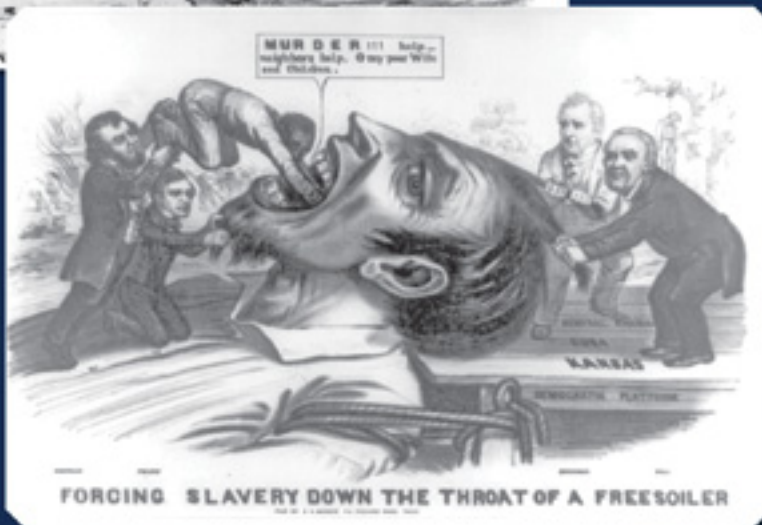


## DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints  
in Primary Source Documents

# "Bleeding Kansas" A Failure of Compromise

*The hope for some sort of compromise over the issue of slavery died in the mid-1850s in Kansas. Why?*



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*Debating* the  
**DOCUMENTS**

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of slavery died in the mid-1850s in Kansas. Why?*

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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):**

Was compromise over slavery impossible in Kansas during the troubles there after 1854? Why or why not?

- 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.



## ***“Bleeding Kansas”: A Failure of Compromise***

From the time of the U.S. Constitution in 1787 until 1860, Americans knew that the issue of slavery might one day break the young republic apart. During that time, they sought to keep the peace by trying to compromise over slavery on several key points.

In 1820, for example, the Missouri Compromise admitted Missouri as a slave state while it banned slavery from the rest of the Louisiana Purchase north of 36° 30' north latitude. This compromise smoothed over the problem of slavery and the western territories for a quarter century. Then the Mexican War (1846–48) added more western lands to the nation. The question of whether to allow slavery in those lands required yet another settlement, the Compromise of 1850. Most abolitionists hated its tough new Fugitive Slave Law, which required Northerners to help slave owners recover escaped slaves. Still, most Americans hoped the slavery issue was closed for good.

Yet only four years later, in 1854, Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas tore it open again with his Kansas-Nebraska Act. Douglas wanted a proposed transcontinental railroad to go west from Chicago. For this to happen, a territorial government would have to be organized in the Louisiana Purchase lands. To get Southern support for this, however, Douglas had to agree to replace the ban on slavery in those lands with something called “popular sovereignty.” This meant allowing settlers in a territory to decide for themselves whether or not to have slavery. Douglas was willing to reopen the slavery issue just to get the transcontinental railroad route he favored.

In a way, America’s great dream of westward expansion had run right up against its biggest nightmare, slavery. And this time, the issue could not be compromised away.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act divided the Louisiana Purchase lands into two territories, Kansas and

Nebraska. Nebraska was unlikely ever to have slaves. But Kansas was next to the slave state of Missouri. It quickly became a battleground. The New England Emigrant Aid Society sent hundreds of settlers to Kansas to keep slavery out. Abolitionist minister Henry Ward Beecher supplied many with Sharps rifles, which came to be known as “Beecher’s Bibles.” Meanwhile, thousands of armed Southerners from Missouri and elsewhere also poured into the state to vote illegally for the proslavery side in the many elections that would take place there over the next few years.

Some of the elections were for state legislatures or for a delegate to Congress. Others were for state constitutional conventions or the constitutions they wrote. Some elections were boycotted by anti-slavery forces, others by proslavery forces. Democratic presidents made matters worse by favoring proslavery forces even though free-staters were in the majority.

As the political process stalled in Kansas, violence erupted. Thousands of “border ruffians” from Missouri crossed over to cause trouble. Abolitionists and other anti-slavery settlers also arrived, many ready to fight. Most famous was John Brown, who, with four of his sons, murdered five proslavery men in revenge for an armed attack on the free-state stronghold of Lawrence. Most settlers were caught in the middle and simply wanted to live in peace.

It was too late, however, to contain the anger boiling over in Kansas and the nation. In all, 55 people were killed in the fighting. Only in 1861, after the Civil War began, was Kansas finally admitted as a free state. The primary sources here will help you better understand why “Bleeding Kansas” put an end to any hope for compromise in the agonizing tragedy of slavery in America.

## "Bleeding Kansas" Time Line

1846-48

• • •

The Mexican War begins. Southern Democrats are key supporters of the war, which they hope will add new slave territories to the nation. As a result of the war, the U.S. does acquire vast new lands.

1850

• • •

A new and stronger Fugitive Slave Law is passed as part of the Compromise of 1850. It forces Northerners to do much more to aid Southern slave owners seeking to recapture escaped slaves. Many in the North are outraged.

1852

• • •

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is published.

1854

• • •

The Kansas-Nebraska Act sets aside the Missouri Compromise, which had limited slavery in the Louisiana Purchase territories. Now, the people of each of these territories will decide whether or not to allow slavery. The first antislavery settlers of the Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Society arrive in Kansas Territory. They help found the town of Lawrence.

1855

• • •

In March, an election for the territorial legislature is held. About 1000 armed proslavery Missourians enter Kansas to vote and keep free-state settlers from voting. The proslavery legislature they elect meets in Lecompton, Kansas, about 12 miles from Lawrence. In the fall, free-state delegates set up their own rival legislature in Topeka. They draft the Topeka Constitution banning slavery in the territory. It is later rejected by Congress. In October, abolitionist John Brown comes to Kansas, to join five of his sons who had arrived earlier.

1856

• • •

In April a three-man federal congressional committee declares the March 1855 elections fraudulent. It finds that the free-state government reflects the will of the majority. Yet the federal government continues to recognize the proslavery Lecompton legislature. On May 21, slave-staters attack and burn the free-state community of Lawrence. On May 24, John Brown retaliates by leading six of his men, including four sons, in the murder of five proslavery settlers at Pottawatomie Creek. Fighting continues. On August 30, 400 Missourians attack the town of Osawatomie, driving out freestaters led by John Brown.

1857

• • •

In March, the U.S. Supreme Court hands down its Dred Scott decision, stating that "Negroes are not citizens of the United States." Proslavery advocates meet in Lecompton to draw up a constitution, which is required for statehood.

1858

• • •

President Buchanan recommends that Congress accept the proslavery Lecompton Constitution for Kansas. However, Congress returns it for another territorial vote. Violence continues in Kansas into 1859.

1859

• • •

At a fourth convention at Wyandotte, free state advocates draft another constitution, which voters ratify. This is the constitution under which Kansas eventually becomes a state.

1861

• • •

On January 29, Kansas becomes the twenty-fourth state.

## DOCUMENT 1

## Visual Primary Source Document 1



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-7785

## Information on Document 1

This Currier & Ives print is titled "Col. Fremont's Last Grand Exploring Expedition in 1856." That year, famous explorer John C. Fremont, became the first presidential candidate of the new anti-slavery Republican Party. Here, he rides "Abolition nag," a horse with the head of anti-slavery editor Horace Greeley. New York politician William Sewall leads the nag toward "Salt River" (a common symbol then for a disaster or a dead-end). Fremont says, "This is pretty hard riding but if he only carries me to the White House in safety I will forgive my friends for putting me astride of such a crazy Old Hack." Greeley says he is worried about going down this road. Seward says:

"Which ever road I travel always brings me to this confounded river, I thought we had a sure thing this time on the Bleeding Kansas dodge." On the right, radical abolitionist minister Henry Ward Beecher is laden with rifles. He preaches: "Be heavenly minded my brethren all/But if you fall out at trifles;/ Settle the matter with powder and ball/ And I will furnish the rifles." Beecher was linked to the New England Emigrant Aid Society, and was known to have furnished antislavery emigrants in Kansas with arms. A frontiersman from Fremont's exploring past (far right), tells him, "Ah! Colonel!— you've got into a bad crowd..."