

Document-Based Assessment for U.S. History

MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Name _____

Date _____

DBQ 1: WHAT MOTIVATED EUROPEANS TO EXPLORE AMERICA?

Historical Background

Until almost 1500, only about 500 years ago, North and South America remained unknown to people living in Europe, Asia, or Africa. It seems likely that several centuries earlier a tiny number of fishermen from northern Europe had found their way to areas we now call Greenland and northeastern Canada. But this contact with America remained unknown to the rest of Europe. (In fact, it's probable that most of these fishermen, themselves, were unaware of what they had found or where they had been.) The rest of the world remained ignorant of America's existence.

Then, in the 1400s, a new interest in exploration arose among Europe's leaders. This new interest would soon result in Europeans' discovery of the Americas. That new interest grew, in large part, from a desire to buy products from Asia. Europe's contacts with the Middle East had grown during the Crusades. Also, Marco Polo, of Italy, had traveled to China and lived there for a number of years. His book about his travels became a best-seller in Europe. From the book, Europeans learned about the existence of spices, dyes, fruits, rich tapestries, and other desirable products in Asia. But the eastern overland route between Europe and Asia was too long and too costly to be practical. So explorers, with financial backing from the monarchs of Spain and Portugal, began to seek ocean routes. Sea travel would provide faster and cheaper trade routes to the rich products of India and China. Thus, in the late 1400s an Italian sea captain named Christopher Columbus approached Spain's king and queen. He proposed to reach Asia by sailing to the west. With the monarchs' support and funding, Columbus stumbled onto several Caribbean islands in the autumn of 1492. Europe had now "discovered" America.

■ **Directions:** The following question is based on the documents (1–3) that follow. Before reading these documents, be sure to

1. Carefully read and think about the document-based question that follows these directions.
2. Ask yourself: What do I already know about this question and its topic? What did I learn from reading the Historical Background section? If I had to answer the document-based question without reading any of the documents, what would I say?
3. Take a few minutes to jot down the major things you already know about this topic and question. What important names, dates, events, and major ideas do you already know?
4. Now read each document carefully. Ask yourself: How does this document help to answer the document-based question? Underline things of special importance and jot notes in the margins. If you're confused by or don't understand a document, go on to the next one. Later, if you have time, you can go back.

(continued)

Name _____

Date _____

DBQ 1: WHAT MOTIVATED EUROPEANS TO EXPLORE AMERICA? *CONTINUED*

5. Develop a thesis statement that directly answers the document-based question. You'll want to state this thesis early in your essay.
6. Briefly outline your entire essay. Make sure that what you say in it supports and proves your thesis statement. In your essay, plan how you'll use the information found in the documents and what you know already about this topic.
7. Carefully write your essay. As you include supportive information from documents, be sure to cite the sources of this information. This will add authority and credibility to what you're saying.

Question: What factors motivated Europe's discovery and exploration of the Americas in the 1400s and 1500s?

PART A

The following documents will help you answer the document-based question. Read each document carefully. Answer the question or questions that follow each document.

Document 1

In the late 1400s, the pope, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, was a very powerful and influential person. He was so powerful, in fact, that he could impose his authority on the governments of nations. Here is a document issued by Pope Alexander VI in 1493. This was soon after Columbus returned to Europe with news that he had happened upon a series of new lands (America). In this document, the pope's office identified one of the primary motives of exploration of these new lands. It expressed the motive in the form of a command to the Spanish government.

We have . . . learned that you [have] discovered certain islands and mainlands . . . to the [purpose] that you might bring to the worship of our Redeemer [Jesus] and the profession of the Catholic faith to their residents and inhabitants . . . We command you [to] appoint . . . God-fearing . . . men, in order to instruct the . . . inhabitants and residents in the Catholic faith and train them in good morals.

What, according to the pope, was a major motive of early European exploration of America? _____

(continued)

Name _____

Date _____

DBQ 1: WHAT MOTIVATED EUROPEANS TO EXPLORE AMERICA? *CONTINUED*

Document 2

This letter, written by Columbus to the Spanish government during his return voyage from America, revealed another motive for his exploration of the New World.

In the earth are many mines of metals. . . . There is incalculable gold. . . . The men whom I am leaving there [in America] will discover a thousand other things of value.

What, according to this letter from Columbus, was a major motive of early European exploration of America? _____

Document 3

It's good to remember that Europeans found the Americas by accident. Columbus wasn't hunting for a "new land." He was trying to get to China and India. The lands he encountered in 1492 were, he guessed, islands somewhere off of the coast of Asia. It would, he believed, only take a little more exploration to find mainland Asia. The following document comes from a book published in 1971 by Samuel Eliot Morison. He was a historian who taught at Harvard University from 1915 until 1955.

As a literary wit remarked, America was discovered by accident, not wanted when found, and early explorations were directed at finding a way through or around it. Columbus's fourth voyage, starting in 1502, was a search for a [route] from the Caribbean to the Indian Ocean; Cabot died seeking a [route] through North America; and for the next eight decades all recorded voyages [to America] . . . were first and foremost, searches for the . . . Northwest Passage to fabulous Cathay [China].

Source: Samuel Eliot Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages*, Oxford University Press, 1971.

What, according to this account, was a major motive of early European exploration of America? _____

PART B

Essay: What factors motivated Europe's discovery and exploration of the Americas in the 1400s and 1500s?

Name _____

Date _____

DBQ 2: WHY AND HOW DID PEOPLE COME TO EARLY AMERICA?

Historical Background

Americans have always been on the move. More than most other people, we seem to have a restless urge to relocate. In fact, each year almost one in every five Americans moves from one home to another. Sometimes these moves are just across the street or around the block. But many Americans move hundreds or thousands of miles to different states or even to different countries. Close to 100 million Americans (one in every three) were born in a different state from the one they presently live in. Almost 25 million were born in other countries. Today, as in the past, relatively few Americans live their entire lives in the towns in which they were born.

People move for many reasons. Perhaps your family is one of those who have moved in recent years. If so, you might ask your mom or dad to explain why your family moved. Very often the reason is economic—a better job or better job opportunities. Sometimes it's to be near family or friends. Sometimes people move to escape where they were; sometimes they're drawn to someplace new. Sometimes people have no choice. They simply have to move.

Many of the people who first came to America during its early colonial days moved here for the same reasons that people might relocate today. Many of these were the same reasons why immigrants still come to America today from other countries. The abundance of cheap, productive farmland drew many farmers from Europe. In Europe, land was scarce and rents were very high. In America, labor was scarce, so wages were higher than in Europe. This attracted many European workers to the colonies. Some early colonists came here with unrealistic dreams that they would quickly become wealthy. Some early colonial immigrants came to America to flee wars. Others came to escape religious persecution and oppressive rulers. Many simply realized that their lives back home in Europe held little promise. They hoped that America might provide a chance for better lives for themselves and for their families. These hopes fueled their migration.

■ **Directions:** The following question is based on the documents (1–5) that follow. Before reading these documents, be sure to

1. Carefully read and think about the document-based question that follows these directions.
2. Ask yourself: What do I already know about this question and its topic? What did I learn from reading the Historical Background section? If I had to answer the document-based question without reading any of the documents, what would I say?
3. Take a few minutes to jot down the major things you already know about this topic and question. What important names, dates, events, and major ideas do you already know?

(continued)

Name _____

Date _____

DBQ 2: WHY AND HOW DID PEOPLE COME TO EARLY AMERICA? *CONTINUED*

4. Now read each document carefully. Ask yourself: How does this document help to answer the document-based question? Underline things of special importance and jot notes in the margins. If you're confused by or don't understand a document, go on to the next one. Later, if you have time, you can go back.
5. Develop a thesis statement that directly answers the document-based question. You'll want to state this thesis early in your essay.
6. Briefly outline your entire essay. Make sure that what you say in it supports and proves your thesis statement. In your essay, plan how you'll use the information found in the documents and what you know already about this topic.
7. Carefully write your essay. As you include supportive information from documents, be sure to cite the sources of this information. This will add authority and credibility to what you're saying.

Question: Why and how did people come to settle in colonial America?

PART A

The following documents will help you answer the document-based question. Read each document carefully. Answer the question or questions that follow each document.

Document 1

It's good to remember that not all colonial Americans voluntarily chose to come to America. Here is a brief excerpt from the autobiography of an African man named Olaudah Equiano. He was kidnapped as a boy in the mid-1700s. He was then brought to America, where he was sold into slavery.

After being kidnapped near his home in a western African village, he was marched to the coast with others.

The first object which [I saw] when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship . . . riding at anchor and waiting for its cargo . . . I was soon put down under the decks. . . .

Equiano spent weeks onboard the slave ship, filled with fear and sick from hunger and illness. When they finally landed in America, he and the other captives were very frightened. They feared that they would be killed.

(continued)

Name _____

Date _____

DBQ 2: WHY AND HOW DID PEOPLE COME TO EARLY AMERICA? *CONTINUED*

... at last the white people got some old slaves from the land to pacify us. They told us we were not to be eaten, but to work . . .

Source: Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, the African*. Originally published in 1791.

Why and how did Olaudah Equiano (and thousands of others like him) come to colonial America? _____

Document 2

Large numbers of white people came to colonial America as indentured servants. Most were young, unmarried men. Some women and families also came as indentured servants. They were bound by an indenture, or contract, to serve their masters for a certain number of years. Most served as farm laborers, living very much like black slaves. As indentured servants, they had few rights. Sometimes families were broken apart. Most indentured servants voluntarily chose to “sell” themselves to pay the cost of their transport to America. Some, however, were forced into their indentures. Many of these involuntary indentured servants were minor convicts. The British government sent them to America to save the cost of keeping them in jails.

Black slaves remained bound for their entire lives. But indentured servants were bound by their indenture for only a few years. Once they completed their terms of service, they became free. Their master or their colony gave them land and tools. Society encouraged them to become independent farmers and good citizens. Most did. In the mid-1700s, a German visitor named Gottlieb Mittelberger traveled in Pennsylvania and other American colonies. He later wrote about this visit. In the excerpt below, he described the nature of indentured servitude in colonial America.

Every day [colonists] go on board the newly arrived vessel that has brought people from Europe and offers them for sale. Then they negotiate with them as to the length of the period for which they will go into service in order to pay off their passage. . . . When an agreement has been reached, adult persons . . . bind themselves to serve for three, four, five, or six years, according to their health and age. The very young . . . have to serve until they are 21 . . . Work is strenuous in this new land. . . . Many [of] advanced age must labor hard for their bread. . . .

Source: Gottlieb Mittelberger, *Journey to Pennsylvania*. Originally published in 1754.

(continued)

Name _____

Date _____

DBQ 2: WHY AND HOW DID PEOPLE COME TO EARLY AMERICA? *CONTINUED*

Why did many people come to early colonial America as indentured servants? _____

Document 3

Many of the immigrants to America in the 1600s and 1700s were peasants and tenant farmers from England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. They were farm workers who lived on land rented from wealthy landowners. They had almost no hope of ever escaping poverty or of owning their own land. Imagine how ambitious tenant farm families reacted to the following announcement. The colonial government of Maryland wrote it in the mid-1600s. The statement circulated in London and other cities in England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

Any married man that shall transport himself, his wife and children, shall have assigned to him . . . [and his heirs] forever . . . for himself 100 acres, and for his wife 100 acres and for every child . . . 50 acres . . .

Why did this written announcement encourage many British tenant farmers to come to the American colonies? _____

Most peasants had no money to pay the cost of their trip to America. How could they go if they had no money to pay for the transportation? _____

Document 4

The promise of cheap land and hopes for wealth were lures for most poor European immigrants to early colonial America. But many others came here seeking something else. Among them were the early settlers of New England. The following are excerpts from the personal accounts of William Bradford, the first governor of Plymouth Colony. Here he tells why the Pilgrims chose to come to America.

(continued)

Name _____

Date _____

DBQ 2: WHY AND HOW DID PEOPLE COME TO EARLY AMERICA? *CONTINUED*

... at length the conclusion was to live as a distinct [group] by themselves [in America] and to [seek from the king] freedom of religion.

While still onboard their ship, before landing on the coast, Bradford and other leaders of the group wrote and signed an agreement. It came to be known as the Mayflower Compact. One part of it stated

We ... [have] undertaken, for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith ... a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern part of Virginia. ...

Source: William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*. Originally published in 1856.

Why did Bradford and many others come to Plymouth Colony and later to Massachusetts in the early and mid-1600s? _____

Document 5

Many poor people in Europe during the 1600s suffered daily injustices and persecutions. Farm peasants had to pay very high rents to the wealthy landowners. These peasants often were forbidden to hunt or fish on the lands they lived on. Their sons were forced into the army to fight the king's wars. The powerful landowners controlled the local government and courts. They used this control to benefit themselves and to deny rights and fairness to poor people. It was difficult for owners of small businesses to borrow money. Even when they could, they often had to pay very high rates of interest. Poor people had little power, and little hope.

The following excerpts come from a book written by an English traveler in colonial Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Contrast what he says about these American colonies with the description of life in Europe in the paragraph above.

(continued)