

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

Women and the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment promised a new age of reason and human rights. What was its impact on women and their rights?



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Debating the DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

Women and the Enlightenment

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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Contents

Teacher Introduction	1
Suggestions to the Student	5
Introductory Essay	6
Women and the Enlightenment Time Line	7
First Group of Documents	8
Study the Documents	10
Comparing the Documents	12
Comparison Essay	13
Second Group of Documents	14
Study the Documents	16
Comparing the Documents	18
Comparison Essay	19
Document-Based Question	20
Worksheet Answers and Guidelines	21
Visual Primary Sources	23

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):

“In the long run, the movement for equality between men and women would not have been possible without the Enlightenment.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

- 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.

Women and the Enlightenment

The European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century was a complex movement of ideas. It began in France, England, and Scotland and soon spread to other parts of Europe. In time, Enlightenment ideas would influence the rest of the world as well, especially as European industry, science, and imperial power spread across the globe in the nineteenth century and beyond.

The very heart of the Enlightenment was its demand that human reason alone ought to be the basis for all customs, beliefs, and institutions. Enlightenment thinkers were deeply critical of Europe's entire past. The most biting of these critics, Voltaire, detested what he saw as the centuries-long stifling effects of organized religion, superstition, and tyranny. Science and reason, along with individual liberty and freedom of thought, would lead the way out of a benighted past.

Enlightenment figures also challenged traditional social divisions and hierarchies of all sorts. They aimed much of their criticism at hereditary aristocracies and the privileged clerics of established churches, the Catholic Church in particular. Hence, along with liberty, equality was also a central Enlightenment value. Reason, freedom of thought, liberty, and equality: these were to be the guiding watchwords for reformers and political movements around the world for the next two centuries. The U.S. Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights were all Enlightenment documents that based society on "self-evident truths" about individual liberty and a rational Creator who endowed all with equal rights.

Yet is the Enlightenment this easy to sum up? It's worthwhile to keep in mind that the Enlightenment was given that name by its own followers. These self-described "enlightened" thinkers believed they were making a complete break with all of Europe's benighted past. Yet historians now do not see any such dramatic and complete break. A growing faith in reason and science in Europe can actually be traced back at least to the twelfth

century. The scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth century was itself a key part of what inspired Enlightenment thinkers. The Enlightenment was certainly not a totally new beginning.

Nor is it so clear exactly how "enlightened" the Enlightenment actually was. Many Enlightenment figures spent their time meeting and discussing ideas with aristocrats and absolute rulers. Their ideas about liberty and equality rarely led to calls for the end of slavery, for the equality of peasants and the nobility, or for the equality of women.

As for women specifically, the Enlightenment's impact was definitely mixed. On the one hand, some educated women and wealthy women played key parts in it. The salons at which Enlightenment thinkers were honored guests were often run by women. A few independent thinkers such as Mary Wollstonecraft did arise to defend the idea that the Enlightenment concepts of liberty, equality, and individual rights should apply equally to women.

Enlightenment thinkers had a great deal to say about differences between men and women, and about the rights women should have. Their stress on reason and the power of the individual human mind led some of them to reject the idea that women were inferior. They granted that women were entitled to rights. Yet many also refused to admit that women were fully as rational and capable as men. Many held a view of women as the opposites of men, equal perhaps, but in a unique way. At times, they even depicted women as superior in a moral sense. Yet just as often they claimed women were too emotional and dependent on others to make the rational independent judgments necessary for fully taking part in public affairs and politics.

The Enlightenment provided ideas that would be used to justify female equality. Yet as the sources for this lesson show, its own thinkers were by no means clear about what female equality could or should mean.

Women and the Enlightenment Time Line

1682-1749



Lifetime of Claudine Alexandrine Guérin de Tencin. She is a nun who breaks her vows, becomes an author, a French courtesan, possibly a political spy, and the founder of a famous Parisian literary salon.

1689-1690



John Locke's *Two Treatises on Government* (1689) and his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) are published. Both have a huge influence on the Enlightenment in that they promote the idea of natural rights, government based on a social contract, and the view of the rational individual as a "blank slate" at birth able to be perfected by experience and education.

1689-1755



Lifetime of Baron de Montesquieu (Charles-Louis de Secondat). Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* (1748) proposes the theory that constitutional government must be based on a separation of powers. His ideas strongly influence leaders of the American and French Revolutions and many other societies and constitutions created since all over the world.

1694-1697



Mary Astell, an advocate of equal educational opportunity for women, publishes two books, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest* (1694) and *A Serious Proposal, Part II* (1697). These present Astell's plan for providing women with education.

1694-1778



Lifetime of François-Marie Arouet, better known as Voltaire. He is perhaps the most famous Enlightenment writer, a biting critic of censorship, tyranny, and the teachings and authority of the Catholic Church. He is a vigorous defender of individual liberty and religious tolerance.

1699-1777



Lifetime of Marie Therese Rodet Geoffrin. Starting in 1748, she becomes one of the Enlightenment's most influential French salon hostesses. She holds two dinners weekly for major French artistic and literary figures.

1712-1778



Lifetime of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau sees injustice as due to society's harmful corruption of man's natural human goodness. His solution is a society based on a social contract entered into by individuals who agree to follow the entire citizenry's "general will."

1713-1784



Lifetime of Denis Diderot. He was a French philosopher and, along with mathematician Jean d'Alembert, the editor of the *L'Encyclopedie*, a major triumph of the Enlightenment. In 35 volumes, it sums up human learning from the perspective of the Enlightenment's ideas, with entries by many famous Enlightenment writers. In describing its goal, Diderot explains, "All things must be examined, debated, investigated without exception and without regard for anyone's feelings."

1739



Women Not Inferior to Man is written by "Sophia" and published in London. Sophia's true identity will never be absolutely determined. Some of her work is adapted from a male writer, Francois Poulain de la Barre.

1759-1797



Lifetime of Mary Wollstonecraft, English advocate of equality of the sexes. In 1792, she writes *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, one of the key feminist tracts of the Enlightenment.

DOCUMENT 1

Visual Primary Source Document 1



The Granger Collection, New York

Information on Document 1

In eighteenth-century France, intense discussions of Enlightenment ideas were constantly taking place in salons. Many of the most famous of these were sponsored in the homes of upper-class, aristocratic

women. One of the most famous was Mme. Marie Therese Rodet Geoffrin (1699–1777). This painting is of Geoffrin's literary salon at Hotel de Rambouillet, Paris.