

## DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints  
in Primary Source Documents

# From God-Kings to World Religions

*Over time, universal religious and intellectual  
insights and ideas emerged in the ancient world.*



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## *Debating* the DOCUMENTS

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in Primary Source Documents

# From God-Kings to World Religions

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The 2017 World History Course and Exam Description of the College Board Advanced Placement Program\* lists five themes that it urges teachers to use in organizing their teaching. Each World History *Debating the Documents* booklet focuses on one or two of these five themes.

### *The Five Themes*

- 1. Interaction between humans and the environment.** (demography and disease; migration; patterns of settlement; technology)
- 2. Development and interaction of cultures.** (religions; belief systems, philosophies, and ideologies; science and technology; the arts and architecture)
- 3. State-building, expansion, and conflict.** (political structures and forms of governance; empires; nations and nationalism; revolts and revolutions; regional, transregional, and global structures and organizations)
- 4. Creation, expansion, and interaction of economic systems.** (agricultural and pastoral production; trade and commerce; labor systems; industrialization; capitalism and socialism)
- 5. Development and transformation of social structures.** (gender roles and relations; family and kinship; racial and ethnic constructions; social and economic classes)

### *This Booklet's Main Theme:*

**2** Development and interaction of cultures.

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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.

NOTE: If you are using these materials with an AP world history class, an honors class, or some other group of advanced and/or more knowledgeable students, you may want to make more written sources available to them on this topic. Do a basic Internet search for sources that provide additional perspectives and then add to the sources provided here.

### 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):**

Look back at the introduction for this lesson and re-read Karl Jasper’s comment on the “axial age.” Was there such an axial age? 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.

## God-Kings to World Religions

Even the earliest hunter-gatherer societies had spiritual rituals and beliefs. Archaeologists tell us that Neanderthals buried their dead, which seems to suggest some kind of a belief in a life after death. All humans have powerful tendency to try to understand the unknown or mysterious aspects of the world around them. They have expressed spiritual and religious insights in countless ways in just about every culture ever known.

The earliest small-scale hunter-gatherer and agricultural societies usually believed in a variety of spirits or gods. These were mostly connected with important natural forces or events—such as the sun, sky, rain, soil, seasons, rivers, mountains, trees, etc. Other gods were seen in some sense as in control of key human or social events or actions, such as birth, death, warfare, planting, harvesting, etc.

One supreme god was sometimes seen as first among others. In general, the gods, spirits, or ancestors had to be pleased or placated to keep the natural order working well. As more complex civilizations emerged, so did the tendency to see one god as all-important—or a small number of gods, who were often just different aspects of the same god.

Moreover, these ruling gods were usually closely connected to the human rulers of these more complex societies. Ancient Egypt's ruler, the Pharaoh, was himself considered a god. In Sumer, Assyria, and other Mesopotamian societies, the king was not usually a god. Commonly, he was seen as chosen by the god to rule or as someone descended from that god. In China, the emperor also was not a god. He was seen as the crucial link maintaining the balance between the natural and human order and heaven.

These links between gods and rulers made sense in the more complex societies that were appearing. In those societies, after all, the ruler and the government were seen as key to controlling the unruly forces of nature.

In the first millennium BCE, however, spiritual life in many parts of the world changed again in fundamental ways. Religions took on a much more universal quality. Monotheistic religions, for example, depicted one god ruling the entire world. These religions also tended to stress moral values and ethical behavior, more than simple obedience to god and king. Non-theistic faiths also emerged, offering spiritual guidance or salvation to all of humanity.

The philosopher Karl Jaspers called this time an “axial age”—that is, an age when the entire world's spiritual awareness evolved, seeming to turn on one single axis. He said of this time:

*Let us designate this period as the “axial age.” Extraordinary events are crowded into this period. In China lived Confucius and Lao Tse, all the trends in Chinese philosophy arose . . . In India it was the age of the Upanishads and of Buddha. . . . In Iran Zarathustra put forward his challenging conception of the cosmic process as a struggle between good and evil; in Palestine prophets arose: Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Deutero-Isaiah; Greece produced Homer, the philosophers Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plato, the tragic poets, Thucydides and Archimedes. All the vast development, of which these names are a mere intimation, took place in those few centuries, independently and almost simultaneously in China, India and the West. . . .*

The sources for this lesson will help you decide what you think of this idea of an “axial age.” Was there such an age? What did these various new spiritual and religious traditions have in common? What were the key differences among them? Why did so many of them emerge in these centuries?

# God-Kings to World Religions Time Line

**3500–2200 BCE**

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The Sumerian city-states flourish. The Pharaohs rule Egypt during the Early Dynastic period and the Old Kingdom. The pyramids are built. The Indus River civilization in India reaches its height.

**2200–1200 BCE**

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The earliest forms of the Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh, a mythic king, date from around 2100 BCE. From 1792–1750 BCE, Hammurabi rules the Babylonian Empire and writes his law code. The Indus River civilization disappears by about 1700 BCE. Aryans move into the region.

**1200–900 BCE**

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In China, the idea that the emperor rules with the “mandate of heaven” evolves as the Shang gives way to the Chou Dynasty. India’s oldest Hindu texts, the Vedas, are probably written down in these centuries. In the tenth century BCE, during the monarchy of David and Solomon in Israel, it is probable that the first parts of the Hebrew Bible are written down.

**900–600 BCE**

• • •

The first of the Upanishads is probably composed in the eighth century BCE. The Upanishads are the part of the Hindu scriptures that deal with philosophy and the key spiritual ideas of Hinduism. In Greece, this is the time when the Homeric epics are written down. In 745 BCE, the Assyrian Empire begins to expand and become the dominant power in Mesopotamia. The Hebrew prophets (about 750 to 550 BCE) begin to criticize their people for failing to live up to God’s moral demands. In the eighth century, the prophet Isaiah gives expression to the pure form of Jewish monotheism. (However, some scholars believe Jewish monotheism only emerges fully in the seventh or sixth centuries BCE).

**600–500 BCE**

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Scholars do not know when the prophet Zoroaster actually lived. Zoroastrianism is the religion he supposedly founded. In any case, by the sixth century BCE it has clearly become a monotheistic faith. (Or perhaps dualistic, with the supreme creator god Ahura Mazda opposing a chaotic or destructive spirit.) It is also in the sixth century that Zoroastrianism becomes a major religion in the Persian Empire. In Greece, early Greek philosophers such as Thales of Miletus begin to offer purely rational explanations of the natural world. In China, the traditional dates of 551–479 BCE are given for Kongfuzi—Confucius—whose philosophy of familial piety, hierarchy, and social order will guide China until modern times.

**500–400 BCE**

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563 BCE is the date traditionally given for the birth of Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism. However, more recent scholars think he lived in the fifth century BCE.

**400–300 BCE**

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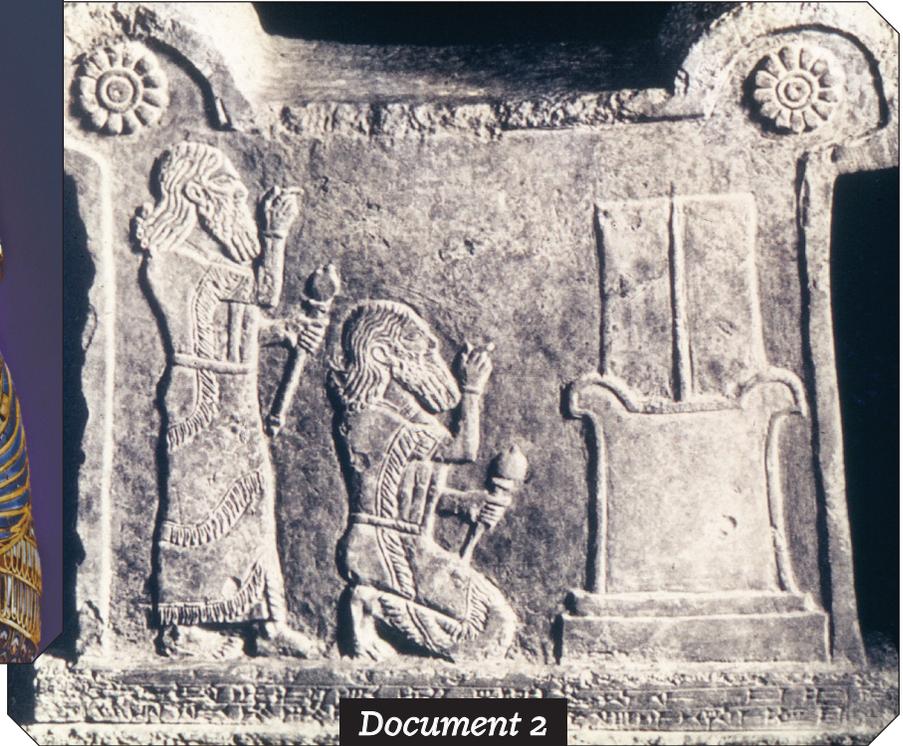
Many historians also say Laozi (Lao Tsu) actually lived in the fourth century BCE. According to Chinese tradition, he founds Daoism, a philosophy stressing the harmony of the entire natural order. Under Pericles, Greek democracy in Athens is at its high point, as is Greek drama, sculpture, and philosophy. The philosopher Socrates is put to death for his ideas in 399, but ancient Greece’s two greatest philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, do their work during much of the fourth century.

## DOCUMENTS 1 &amp; 2

## Visual Primary Source Documents 1 &amp; 2

**Document 1**

The Granger Collection, New York

**Document 2**

The Granger Collection, New York

**Information on Documents 1 & 2**

**Document 1.** Tutankhamen's tomb is located in Egypt's Valley of the Kings. Tutankhamen was a young Egyptian Pharaoh who died at age 19 sometime around 1325 BCE. His burial chamber included four small canopic coffins containing parts of his remains. This image is from the front of one such coffin. It is not Tutankhamen's famous gold funerary mask found on his mummy. In the tomb also were things it was thought he would use in the afterlife: boats, food, lamps, jars, furniture, gilded deities, jewelry, and much more.

**Document 2.** The relief sculpture on this altar shows Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta (1243–1207 BCE). The king appears in two positions worshipping a symbol of Nusku, the fire-god (also god of the arts and civilization). Nusku's symbol is resting on a replica of the altar itself. Assyria arose in northern Mesopotamia. Through war and conquest, it grew in time into the region's most powerful empire until its fall in 609 BCE. Its early capital, Assur, was named after its patron god. The Assyrians did not see their kings as gods, but as gaining authority from the gods.