

Describe the changes in life expectancy and infant mortality over the past century, and explain why you do or do not think the phrase “population crisis” should be used to sum up these trends.

- 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.

Is Population Growth a Crisis?

In many ways, the twentieth century is unique in all of human history. During this period, enormous scientific breakthroughs; industrial, commercial, and agricultural innovations; medical discoveries; and public health systems vastly enhanced the physical well-being of people all over the world.

All of these advances, however, brought new problems, one of which was an explosion in the world's population. These advances vastly extended the number of years individuals live, and greatly reduced rates of infant mortality. These are wonderful achievements, but they inevitably cause populations to grow.

In 1800, average life expectancy was probably in the low 30s nearly everywhere in the world. This means a newborn could expect, on average, to live about that long. This figure began to increase in certain locales: By 1900, global life expectancy rose to about 47 years; today, it's about 67 years, according to UN statistics. In the wealthiest nations, average life expectancy is more than 80 years for women and in the high 70s for men.

There is a good deal of regional variation in these figures, naturally. Yet life expectancy has risen dramatically even in many of the poorer nations. About three-quarters of all the nations on earth have an average life expectancy of over 60 years. The main exception is sub-Saharan Africa, where rates of HIV/AIDS infection are tragically high.

Closely related to life expectancy is the infant mortality rate. This is the number of infants under the age of one who die, out of every 1000 births. In 1900, rates of 200 per 1000 live births were common everywhere, due to malnutrition and various diseases such as diphtheria, pertussis, measles, and others. Today, most wealthy nations have rates below 10 infant deaths per 1000 live births. Three-fourths of all nations are below 50 infant deaths per 1000 live births. Again, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates, with 10–15 nations at 100 or more deaths per thousand.

The causes of these improvements were higher quality health care and nutrition, safer food, better

education, new medical knowledge, central heating, and public health measures resulting in sanitation systems and clean drinking water.

As a result, population has soared. After thousands of years of human history, the world's population only reached its first billion by the early 1800s. Today, it is over six billion. UN estimates show the number rising possibly as high as ten billion by 2050. Surging populations clearly use up more natural resources and tend to threaten the health of the environment. Poverty adds enormously to this problem: Poorer nations do not have life expectancies as quite as high as richer nations, but they do have much higher fertility rates. That is, women there have many more children than in wealthier nations. With lower infant mortality rates, this results in their populations skyrocketing.

By the mid-twentieth century, concern about overpopulation was turning into panic. Some predicted virtual doom for the human race by the year 2000—massive resource depletion, famine, and war, leaving billions dead. Crash programs to drastically limit population growth were recommended as necessary to limit the inevitable horrors.

Were these fears justified? Are they still justified? The same UN estimates of population growth also show world population leveling off. In fact, in many wealthier nations, fertility rates have dropped below what it takes to replace the current population. In those nations, some people actually warn of too few new births, not too many. In the poorer nations, fertility rates have also begun to decline due to better nutrition, health care, and education, and greater rights for women. As a result, the population debate has become more complicated in many ways. It is still a very serious one, however. The sources here will help you better understand and take part in that vital and ongoing debate.

Population Growth Time Line

1798

In his “Essay on the Principle of Population,” Reverend Thomas Malthus claims that while population increases at a geometrical ratio, available food and other resources only increase at a slower arithmetical ratio. As a result, population inevitably outpaces the ability to take care of all the new people unless war, disease, famine, or some other calamity keep population down. Ever since, arguments about population center around this theory and its many critics.

1800

• • • Around 1800, world population reaches one billion.

Mid-1800s

• • • The Industrial Revolution begins in England and spreads. While it increased wealth, it may actually have worked against population growth at first, in that it led to crowded, cold, and filthy urban housing, unsanitary waste disposal, and dirty food and water. For example, outbreaks of cholera in 1831, 1848, 1854, and 1866 devastate Britain.

1860–1864

• • • French chemist Louis Pasteur makes the breakthrough discoveries that confirm the germ theory of disease. He finds that germs are the cause of the decay of organic matter. In the decades ahead, discoveries are made of the germs that cause diphtheria, cholera, bubonic plague, and other diseases.

1871

• • • The new germ theory proves that many dangerous germs are spread through unclean water. This pushes the British government to pass the Public Health Act of 1871, which forces cities to provide supplies of clean drinking water and to remove sewage from the streets. An era of growing public health regulation begins.

Early 1900s

• • • Many improvements begin to drive down infant mortality, especially in better-off societies—clean drinking water and better sewage systems, more and safer food, greater care in hospitals to maintain cleanliness and keep infections from spreading, and later on, antibiotics, vaccines, and many other medical breakthroughs. As a result, life expectancy begins to rise in North America, Europe, and other wealthier regions, especially.

1927

• • • World population reaches two billion.

1968

• • • As a growing environmental movement focuses on pollution, resource depletion, and overpopulation, Paul Ehrlich publishes his dire warnings of worldwide peril in his book *The Population Bomb*. However, 1968 is also the year when a former USAID director first used the term “Green Revolution” to describe a vast array of new techniques, including high-yield strains of crops that were improving food production and would allow it to keep pace with population growth.

1975

• • • World population reaches four billion.

1979

• • • China institutes its one-child policy as a population-control method. It seeks to limit couples to one child, enforcing this through fines and other constraints. It is applied unevenly. China’s policy is extreme, but it is one example of a broader approach to overpopulation that stresses population control through active efforts to influence reproductive decisions.

1999

• • • World population reaches six billion.

DOCUMENTS 1 & 2

Visual Primary Source Documents 1 & 2

Document 1



Nick Stubbs, Shutterstock Inc.

Document 2



Kaspars Grinvalds, Shutterstock Inc.

Information on Documents 1 & 2

Document 1. Population problems usually become most noticeable when combined with environmental crises, civil war, or poverty. These are the hands of refugees reaching out for food relief after a devastating tsunami hit Aceh, Indonesia, in 2004, killing over two hundred thousand people throughout the heavily populated Indian Ocean region.

Document 2. Overpopulation is as much a problem in cities as in impoverished rural areas, as this cityscape suggests. In 2007, a United Nations Population Fund report announced that by 2008, more than half the world's population (about 3.3 billion people) would be living in towns and cities. This number is expected to reach about 5 billion by 2030.