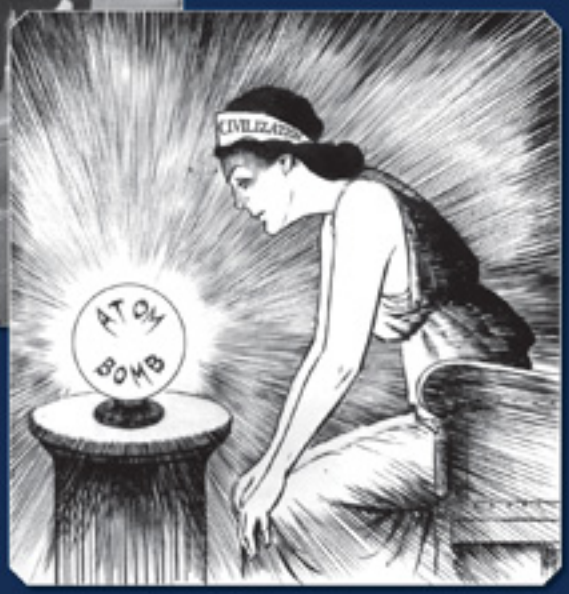
DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints in Primary Source Documents

1945
The Post-War Mood

The world war's end brought relief and celebration, but also anxiety about new dangers on the horizon.



Contents

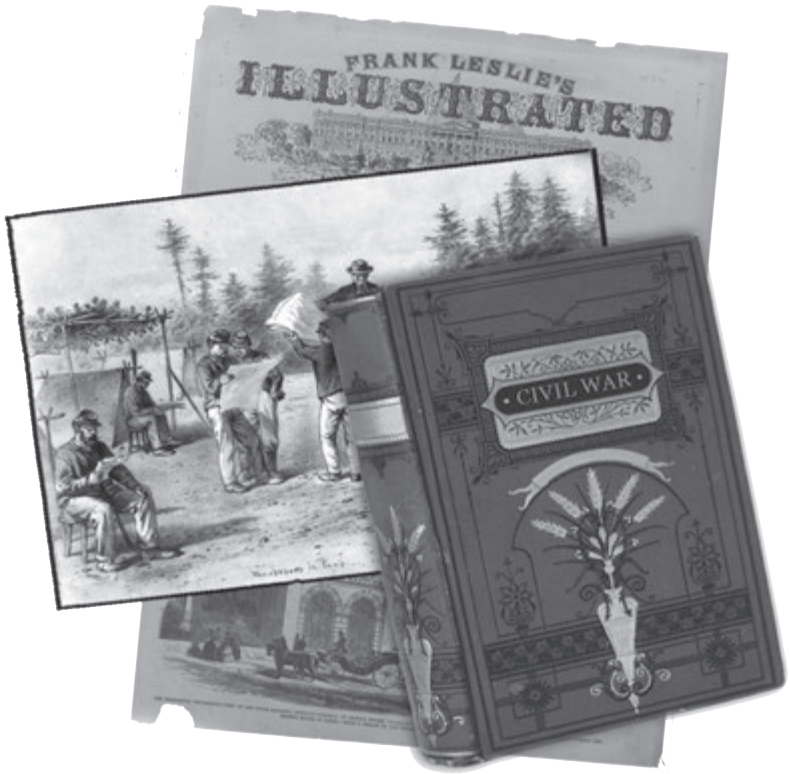
Teacher Introduction

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.

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):

"In 1945, Americans faced the future with great confidence, an understandable mood given their great triumph over Germany and Japan." 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.

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.

1945: The Nation at a Turning Point

For Americans, the first seven months of 1945 were a time of agony and pain, yet also hope. The final five months of the year were a time of triumph tinged with profound fear. All in all, it was an amazing year. Each day was lived with a sense that anything could happen. A turning point in history had arrived.

How do we make sense of our lives and our world when living through such an intense time? The documents in this booklet will give you some sense of how those living through 1945 thought and felt about it.

Early in that year, Allied forces swept into Germany. As they did, U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin met at Yalta, in the Crimea, to plan the final stages of the war and the post-war settlement. Decisions at Yalta would also fuel tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union just after the war. Many say that the future Cold War was born at this meeting.

Another event that would help shape the Cold War and the entire post-war world took place in April, at the San Francisco conference establishing the United Nations.

Just before this conference, on April 12, Franklin Roosevelt died, having led the nation through 12 years of economic hard times and a huge world war. At about that time, the two dictators the United States had fought in Europe also died: Italy's Benito Mussolini, who was executed, and Germany's Adolf Hitler, who committed suicide in his bunker in Berlin.

When U.S. forces then liberated the concentration camps of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau, the full depths of Nazi barbarism began to sink in. Then, on May 8, Nazi Germany surrendered. One of the most hideous tyrannies in all of history was gone.

Yet Americans had little time to take in the horrifying reality of the Holocaust or to celebrate the Nazi collapse. Intense fighting continued in the Pacific against Japan. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers waited anxiously to see if they would be needed in an all-out invasion of the Japanese mainland. They were spared this fate, but at a huge price. On August 6 and 9, two atomic bombs destroyed two Japanese cities—Hiroshima and Nagasaki—killing more than 100,000 people instantly. The atomic age was born.

Within a few days of that second atomic bomb, Japan surrendered. World War II was over. As Americans celebrated, however, they also had to absorb the terrifying news of what nuclear weapons would mean for them and for the world. The combination of relief, joy, and shock would stay with them for the rest of the year, and beyond.

Some of their joy and shock had to do with the end of strict wartime controls over every aspect of their lives. Suddenly, U.S. industry was able to turn from war production to the production of consumer goods. During the war, all sorts of goods were rationed, or strictly limited per person. Now, as millions of soldiers arrived home, Americans began to enjoy a prosperity they had not known since the Great Depression began in 1929. Prices were controlled for a time, but soon a huge pent-up demand for goods made inflation a growing problem.

Historians write about the past looking back, already knowing how things turned out. But when studying history, it's important to keep in mind that people live their lives forward, never knowing how things will turn out. They always face an unknowable future. Yet they must make choices anyway. These documents may give you a sense of how Americans viewed the future in the momentous, turning-point year of 1945.

1945: A Time Line

February — Feb. 4–11: At the Yalta Conference, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin discuss post-war Germany, the planned United Nations, political arrangements in Poland, and land to be ceded to the Soviets in return for their joining the war against Japan. Feb. 19: Marines land on Iwo Jima.

March — March 7: U.S. forces cross the Rhine River and enter Germany. March 10: Hundreds of bombers hit Tokyo, killing tens of thousands. Firebombing raids of other cities on the Japanese mainland begin.

April — April 1: U.S. forces land on Okinawa. April 12: President Roosevelt dies. He is succeeded by Vice President Harry S. Truman. April 25: Representatives of 50 nations meet in San Francisco to begin work on the charter of the United Nations. April 28: Italian anti-fascist fighters capture and kill Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. Two days later, Germany's Adolf Hitler commits suicide.

May — May 8: Germany surrenders unconditionally to the Allies. May 8 is V-E (Victory in Europe) Day; the war in Europe is over.

June — June 5: Germany is divided into British, French, U.S., and Soviet occupation zones. June 26: Fifty nations sign the U.N. charter in San Francisco.

July — July 16: An atomic bomb is successfully tested at Alamogordo, New Mexico. July 17–August 2: The Allied leaders hold the Potsdam Conference to discuss the fate of Germany and demand Japan's unconditional surrender.

August — Aug. 6–9: Atomic bombs are dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing more than 100,000 instantly. Along with Soviet entry into the war against Japan on August 8, this convinces Japan to surrender on August 14. August 15 is V-J (Victory over Japan) Day. August 20: The War Production Board ends most of its restrictions on manufacturing.

September — Sept. 2: Japan formally signs its surrender on the U.S. battleship Missouri in Tokyo Bay.

November — Nov. 20: Allied trials begin for 22 German officers in Nuremberg, Germany, for crimes and atrocities committed during the war. Twelve will be sentenced to death by hanging.

Visual Primary Source Document 1

Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Information on Document 1

It took two atomic bombs to finally convince the Japanese to surrender. The United States dropped the first one on the city of Hiroshima on August 6. Hours later, President Harry S. Truman, returning from the Potsdam conference, told sailors aboard the U.S. cruiser *Augusta* about this first use of the atomic bomb. The other atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on August 9.

The development of the bomb had been a top secret project, and practically no one knew about it until it was first used against Japan. Then a few days later, on August 14, Americans learned of Japan's surrender. They were expecting many more months of brutal fighting. The surrender came as a sudden and shocking surprise, and it brought thousands of Americans into the streets to celebrate.

This famous photo was taken that day, August 14. It shows a sailor kissing a young nurse in the middle of Times Square in New York City. These two, along with so many others, were overjoyed at the realization that the war was truly over.