

How to...

WRITE AN EFFECTIVE DOCUMENT BASED ESSAY



Objectives:

The students will...

- Learn how to analyze a document effectively
- Be able to construct an argument based upon primary sources
- Understand the process of writing an effective DBQ

Resources:

[The National Archives](#) is an excellent source of primary source materials.

[The College Board](#) has a website devoted to the AP American History test with sample questions. The [structure of the test](#) is also explained in detail on their site.

There are several independently maintained sites that provide help for students in preparing for the AP Exam. The [Up State History Alliance](#) has a website with excellent resources for preparing to write a DBQ. Many teachers have their students develop their [own DBQ's](#) as part of their courses.

Student Handout on “How to Write a Document Based Essay.”

Teacher's Guide

Background:

The Document Based Essay is the most feared and misunderstood portion of the AP US History test. With a little practice, common sense and hard work, though, all students can do well on this part of the test.

Students should understand that historians use primary source documents as the basis for their writing and interpretation of history. These sources are uncontaminated by subsequent interpretations made after the outcome of events are known. Through careful reading of important documents and assessing them within the context of an era, a new and original interpretation of historical events is possible.

1. Pass out the student handout on “How to Write a Document Based Essay.”
2. Go over the points with them. Provide them samples of DBQ's from the College Board (It is a good idea to build a file of past DBQ's and then use them to teach future students).
3. Have the students research first sentences and opening paragraphs from great non-fiction books. Assess how the authors begin to tell their historical story.
4. Put the students in groups of four and have the students write their own DBQ. They will need to acquire primary sources and to frame an appropriate question.
 - a. Have the groups exchange their DBQ's and work cooperatively to come up with an appropriate answer.

