

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

Why Women Won the Vote

*After nearly a century of agitation,
American women finally won the vote in 1920.*



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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):

“Women won the vote because by the early 1900s their independent roles in public life made it clear they were already active as citizens and deserved to vote.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

- 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.

Why Women Won the Vote

Starting in the early 1800s, a wide-ranging movement arose to free women from their less than equal position in American society. At first, this movement focused on many other reforms as well—on prison reform, for example, or on public schooling, or above all on the growing movement to abolish slavery.

Of course, women did also start to call for complete political equality. At a famous meeting at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, the modern-day women's rights movement was born.

After the Civil War, various women's rights groups began to focus on one overriding goal—the right to vote. In 1866, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony helped to form the American Equal Rights Association. A few years later, it split into two separate organizations because of disagreements about the Fourteenth Amendment and the Fifteenth Amendment. These amendments were meant to protect the rights of newly freed slaves. However, they did not specifically cover women in the protections they provided. One women's group opposed the amendments, the other did not. In 1890, these two groups reunited to form the National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Its sole purpose was to win women the right to vote.

Of course this single goal did not prevent women from taking a more active part in many other areas of American life. In fact, the late 1800s saw the growth of an increasingly vocal professional class of women who led all sorts of reform efforts. In journalism, education, child welfare, union organizing, civil rights, and more, women were playing a much greater role. In fact, it may well have been this many-sided public activity that made the lack of voting rights for women seem increasingly unfair to millions of Americans, male and female.

The progressive movement of the early 1900s was a response to the disorder and injustices

accompanying the arrival of the urban-industrial age. It was led by a growing group of middle class professionals, including many women taking a more active part in the nation's life. Their experience in progressive reform efforts added considerably to the strength and diversity of the women's rights movement itself.

One progressive movement in particular was a key force in the fight for women's voting rights. That was the temperance movement, led by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. As for regions, the American West led the way starting with Wyoming Territory, which was organized with a women's suffrage provision in 1869.

The final battle for the right to vote was actually a complex one. The activists argued a good deal about tactics. The NAWSA continued to take a moderate and careful approach. In 1913, Alice Paul and Lucy Burns formed the Congressional Union (later named the National Women's Party). It took part in hunger strikes and other dramatic forms of civil disobedience.

Meanwhile resistance to women's suffrage was also fierce—from many men, from distillers and brewers, from urban political machines and even from some women (through the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage led by Mrs. Arthur Dodge). Nevertheless, by the second decade of the twentieth century, the momentum was unstoppable. The active role played by women in World War I only added to this momentum. In 1920, with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, women won the right to vote.

All the primary sources with this lesson are visual to some degree. These sources will help you assess the arguments for and against this movement. They will also help you decide why it won out in the end.

Women's Suffrage Time Line

1848

• • •

At a convention in Seneca Falls, New York, participants set the goals for the women's rights movement.

1851

• • •

Former slave Sojourner Truth delivers her "Ain't I a Woman?" speech in Akron, Ohio.

1866

• • •

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony form the American Equal Rights Association, whose goal is to achieve universal suffrage—that is, the right to vote for all men and women, black and white.

1869

• • •

The women's rights movement splits into the more radical National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) and the more conservative American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA). Also during this year, Wyoming territory is organized with a provision for women's suffrage.

1872

• • •

Susan B. Anthony is arrested and put on trial in Rochester, New York, for trying to vote for Ulysses S. Grant in the presidential election. Sojourner Truth demands the right to vote in Battle Creek, Michigan, but she is turned away.

1874

• • •

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) is founded. It becomes an important ally in the fight for women's suffrage.

1878

• • •

A Woman Suffrage Amendment is introduced in the United States Congress. The amendment finally passes both houses in 1919.

1890

• • •

The NWSA and the AWSA are reunited as the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) under the leadership of Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

1903

• • •

The Women's Trade Union League of New York is organized to help working women form unions, get education, and better their working conditions.

1911

• • •

The National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS) is organized.

1912

• • •

Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive ("Bull Moose") Party becomes the first national political party to adopt a women's suffrage plank.

1913

• • •

Alice Paul and Lucy Burns organize the Congressional Union, later known as the National Women's Party (in 1916). It uses White House picketing and civil disobedience tactics to push for women's suffrage.

1916

• • •

At a convention in New Jersey, NAWSA president Carrie Chapman Catt presents her "winning plan" for a final push to victory. Catt's plan requires coordinated efforts by all state and local suffrage associations.

1917–1919

• • •

Women's efforts during World War I win more support for women's suffrage.

1920

• • •

August 26, 1920: the Nineteenth Amendment is ratified.

DOCUMENT 1

Visual Primary Source Document 1



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC2-1021.

Information on Document 1

This 1896 lithograph from the political humor magazine *Puck* is titled “At the Emancipated Women’s Club.” It is a caricature of women’s suffrage. In it, a page has come over to an elegantly dressed woman. She says, “Your husband wants

to see you, Mum. He says the baby’s tooth is through at last, and he had to come and show it to you, Mum!” The woman’s husband is standing at the door with three children.