

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

Jackson and the Indians

The Indian wars of the first four decades of the 1800s, and the decisions that led to the Indians' removal to lands west of the Mississippi.



Debating the
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Contents

Teacher Introduction	1
Suggestions to the Student	5
Introductory Essay	6
Jackson and the Indians 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
Visual Primary Sources	21

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.

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):

“Andrew Jackson’s Indian removal policies were very harsh. But they were also realistic, both because of national security threats and because of America’s rapid growth as a nation.” Assess the validity of this statement. That is, explain why you do or do not agree with it.

- 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.

Jackson and the Indians

Andrew Jackson was beloved by many ordinary Americans. They knew him as “Old Hickory” and saw him as a champion of the common man in an increasingly democratic age.

To the Indians of the Southeast, however, Jackson was known as “Sharp Knife.” As this nickname suggests, Jackson often dealt harshly with Native Americans. He had fought them nearly his entire life, starting as a boy during the Revolutionary War. In the War of 1812, he led U.S. troops and Indian allies against Creek warriors at Horseshoe Bend in 1814. This bloody battle was a turning point in the defeat of the powerful Creek nation in Alabama. Later, Jackson fought other large groups of Native Americans in Florida in the first Seminole War (1817–1818).

Jackson fought these and other wars to clear huge areas of the South of Indians and make the region safe for white settlers. However, he was not driven only by greed or hunger for land. Jackson knew that the powerful Southeastern tribes often allied with British and Spanish forces that threatened the new nation from this region. Jackson’s battle of Horseshoe Bend, for example, was really a part of the War of 1812. It was followed shortly after by Jackson’s most famous military triumph against the British in that war, the battle of New Orleans. National security fears and a desire to foster national economic growth were both key factors guiding Jackson in his dealings with Native Americans.

Yet Jackson saw himself as a friend of the Indian, even though he shared the deep prejudices of his age. Many Indians had shown an ability to trade with, adapt to and learn from the settlers and their increasingly powerful civilization. This was especially so of some of Jackson’s main foes, the so-called five “civilized” tribes of the Southeast

(Creeks, Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws and Seminoles). Yet Jackson saw Indians as inferior. He insisted that Indian societies could never hold their own surrounded by white society. They could only survive, he believed, by moving west of the Mississippi where they might still have a chance to maintain their traditional ways of life.

As President, Jackson pushed Congress to pass the Indian Removal Act of 1830. This law applied to all Indians, not just those in the Southeast. In time, it would be used to clear the entire U.S. east of the Mississippi of all major Native American nations. It was often enforced with great cruelty, especially during the famous “Trail of Tears,” when some 18,000 Cherokees were forced to trek hundreds of miles to the Indian Territory in the present-day state of Oklahoma. More than 4,000 died en route.

Was there a better way? It’s easy with hindsight to say there was. Many at the time spoke out on behalf of Indian rights. And the Cherokees especially were making a major effort to adopt the cultural and economic ways of the dominant white society. Yet a huge and growing population of whites was pushing west. Many of them were poor land-starved immigrants from Europe. The governments of the time were not all that powerful, and it is not clear they could have slowed this relentless tide even if they had wanted to. Real national security concerns did exist among U.S. leaders, as well. And even friends of the Indians often shared the racist prejudices against them. In this context, removal may well have been the best of several very bad options. Or perhaps there was in fact a better way.

Jackson and the Indians Time Line

1813–1814

- • • General Andrew Jackson leads troops against the Creek Indians. The Creeks are defeated and lose 14 million acres in Georgia and Alabama.

1814–1824

- • • Jackson is the key figure in arranging several treaties by which the “Five Civilized Tribes” of the Southeast and other tribes agree to give up eastern lands for lands west of the Mississippi. Despite the treaties, many Indians refuse to move.

1815

- • • Jackson becomes a national hero at the Battle of New Orleans at the end of the War of 1812.

1816–1818

- • • *The First Seminole War:* Jackson fights Seminoles and runaway slaves in Florida. He can't defeat the Indians, but Spain is forced to give up Florida.

1828

- • • Jackson is elected President. Also that year, Elias Boudinot and Sequoyah begin publishing the Cherokee Phoenix, the first American newspaper published in a Native American language.

1830

- • • Jackson signs the Indian Removal Act. It gives him authority to move eastern Indians to lands west of the Mississippi. That year, the Choctaws sign a treaty exchanging eight million acres for lands in Oklahoma.

1832

- • • The Supreme Court headed by John Marshall says that Georgia's laws “can have no force” within Cherokee boundaries. Georgia refuses to accept this, and President Jackson agrees. He declares, “John Marshall has made his decision, now let him enforce it!” *The Black Hawk War:* After moving west of the Mississippi, the Sac and Fox tribes try to move back to their homeland in Illinois and Southern Wisconsin. Troops pursue them. On August 2, some 150 Sac and Fox men, women and children, under a flag of truce, are massacred by the Illinois militia. Chief Black Hawk is later taken prisoner.

1835

- • • Some Cherokee leaders agree to removal to the Indian Territory in Oklahoma. Most other Cherokee do not accept this agreement.

1835–1842

- • • *Second Seminole War:* Under Chief Osceola, the Seminoles fight a long, brutal war in the Everglades. Osceola is captured and later killed, and his warriors nearly wiped out.

1838

- • • Federal troops forcibly remove almost 16,000 Cherokee. Many are herded into camps. The rest undertake an 800-mile forced march to Oklahoma. In all some, 4,000 Cherokee die during the removal process known still as “The Trail of Tears.”

DOCUMENT 1

Visual Primary Source Document 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Information on Document 1

This etching was done by William Charles, a Scottish-born caricaturist who had come to America in 1805. It is titled *A scene on the frontiers as practiced by the "humane" British and their "worthy" allies*. The cartoon may have been prompted by a massacre during the War of 1812 in Chicago and the purchase of American scalps there by British Colonel Proctor. On the left a British officer receives a bloody scalp from an Indian, who has a purse with "Reward for Sixteen Scalps" hanging from his flintlock.

The officer says, "Bring me the Scalps and the King our master will reward you." Below the illustration are eight lines of verse: "Arise Columbia's Sons and forward press, / Your Country's wrongs call loudly for redress; / The Savage Indian with his Scalping knife, / Or Tomahawk may seek to take your life; / By bravery aw'd they'll in a dreadful Fright, / Shrink back for Refuge to the Woods in Flight; / Their British leaders then will quickly shake, / And for those wrongs shall restitution make."