

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

The Covenant Chain

The Iroquois and Colonial America

How successful were the Iroquois in basing their dealings with Europeans on the concept of the Covenant Chain?



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Debating the
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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.

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):

How wise was it for the Iroquois to base their dealings with Europeans on Covenant Chain diplomacy?

- 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 DBQ is on page 20.

The Iroquois and the Covenant Chain

The arrival of European settlers in North America in the 1600s presented Native Americans with both an opportunity and a danger. The opportunity was for trade. Europeans wanted the furs and deer skins Indians had to offer. The Indians wanted the guns, tools, kettles, and clothing of the Europeans. The danger in this contact was that the Europeans were powerful. Their weapons, growing numbers, and hunger for land all threatened the way of life of every native tribe or nation.

Native Americans had to decide how best to balance their wish to trade with Europeans against the dangers the newcomers posed. One group of Native Americans was quite successful at this, at least for some time. Its success had much to do with a series of treaties known as the Covenant Chain. This group was the Iroquois.

The Iroquois actually call themselves the “Haudenasee.” They were also known as the “Five Nations,” because they were actually a confederacy, or league, of five nations in what is now upstate New York. The nations were the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. (In 1722, the Tuscaroras joined them, making them the Six Nations.)

The Iroquois League was not really a government. It was a regular gathering of sachems (chiefs) from the clans making up the Five Nations. These sachems met to deal with common dangers or problems. The meetings included ceremonies, speeches, and the use of belts of wampum beads to record or mark what was decided. Gifts of beaver pelts and other goods accompanied speeches.

It was the same in meetings with Europeans. And sachems of the Five Nations did meet with the Europeans often. At times, they met with the French and sought peace with them. Yet they were most often allied with the English.

Nevertheless, their real goal always was to ensure their own security and win the best terms in the fur trade with both England and France.

The Iroquois were usually middlemen in this trade. That is, they traded for furs with tribes farther west and then sold these furs to Europeans. Most of the time, they sold furs to the English at Albany. The French usually bought their furs directly from other tribes. This was why the Iroquois were more often at war with the French and their Indian allies.

Starting in 1677, the Iroquois and the English agreed to a series of treaties that came to be known as the Covenant Chain. This “chain” was said to tie the two groups together in friendship. Because of it, the Iroquois were sure of being able to trade furs for the British weapons and other goods they wanted. The British got the furs—and they also gained Iroquois allies in their wars with the French.

Over time, the Iroquois seemed to grow in power. At times, they claimed control over other tribes all the way to the Mississippi River. The British backed up these claims, hoping to use their ties with the Iroquois to gain control over the other tribes. For a while, the Iroquois thrived. For two centuries, they remained fiercely independent. They were greatly feared and respected by French and British alike. Yet their need for European weapons and other goods steadily increased, and this changed their culture and society drastically. In the long run, they lost power as the tide of settlement finally swept around and over them.

Did they choose the best solution to the opportunity and threat presented by the Europeans? Historians today still debate this question. Now, the documents in this booklet can help you discuss and debate it as well.

Iroquois Time Line

1560–1570

According to Iroquois myths, during this time, the prophet Deganawidah and his follower Hiawatha found the Iroquois Confederacy or League to end warfare between the Five Nations. Some think this took place much earlier.

1608–1609

French explorer Samuel de Champlain founds Quebec on the St. Lawrence River. The next year, Champlain and about 60 Huron and Algonquin allies battle 200 Iroquois in what is now upstate New York. The Iroquois have never seen firearms, and they quickly flee. Also that year, Henry Hudson sails up the river now named for him and trades with Indians. The Dutch soon found the colony of New Netherlands (present-day New York). They become the Five Nations' main trading partners.

1620s–1630s

European diseases spread among Iroquois and other tribes. Their numbers go way down due to the deaths from these epidemics.

1626

The Huron trade furs directly with the French. This angers the Iroquois, who want the fur trade to go through them to the Dutch. The Iroquois are now well armed with guns. They war against the Hurons and destroy them. They also war against other tribes farther west. They seek to control the fur trade. They also need captives to "adopt" as new members of their own tribes, which are much smaller due to the diseases.

1640s

England takes over New Netherlands and renames it New York. Soon the English replace the Dutch as the main trading partners of the Iroquois.

1677

This year marks the first of many agreements between the English and the Iroquois. These agreements tie them together in what they call the Covenant Chain.

1701

After years of helping the English, the Iroquois make peace with the French. They want to be able to choose which side to support as they see fit. They also stop fighting the western tribes. Yet they still need new captives to adopt and begin attacking other tribes much farther south.

1747

There is a huge increase in settlers who move onto Iroquois lands or lands of the nearby tribes that the Iroquois control. In 1722, one southern tribe, the Tuscorora, joins the Iroquois. This makes them the Six Nations.

1754–1763

The French and Indian War ends with the British takeover of Canada. This means the Iroquois can no longer play off the British against the French as they have for so long. As settlers move west, the Iroquois start to lose control of more and more of their lands.

DOCUMENT 1

Visual Primary Source Document 1



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-108526.

Information on Document 1

In 1608, France's Samuel de Champlain founded Quebec. The French wanted to trade with the nearby Indians for their furs. Soon, however, they also got caught up in warfare between these Indians and the Iroquois to the south. In 1609, Champlain led French soldiers and their Huron, Montagnais, and Algonquin allies south to what is today Lake Champlain in upstate New York. There they clashed with the Mohawks, the eastern-most Iroquois tribe. The above illustration, created in 1613, shows the battle that took place.

The Mohawks were defeated in this battle. Yet it also taught them about European firearms. The illustration shows the Mohawks grouped together openly, using bows and arrows and protecting themselves with wooden body armor. This form of warfare soon changed completely. The Iroquois quickly began to trade furs for the guns and other goods the Europeans had to offer. In time, guns enabled the Iroquois to fight in smaller, faster-moving groups hiding in the forest. Their military might grew rapidly.