

The
**HISTORIAN'S
APPRENTICE**

Happy Trails

The Appeal of the Frontier in 19th-Century America

Sourcing
Contextualizing
Finding Bias
Corroborating
Interpreting

Students learn the historian's craft by
analyzing primary and secondary sources

MindSparks
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

Happy Trails

The Appeal of the Frontier in 19th-Century America

by Jonathan Burack

Each unit in *The Historian's Apprentice* series deals with an important historical topic. It introduces students to a five-step set of practices designed to simulate the experience of being a historian and make explicit all key phases of the historian's craft.

The Historian's Apprentice: A Five-Step Process

1. Reflect on Your Prior Knowledge of the Topic

Students discuss what they already know and how their prior knowledge may shape or distort the way they view the topic.

2. Apply Habits of Historical Thinking to the Topic

Students build background knowledge on the basis of five habits of thinking that historians use in constructing accounts of the past.

3. Interpret the Relevant Primary Sources

Students apply a set of rules for interpreting sources and assessing their relevance and usefulness.

4. Assess the Interpretations of Other Historians

Students learn to read secondary sources actively, with the goal of deciding among competing interpretations based on evidence in the sources.

5. Interpret, Debate, and Write About the Topic Yourself

Students apply what they have learned by constructing evidence-based interpretations of their own in a variety of ways.



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MindSparks
10200 Jefferson Boulevard., P.O. Box 802
Culver City, CA 90232-0802
United States of America

(310) 839-2436
(800) 421-4246

<http://mindsparks.com>
access@mindsparks.com

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Teacher Introduction

★ *Teaching the Historian's Craft*

The goal of *The Historian's Apprentice* units is to expose students in a manageable way to the complex processes by which historians practice their craft. By modeling what historians do, students will practice the full range of skills that make history the unique and uniquely valuable challenge that it is.

Modeling the historian's craft is not the same as being a historian—something few students will become. Therefore, a scaffolding is provided here to help students master historical content in a way that will be manageable and useful to them.

Historical thinking is not a simple matter of reciting one fact after another, or even of mastering a single, authoritative account. It is disciplined by evidence, and it is a quest for truth; yet, historians usually try to

clarify complex realities and make tentative judgments, not to draw final conclusions. In doing so, they wrestle with imperfect sets of evidence (the primary sources), detect multiple meanings embedded in those sources, and take into account varying interpretations by other historians. They also recognize how wide a divide separates the present from earlier times. Hence, they work hard to avoid present-mindedness and to achieve empathy with people who were vastly different from us.

In their actual practice, historians are masters of the cautious, qualified conclusion. Yet they engage, use their imaginations, and debate with vigor. It is this spirit and these habits of craft that *The Historian's Apprentice* seeks to instill in students.

★ *The Historian's Apprentice: Five-Steps in Four Parts*

The Historian's Apprentice is a five-step process. However, the materials presented here are organized into four parts. Part I deals with the first two of the five steps of the process. Each of the other three parts then deals with one step in the process. Here is a summary of the four parts into which the materials are organized:

Teacher Introduction. Includes suggested day-by-day sequences for using these materials, including options for using the PowerPoint presentations. One sequence is designed for younger students and supplies a page of vocabulary definitions.

Part 1. A student warm-up activity, an introductory essay, a handout detailing a set of habits of historical thinking, and two PowerPoint presentations (*Five Habits of Historical Thinking* and *Happy Trails: The Appeal of the Frontier in 19th-Century America*). Part 1 (including the PowerPoints) deals with *The Historian's Apprentice* Steps 1 and 2.

Part 2. A checklist for analyzing primary sources, several primary sources, and worksheets for analyzing them. Part 2 deals with *The Historian's Apprentice* Step 3.

Part 3. Two secondary source passages and two student activities analyzing those passages. Part 3 deals with *The Historian's Apprentice* Step 4.

Part 4. Two optional follow-up activities enabling students to write about and/or debate their own interpretations of the topic. Part 4 deals with *The Historian's Apprentice* Step 5.

★ Suggested Five-Day Sequence

Below is one possible way to use this *Historian's Apprentice* unit. Tasks are listed day by day in a sequence taking five class periods, with some homework and some optional follow-up activities.

PowerPoint Presentation: *Five Habits of Historical Thinking*. This presentation comes with each *Historian's Apprentice* unit. If you have used it before with other units, you need not do so again. If you decide to use it, incorporate it into the **Day 1** activities. In either case, give students the “Five Habits of Historical Thinking” handout for future reference. Those “five habits” are as follows:

- History Is Not the Past Itself
- The Detective Model: Problem, Evidence, Interpretation
- Time, Change, and Continuity
- Cause and Effect
- As They Saw It: Grasping Past Points of View

Warm-Up Activity. Homework assignment: Students do the *Warm-Up Activity*. This activity explores students’ memories and personal experiences shaping their understanding of the topic.

Day 1: Discuss the *Warm-Up Activity*, then either have students read or review the “Five Habits of Historical Thinking” handout, or use the *Five Habits* PowerPoint presentation.

Homework assignment: Students read the background essay “America’s Frontier Experience.”

Day 2: Use the second PowerPoint presentation, *Happy Trails: The Appeal of the Frontier in 19th-Century America*, to provide an overview of the topic for this lesson. The presentation applies the Five Habits of Historical Thinking to this topic. Do the two activities embedded in the presentation.

Homework assignment: Students read the “Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist.” The checklist teaches a systematic way to handle sources:

- Sourcing
- Contextualizing
- Interpreting meanings
- Point of view
- Corroborating sources

Day 3: In class, students study some of the ten primary source documents and complete “Source Analysis” worksheets on them. They use their notes to discuss these sources. (Worksheet questions are all based on the concepts on the “Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist.”)

Day 4: In class, students complete the remaining “Source Analysis” worksheets and use their notes to discuss these sources. Take some time to briefly discuss the two secondary source passages students will analyze next.

Homework assignment: Student read these two secondary source passages.

Day 5: In class, students do the two “Secondary Sources” activities and discuss them. These activities ask them to analyze the two secondary source passages using four criteria:

- Clear focus on a problem or question
- Position or point of view
- Use of evidence or sources
- Awareness of alternative explanations

Follow-Up Activities (optional, at teacher’s discretion).

Do as preferred: the DBQ Essay Assignment and/or the Structured Debate.

★ Suggested Three-Day Sequence

If you have less time to devote to this lesson, here is a suggested shorter sequence. The sequence does not include the PowerPoint presentation *Five Habits of Historical Thinking*. This presentation is included with each *Historian's Apprentice* unit. If you have never used it with your class, you may want to do so before following this three-day sequence.

The three-day sequence leaves out a few activities from the five-day sequence. It also suggests that you use only seven key primary sources. However, it still walks students through the steps of the *Historian's Apprentice* approach: clarifying background knowledge, analyzing primary sources, comparing secondary sources, and debating or writing about the topic.

Warm-Up Activity. Homework assignment: Ask students to read or review the “Five Habits of Historical Thinking” handout and read the background essay “America’s Frontier Experience.”

Day 1: Use the PowerPoint presentation *Happy Trails: The Appeal of the Frontier in 19th-Century America*. It provides an overview of the topic for this lesson by applying the Five Habits of Historical Thinking to it. Do the two activities embedded in the presentation.

Homework assignment: Students read or review the “Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist.” The checklist teaches a systematic way to handle sources.

Day 2: In class, students study some of the ten primary source documents and complete “Source Analysis” worksheets on them. They then use their notes to discuss these sources. Documents 1, 2, 3a & 3b, 4, 7, and 9 are suggested.

You may wish to make your own choices of primary sources. Use your judgment in deciding how many of them your students can effectively analyze in a single class period.

Homework assignment: Student read the two secondary source passages.

Day 3: In class, students do the two “Secondary Sources” activities and discuss them. These activities ask them to analyze the two secondary source passages using four criteria.

Follow-Up Activities (optional, at teacher’s discretion):

Do as preferred: the DBQ Essay Assignment and/or the Structured Debate.

★ *Suggestions for Use with Younger Students*

For younger students, parts of this lesson may prove challenging. If you feel your students need a somewhat more manageable path through the material, see the suggested sequence below.

If you want to use the *Five Habits of Historical Thinking* PowerPoint presentation, this sequence takes four class periods. If you do not use this PowerPoint, you can combine **Day 1** and **Day 2** and keep the sequence to just three days. We suggest using seven primary sources only. The ones listed for **Day 3** are less demanding in terms of vocabulary and conceptual complexity. For **Day 4**, we provide some simpler DBQs for the follow-up activities.

Vocabulary: A list of vocabulary terms in the sources and the introductory essay is provided on page 7 of this booklet. You may wish to hand this sheet out as a reading reference, you could make flashcards out of some of the terms, or you might ask each of several small groups to use the vocabulary sheet to explain terms found in one source to the rest of the class.

SUGGESTED FOUR-DAY SEQUENCE

Warm-Up Activity. Homework assignment: Students do the Warm-Up Activity. This activity explores students' memories and personal experiences shaping their understanding of the topic.

Day 1: Discuss the Warm-Up Activity. Show the *Five Habits of Historical Thinking* PowerPoint presentation (unless you have used it before and/or you do not think it is needed now). If you do not use this PowerPoint presentation, give students the "Five Habits of Historical Thinking" handout and discuss it with them.

Homework assignment: Ask students to read the background essay "America's Frontier Experience."

Day 2: Use the PowerPoint presentation *Happy Trails: The Appeal of the Frontier to 19th-Century America*. This introduces the topic for the lesson by applying the Five Habits of Historical Thinking to it. Do the two activities embedded in the presentation.

Homework assignment: Students read or review the "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist." The checklist offers a systematic way to handle sources.

Day 3: Discuss the "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist" and talk through one primary source document in order to illustrate the meaning of the concepts on the checklist. Next, have students complete "Source Analysis" worksheets after studying primary source documents 2, 3a & 3b, 4, 5, 7, and 10.

Homework assignment: Students read the two secondary source passages.

Day 4: Students do *only* "Secondary Sources: Activity 2" and discuss it. This activity asks them to choose the two primary sources that best back up each secondary source passage.

Follow-Up Activities (optional, at teacher's discretion):

Do as preferred: the DBQ Essay Assignment and/or the Structured Debate.

Here are some alternative DBQs tailored to the seven primary sources recommended here:

"People heading west had many notions of the better life they would find. What happened to them rarely lived up to what they hoped for." Explain why you do or do not agree with this statement.

Explain why it was easier for settlers to travel west in large companies of other settlers, rather than as single individuals or single families.

Vocabulary: The Introductory Essay

- **arrogance:** A rude or domineering sense of superiority or pride
- **imperial:** In the manner of an emperor or powerful ruler
- **individualism:** A belief in the rights of the individual to act independently of others
- **influential:** Able to influence or sway many others
- **pessimistic:** Gloomy or lacking in hope about the future

Vocabulary: The Primary Sources

- **compensate:** To make up for, or to pay for some service
- **constituents:** In this case, those who authorize or elect someone to represent them
- **emigration:** The act of leaving one's homeland or region to move to another
- **ingenuity:** Cleverness; skill at inventing or developing methods or solutions
- **preparatory:** Describes something that helps to prepare or get ready for some activity
- **singular:** Unique or remarkable
- **traverse:** Move across
- **trifles:** Things of very little value

Vocabulary: The Secondary Sources

- **acuteness:** In this case, sharp or intense insight
- **buoyancy:** In this case, a cheerful, hopeful, and determined attitude
- **cautionary:** Containing a warning
- **expedients:** In this case, means to some end; actions taken to deal with some problem
- **exuberance:** Excess or being excessive in some way
- **incessant:** Unending; continual without letup
- **inquisitiveness:** Curiosity

Part 1: The Frontier—Providing the Context

Note to the teacher: The next pages provide materials meant to help students better understand and evaluate 19th-century frontier America. The materials also seek to teach students the Five Habits of Historical Thinking.

This section includes the following:

- **PowerPoint presentation: *The Five Habits of Historical Thinking***

This presentation illustrates five habits of thought or modes of analysis that guide historians as they construct their secondary accounts of a topic. These Five Habits are not about skills used in analyzing primary sources. (Those are dealt with more explicitly in a handout in the next section.) These Five Habits are meant to help students see history as a way of thinking, not as the memorizing of disparate facts and pre-digested conclusions. The PowerPoint uses several historical episodes as examples to illustrate the Five Habits. In two places, it pauses to ask students to do a simple activity applying one of the habits to some of their own life experiences.

If you have used this PowerPoint with other *Historian's Apprentice* units, you may not need to use it again here.

- **Handout: “The Five Habits of Historical Thinking”**

This handout supplements the PowerPoint presentation. It is meant as a reference for students to use as needed. If you have used other *Historian's Apprentice* units, your students may only need to review this handout quickly.

- **Warm-Up Activity**

A simple exercise designed to help you see what students know about the frontier, what confuses them, or what ideas they may have absorbed about it from popular culture, friends and family, etc. The goal is to alert them to their need to gain a clearer idea of the past and be critical of what they think they already know.

- **Introductory essay: “America’s Frontier Experience”**

The essay provides enough basic background information on the topic to enable students to assess primary sources and conflicting secondary source interpretations. At the end of the essay, students get some points to keep in mind about the nature of the sources they will examine and the conflicting secondary source interpretations they will debate.

- **PowerPoint presentation: *Happy Trails: The Appeal of the Frontier in 19th-Century America***

This PowerPoint presentation reviews the topic for the lesson and shows how the Five Habits of Historical Thinking can be applied to a clearer understanding of it. At two points, the presentation calls for a pause and prompts students to discuss some aspects of their prior knowledge of the topic. The proposed sequences suggest using this PowerPoint presentation after assigning the introductory essay, but you may prefer to reverse this order.

Warm-Up Activity

What Do You Know About Frontier Life?

This lesson deals with the appeal of the American frontier in the 1800s. Whenever you start to learn something about a time in history, it helps to think first of what you already know about it, or think you know. You probably have impressions, or you may have read or heard things about it already. Some of what you know may be accurate. You need to be ready to alter your fixed ideas about this time as you learn more about it. This is what any historian would do. To do this, study this photograph and take a few notes in response to the questions below it.



This photo shows a cowboy in 1888 out on the plains. What key job do you think this man had? What do you think his life was like while he was doing that job? Why do you think someone would have chosen to go west and find this sort of work to do?

Americans have always loved stories, songs, paintings, and movies about cowboys. What films about cowboys can you name? What view of the life of the cowboy did you get from those films? How accurate do you think the films you like most actually are about cowboys and the American West?

Do you think cowboys were typical of the kinds of people who moved west as settlers in the 1800s? What sorts of people aside from cowboys do you think did this? Why do you think they did this?

America's Frontier Experience

Perhaps the most famous American history essay ever written was Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." The essay was first published in 1893, a time of economic distress, high unemployment, and deep anxieties about America's future. Turner's essay was very much a reflection of that spirit of the times.

In his essay, Turner cited a Census Bulletin for 1890 indicating that, for the first time, no clear, unbroken frontier line marked off American civilization from the sparse, unsettled lands of the American West. To Turner, this disappearance of the frontier was momentous, "the closing of a great historic movement." In Turner's view, the frontier had always been the place where greater democracy, freedom, individualism, adventurous experimentation, and the spirit of "starting over," were all fostered in pure form. In short, these were all the values he most prized about America itself.

Turner believed the frontier had constantly renewed these same values—and strengthened them within the older society back east. Hence, the closing of the frontier worried him greatly, especially at a time when Americans were facing serious economic and social limits of other sorts. The last words of his essay expressed these anxieties:

And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history.

Turner's thesis has been and still is highly influential. However, over the course of the 20th century historians have criticized it in many ways. These criticisms can be summed up as fitting under two headings: "too simplistic" and "too positive."

Critics say Turner was too simplistic in his speaking about "the frontier" and in speaking about "the settler." There was no single frontier. To be fair to Turner, he did describe how the frontier kept moving and changing over the course of U.S. history. First it lay along the fall line of rivers flowing into the Atlantic. That is, it was in the western areas of the original 13 colonies. Then it lay along the Appalachian

mountains. It moved to Kentucky and Tennessee by the time of the Revolution, then down the Ohio to the Mississippi. For a time it was along the edge of the Rocky Mountains, and finally, the frontier was pushed all the way to the Pacific. Yet there never really was a single frontier that remained the same in its natural and human makeup. The frontier was a shifting collection of areas and lines of settlement within and between other unsettled areas.

Nor were the settlers all one type, that "individualistic American" of Turner's account. They were rich and poor; they were men and women; they were various racial, ethnic, and immigrant groups, as well as native-born Americans of English ancestry. They were mountain-man trappers and fur traders; they were miners, including get-rich-quick dreamers who rushed to California in 1849 seeking gold far ahead of the lines of settlement elsewhere in the nation; they were cattle herders, some of whom were small operators and some with enormous ranches in Texas and elsewhere; and they were farmers of all sorts, living in isolation on the prairies or compact communities in the Pacific Northwest and elsewhere.

They moved west as single individuals, as single families, or in huge caravans of covered wagons. Some went on their own, and of these, some were drawn by hopes for land or wealth or adventure, while others were driven by fears about unemployment, debt, and other troubles. Some settlers moved as agents of large businesses, such as the American Fur Company of John Jacob Astor, or as workers on the railroads, or as U.S. soldiers or Indian agents for the federal government.

To speak of Indian agents also reminds us that the American settler, whoever he or she was, did not enter an empty, unsettled wilderness. In each frontier region as settlers moved west, they encountered Native Americans of various tribes and cultures. Their interactions with these peoples cannot be summed up simply. In time, hostility, warfare, and political pressures forced Native Americans off most of their land and into smaller reservations. However, the interactions between Indians and settlers were highly complex and both groups at times traded peacefully, intermarried, and influenced one another in various ways.

To speak of the Indian wars of the 1800s is also to call into question Turner's positive take on the frontier experience. In recent decades, some historians of the West have viewed settlement in far more negative terms. In their view, it did not bring freedom, democracy, and individualism. Instead, it resulted in conflict, ethnic and racial hatred, violence, and enormous environmental damage from mining, overgrazing, and the intensive farming of arid lands. Even Turner himself acknowledged some of the negative aspects of the frontier spirit he mainly celebrated.

However, not all historians of the West have such a pessimistic view of the region. Some of them also still

focus on the courage, determination, and idealism of many of the settlers of the American frontier.

In arguments about the frontier, the accounts of the settlers themselves are a key source of evidence. However, their stories help us to understand what motivated them to move west; what social, political, and cultural values they brought with them; and what they thought about the complex new lands they entered. What was the appeal of the frontier to these settlers in the 1800s? That is a question still central to the historians who even now debate the place of the frontier in American history.

Points to Keep in Mind

Historians' Questions

As the introductory essay makes clear, historians today debate many questions about the shifting frontier or frontiers, the settlers who pushed west in the 1800s, and even the West as a region today.

While these debates are many and varied, the "Turner Thesis" is still a common theme in many of them. Was the frontier a force promoting democracy and individualism, adventurousness and a practical "can-do" spirit? Or was the frontier a shifting region in which some of America's less attractive qualities were illustrated dramatically—its greed for land, its insensitivity toward other cultures, and its imperial aggressiveness and arrogance?

More broadly, was the frontier a force shaping a new society different from all others, "exceptional" in some basic way, or is this notion of American "exceptionalism" a high-handed, unmerited form of patriotic pride? The different viewpoints about this often reflect current political and cultural attitudes and debates today, yet they also reflect ongoing efforts to find, study, understand, and interpret the historical evidence.

The Primary Source Evidence

For this lesson, you will study ten primary source documents on the frontier experience of settlers moving west in the 1800s (11, if 3a & 3b are counted as two sources). These will focus on the views of settlers, journalists describing the settlers, and visual images about the frontier experience. Together, these sources will give you evidence to help you better understand and evaluate the debates historians have about the role of the frontier in American life. They will also enable you to make some informed judgments of your own about what two historians say about the frontier.

Secondary Source Interpretations

After studying and discussing the primary sources, you will read two short passages about the frontier by different historians. One of these historians is Frederick Jackson Turner. The other is a historian commenting on Turner and his significance. The historians who wrote these passages agree about most of the facts, but they make quite different overall judgments about the frontier. You will use your own background knowledge and your ideas about the primary sources as you think about and answer some questions about the views of these historians.

Five Habits of Historical Thinking

History is not just a chronicle of one fact after another. It is a meaningful story, or an account of what happened and why. It is written to address questions or problems historians pose. This checklist describes key habits of thinking that historians adopt as they interpret primary sources and create their own accounts of the past.

History Is Not the Past Itself

When we learn history, we learn a story about the past, not the past itself. No matter how certain an account of the past seems, it is only one account, not the entire story. The “entire story” is gone. That is, the past itself no longer exists. Only some records of events remain, and they are never complete. Hence, it is important to see all judgments and conclusions about the past as tentative or uncertain. Avoid looking for hard-and-fast “lessons” from the past. The value of history is in a way the opposite of such a search for quick answers. That is, its value is in teaching us to live with uncertainty and see even our present as complex, unfinished, open-ended.

The Detective Model: Problem, Evidence, Interpretation

Historians can’t observe the past directly. They must use evidence, just as a detective tries to reconstruct a crime based on clues left behind. In the historian’s case, primary sources are the evidence—letters, official documents, maps, photos, newspaper articles, artifacts, and all other traces from past times. Like a detective, a historian defines a very specific problem to solve, one for which evidence does exist. Asking clear, meaningful questions is a key to writing good history. Evidence is always incomplete. It’s not always easy to separate fact from opinion in it, or to tell what is important from what is not. Historians try to do this, but they must stay cautious about their conclusions and open to other interpretations of the same evidence.

Time, Change, and Continuity

History is about the flow of events over time, yet it is not just one fact after another. It seeks to understand this flow of events as a pattern. In that pattern, some things change while others hold steady over time. You need to see history as a dynamic interplay of both change and continuity together. Only by doing this can you see how the past has evolved into the present—and why the present carries with it many traces or links to the past.

Cause and Effect

Along with seeing patterns of change and continuity over time, historians seek to explain that change. In doing this, they know that no single factor causes change. Many factors interact. Unique, remarkable and creative individual actions and plans are one factor, but individual plans have unintended outcomes, and these shape events in unexpected ways. Moreover, individuals do not always act rationally or with full knowledge of what they are doing. Finally, geography, technology, economics, cultural traditions, and ideas all affect what groups and individuals do.

As They Saw It: Grasping Past Points of View

Above all, thinking like a historian means trying hard to see how people in the past thought and felt. This is not easy. As one historian put it, the past is “another country” in which people felt and thought differently, often very differently from the way we do now. Avoiding “present-mindedness” is therefore a key task for historians. Also, since the past includes various groups in conflict, historians must learn to empathize with many diverse cultures and subgroups to see how they differ and what they share in common.

Part 2: Analyzing the Primary Sources

Note to the teacher: The next pages provide the primary sources for this lesson. It is suggested that you give these to students after they read the background essay, review the “Five Habits of Historical Thinking” handout, and watch and discuss the PowerPoint presentation for the lesson.

This section includes the following:

- **Handout: “Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist”**

Give copies of this handout to students and ask them to refer to it when analyzing any primary source.

- **Ten Primary Source Documents (eleven if 3a & 3b are counted as two)**

The Documents are as follows:

- Document 1. A 1900s drawing of Indians and a white trader
- Document 2. A description of camp life on the Oregon Trail, 1845
- Documents 3a & 3b. Gold mining, two photographs
- Document 4. Election procedures by a large wagon, 1843
- Document 5. Descriptions of Native Americans by Lucia Loraine Williams
- Document 6. Photo of a woman in front of an ox train in the late 1800s
- Document 7. Part of Alfred Stanton’s letter from Oregon, 1856
- Document 8. Part of Elizabeth Wood’s diary, 1851
- Document 9. An 1844 comment in the Missouri Republican
- Document 10. A photo of Nebraska farm family, 1884

- **Ten “Source Analysis” Worksheets for Analyzing the Primary Sources**

Each worksheet asks students to take notes on one source. The prompts along the side match the five categories in the “Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist.” Not every category is used in each worksheet, only those that seem most relevant to a full analysis of that source.

You may want students to analyze all of the sources. However, if time does not allow this, use those that seem most useful for your own instructional purposes.

Students can use the notes on the “Source Analysis” worksheets in discussions, as help in analyzing the two secondary sources in the next part of this lesson, and in follow-up debates, DBQs, and other activities.

Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist

Primary sources are the evidence historians use to reach conclusions and write their accounts of the past. Sources rarely have one obvious, easily grasped meaning. To interpret them fully, historians use several strategies. This checklist describes some of the most important of those strategies. Read the checklist through and use it to guide you whenever you need to analyze and interpret a primary source.

Sourcing

Think about a primary source's author or creator, how and why the primary source document was created, and where it appeared. Also, think about the audience it was intended for and what its purpose was. You may not always find much information about these things, but whatever you can learn will help you better understand the source. In particular, it may suggest the source's point of view or bias, since the author's background and intended audience often shape his or her ideas and way of expressing them.

Contextualizing

"Context" refers to the time and place of which the primary source is a part. In history, facts do not exist separately from one another. They get their meaning from the way they fit into a broader pattern. The more you know about that broader pattern, or context, the more you will be able to understand about the source and its significance.

Interpreting Meanings

It is rare for a source's full meaning to be completely obvious. You must read a written source closely, paying attention to its language and tone as well as to what it implies or merely hints at. With a visual source, all kinds of meaning may be suggested by the way it is designed, and by such things as shading, camera angle, use of emotional symbols or scenes, etc. The more you pay attention to all the details, the more you can learn from a source.

Point of View

Every source is written or created by someone with a purpose, an intended audience, and a point of view or bias. Even a dry table of numbers was created for some reason, to stress some things and not others, to make a point of some sort. At times, you can tell a point of view simply by sourcing the document. Knowing an author was a Democrat or a Republican, for example, will alert you to a likely point of view. In the end, however, only a close reading of the text will make you aware of point of view. Keep in mind that even a heavily biased source can still give you useful evidence of what some people in a past time thought. However, you need to take the bias into account in judging how reliable the source's own claims really are.

Corroborating Sources

No one source tells the whole story. Moreover, no one source is completely reliable. To make reasonable judgments about an event in the past, you must compare sources to find points of agreement and disagreement. Even when there are big differences, both sources may be useful. However, the differences will also tell you something, and they may be important in helping you understand each source.

The Primary Sources for the Lesson

Document 1

Information on the source: Indians and a white trader, a drawing created in the early 1900s.



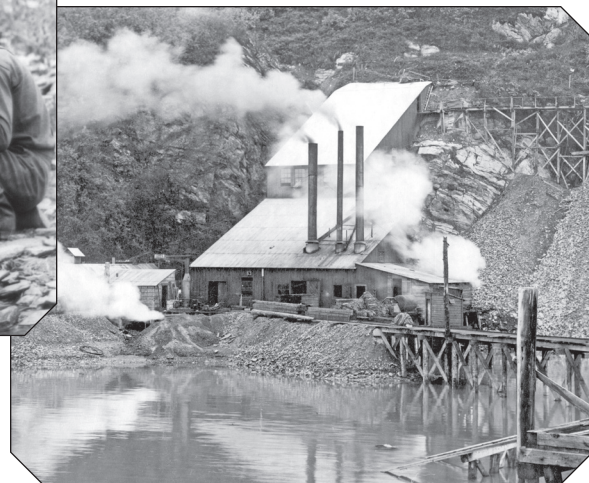
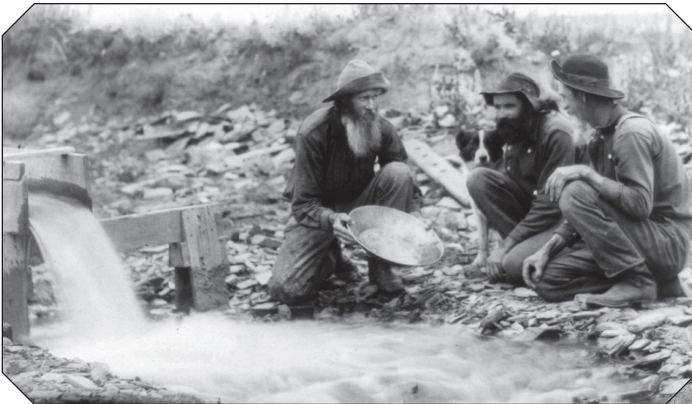
Document 2

Information on the source: Joel Palmer of Indiana describes camp life on the Oregon Trail in this passage from his journal dated June 15, 1845. His company was far out on the prairie in what is now Nebraska. Some of the men had just returned from hunting buffalo.

An unoccupied spectator, who could have beheld our camp to-day, would think it a singular spectacle. The hunters returning with the spoil; some erecting scaffolds, and others drying meat. Of the women, some were washing, some ironing, some baking. At two of the tents the fiddle was employed in uttering its unaccustomed voice among the solitudes of the Platte; at one tent I heard singing; at others the occupants were engaged in reading, some the Bible, others poring over novels. While all this was going on, that nothing might be wanting to complete the harmony of the scene, a Carmelite preacher, named Foster, was reading a hymn, preparatory to religious worship. The fiddles were silenced, and those who had been occupied with the amusements, betook themselves to cards. Such is but a miniature of the great world we had left behind us, when we crossed the line that separates civilized man from the wilderness. But even here the variety of occupation, the active exercise of body and mind, either in labor or pleasure, the coming of evil and good, show that the likeness is a true one.

Documents 3a & 3b

Information on the source: Panning for gold in the 1880s and a large gold mine in operation in the early 1900s.



Document 4

Information on the source: In 1843, Mathew C. Field, an assistant editor of the *New Orleans Picayune* traveling with a group to the Rockies, came across a large wagon train of several hundred men, women, and children headed for Oregon Territory. In this passage, Field describes the odd election procedure this group followed just after crossing the Kansas River on their way west.

We found they were only going on with their elections . . . The candidates stood up in a row before the constituents, and at a given signal they wheeled about and marched off, while the general mass broke after them "lickity-split," each man forming in behind his favorite, so that every candidate flourished a sort of tail of his own, and the man with the longest tail was elected! These proceedings were continued until a Captain and a Council of Ten were elected, and, indeed, if the scene can be conceived, it must appear as a curious mingling of the whimsical with the wild. Here was a

congregation of rough, bold, adventurous men, gathered from distant and opposite sections of the Union, just forming an acquaintance with each other, to last, in all probability through good and evil fortune, through the rest of their days. Few of them expected or thought of ever returning to the States again. They had with them their wives and children, and aged, dependent relatives. They were going with stout and determined hearts to traverse a wild and desolate region, and take possession of a far corner of their country, destined to prove a new and strong arm of a might nation.

Document 5

Information on the source: Like many settlers, Lucia Loraine Williams kept a diary of her trip across the plains with her husband and children, traveling from Ohio to Oregon in 1851. In these passages from different days in her story, she describes various encounters with Native Americans along the way.

The first tribe we passed was the Omaha. They are a beggarly set. The next came the Pawnee, they are the tallest, strongest and most savage, also the noblest looking of any of the tribes I have seen. While we were camped at Shell Creek several of them came and stayed with us. They were nearly starved, their hunting excursion the fall previous having not proved successful and most of the warriors—some 300—had gone into the disputed [area] to hunt [between them and the Sioux]. The day previous our arrival at Shell Creek the Pawnees had taken two cows from a company [of settlers], exacting them to pay for passing through their country and their captain being afraid, dared not refuse. They wanted some cattle of us but did not get any . . .

1st of June. Passed the Sioux village. Their wigwams are made of buffalo skins (the

Pawnees' were mud). They seemed to be a much wealthier tribe than any we have yet seen. The squaws were dressed in antelope skins, ornamented with beads. The men were also clothed with skins or blankets. They owned a great many ponies. On one of the wigwams were several scalps hung out to dry, taken from the Pawnees. They were friendly.

4th. Passed Chimney Rock and camped under Scott bluffs near two wigwams. They came over to eat with us. I helped to get supper for two Indians. We gave them a knife and fork. They took the knife but refused the forks. They were well dressed in blankets, with a hood to come over the head. They were very careful to take all from their plates and tie up in a corner of their blankets. They belonged to the Cheyennes.

Document 6

Information on the source:

Woman holding a whip, standing in front of an ox train in the Black Hills, between 1887 and 1892.



Document 7

Information on the source: Alfred and Phoebe Stanton and their five children moved from Indiana to Oregon in 1847. The passage below is Alfred's part of a letter from Oregon that the couple sent to relatives back east on April 13, 1856.

Dear Brother and Sister.

I thought I would break the long silence that has prevailed between us. I received your kind letter some time ago, which informed us that you were all in good health. We are all in good health at this time & all of our folks are as far as I know. The weather is very fine at this time, and crops bids fair to be very good this season. We had very cold weather for about two weeks which froze harder than I ever saw in Oregon before. It froze all the wheat out so that the people had to sow again this spring. We have a fair prospect for a large crop of fruit this season. Wheat is worth one dollar per bushel, oats 60 cents, potatoes 1 dollar per bushel. Good work horses are very high, good American cows are worth from 50 to 60 dollars a piece. Good sheep is worth from 7 to 8 dollars a head. Hogs are very cheap. We have had a great deal of Indian difficulty both North and South, there has been a great many men and women and children killed in Oregon. Great many families have been

murdered and their houses burned and cattle driven off and destroyed. They have several women and children prisoners at this time. Our young men and a good many old men have gone to fight Indians. Our Indian war commenced about the first of September last, and we have had a great deal of difficulty with them ever since, and there is no telling when it will be over. This war caused labor to be high and money scarce. The farmers of Oregon have turned their attention a great deal to raising fruit, there being a good market at this time. And we think that it will continue for a long time to come, for California does not raise as good fruit as we do, also the Sandwich Islands [the Hawaiian Islands] will be a good market for fruit. San Francisco is a city of one hundred thousand inhabitants at this time, and apples are worth one dollar a pound, and it takes about 44 lbs for one bushel. This is no small sum for one bushel of apples. Just think of that and just wish your selves in Oregon with a good orchard.

Document 8

Information on the source: A passage from Elizabeth Wood's diary of her journey to Oregon in 1851. Her account appeared in the *Weekly Republican* of Peoria, Illinois, February 13, 1852.

After experiencing so many hardships, you doubtless will think I regret taking this long and tiresome trip, and would rather go back than proceed to the end of my journey. But, no, I have a great desire to see Oregon, and besides, there are many things we meet with—the beautiful scenery of plain and mountain, and their inhabitants, the wild animals and the Indians, and natural curiosities in abundance—to compensate us for the hardships and mishaps we encounter. People who do come must not be worried or frightened at trifles; they must put up with storm and cloud as well as calm and sunshine; wade through rivers, climb steep hills, often go hungry, keep cool and good natured always, and possess courage and ingenuity equal to any emergency, and they will be able to endure unto the end. A lazy person should never think of going to Oregon.—Our cattle, but treating them kindly and speaking to them gently, are beginning to get a little tame, and we can now venture to ride in the wagons.—Here we have very little grass, and have great difficulty in finding enough for our stock; what there is, is dried up, but the cattle eat it.

Document 9

Information on the source: On May 30, 1844, the *Missouri Republican*, a newspaper in St. Louis, reported rather critically on the settlers headed west from Missouri that year. This passage is from that report.

The poor devils who start for Oregon, generally spend all they have to scrape together a wagon, some cattle, and a small outfit of provisions. They will spend the summer in the severest toil in getting there. How they will spend the winter is not known even to themselves; for they are as ignorant as they are poor, and know nothing whatever of the country they are going to. In truth, no man of information, in his right mind, would think of leaving such a country as this, to wander over a thousand miles of desert and five hundred of mountains to reach such as that... It is wrong in the people of St. Louis to encourage this spirit of emigration. The settlement of Oregon will not result in any advantage to your city. Your share of its limited trade will be small. Trade cannot cross the Rocky Mountains; it must come by way of the isthmus of Panama. You can do better for your city by settling the vacant lands in your own state.

Document 10

Information on the source: A photo showing a family in Nebraska, 1884, standing in front of sod house with windmill on the roof of the adjoining building.



Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 1

Indians and a white trader, a drawing created in the early 1900s.

Sourcing

This illustration is from the early 1900s.
Does that make you question its
usefulness to historians? Why or why not?

Interpreting meanings

The illustration shows one of the first
types of pioneer settler to show up as the
American frontier moved west.
What type?

The illustration suggests a peaceful
exchange between an Indian and a lone
trader. Do you think this image idealizes
such interactions? That is, does it depict
them in too positive a way? Why or
why not?

Contextualizing

Aside from what you see this trader
offering the Native American, what
other goods did such traders bring with
them and what did they exchange these
goods for?

The artist may have intended to show a
trader exchanging goods with a Native
American couple and their child. However,
the woman could be the trader's wife. Can
you explain why that is plausible? What
other kinds of effects do you think Native
Americans and traders and trappers in the
West had on one another?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 2

Joel Palmer of Indiana, describing camp life on the Oregon Trail, 1845.

Interpreting meanings

What in the scene described fits with your own previous notions of what settlers moving West experienced? Are there features here that do not fit or that surprise you in some way?

Palmer describes the camp as “a miniature of the great world we had left behind us.” What does this suggest about the typical settler and about the frontier’s influence on such a settler?

Point of view

Joel Palmer says his perception of this frontier scene was from the point of view of an “unoccupied spectator.” Do you think his description is purely neutral, as Palmer suggests, or does it reveal his own point of view in some way?

Corroborating sources

What other sources for this lesson seem to fit with Palmer’s description of camp life here? Are there any that do not fit?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Documents 3a & 3b

Panning for gold in the 1880s and a large gold mine in operation in the early 1900s.

Contextualizing

Men like the three in Photo 3a headed west by the thousands in 1849 and for the next few years. Why?

Historians often speak of a mining frontier as one of several frontiers in the West. Photos 3a and 3b show how that mining frontier changed from 1840s to the end of the 1800s. Can you explain?

Interpreting meanings

What does Photo 3a help you understand about the American frontier in the 1800s and the kinds of people who headed for it?

Corroborating sources

Do any other sources for this lesson hint at similar kinds of changes in the West as the one these two photos together suggest?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 4

Mathew C. Field describes the election procedures taken by a large wagon headed for Oregon territory, 1843.

Contextualizing

From what you know about the length and nature of the Oregon Trail, explain why settlers on it might have preferred to move in large wagon trains and why they might want leaders in charge as this group apparently did.

The early 1800s saw major changes in the way presidents and other political leaders were being chosen. How might these changes help explain the procedures this group of settlers chose to use to pick its leaders?

Interpreting meanings

How democratic do you think this group's way of selecting its leaders was?

Point of view

Halfway through this passage, Field says that the election "must appear as a curious mingling of the whimsical with the wild." In what then follows, what point do you think he is trying to make about the causes or significance of this democratic spirit?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 5

Descriptions of Native Americans from the 1851 diary of Lucia Loraine Williams.

Contextualizing

The encounters Lucia Williams had on her 1851 journey were mainly peaceful. Why did tensions with Native Americans west of the Mississippi rise in the years after the Civil War?

Interpreting meanings

Based on the incidents Williams describes and her other observations, what attitudes did settlers and Native Americans seem to have toward one another along this trail to Oregon? How well do they appear to have understood one another?

Point of view

Notice the various ways Williams describes the tribes she observed. Does she express any distinct overall idea or opinion about Native American peoples? That is, what point of view or attitude about Native Americans did Williams herself seem to have?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 6

Woman holding a whip, standing in front of an ox train in the Black Hills, between 1887 and 1892.

Contextualizing

Wagon trains crossing the plains and mountains of the trans-Mississippi West more often preferred to use oxen than horses. Why do you suppose that was so?

Interpreting meanings

What else can you either observe or infer from this photo about the challenges settlers in wagon trains like this would have faced?

From the photo, can you infer anything about the kinds of character traits settlers tended to have or value, including among women heading to the frontier?

Corroborating sources

Which other accounts for this lesson seem to fit with the impression this photograph provides of life for settlers making their way west in the 1800s?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 7

Alfred Stanton's part of a letter from Oregon sent to relatives back east on April 13, 1856.

Contextualizing

By 1856, the frontier regions of both the Pacific Northwest and California were already changing drastically. How does this letter help illustrate what those changes were?

Interpreting meanings

One view of settlers on the frontier is that they sought to live an independent, self-sufficient existence and cut ties to the main institutional life of the larger society. What details in Alfred Stanton's letter about his interests and plans suggest this was not so, at least for him?

Point of view

How carefully does Alfred Stanton describe the nature of the Indian troubles he discusses? Do you think he left out important information? What point of view does he appear to have?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 8

A passage from Elizabeth Wood's diary of her journey to Oregon in 1851.

Interpreting meanings

Sum up in your own words the qualities Wood thinks a pioneer settler had to have. Also, what does she reveal about the motives or reasons many settlers had for emigrating to the West?

Sourcing

To what extent do you think Wood's focus and interest reflects the fact that she was a woman? That is, do you think men would have noticed and valued the same things in the same way she does here? Why or why not?

Corroborating sources

From the other sources, does Wood's attitude seem typical of what most settlers felt? Why or why not?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 9

An 1844 comment in the *Missouri Republican* critical of settlers heading west from Missouri.

Sourcing

How does knowing the source of this comment help you evaluate its purpose and point of view?

Interpreting meanings

List all the things this report suggests as reasons for settlers not to go west. Which seem most valid? Why?

Point of view

Choose some phrases that illustrate the report's point of view or bias.

Corroborating sources

Which sources do or do not back up this report's view of the typical settler?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 10

An 1884 photo showing a family in Nebraska, standing in front of a sod house with windmill on the roof of the adjoining building.

Contextualizing

Many settlers in Nebraska and elsewhere in the plains built sod houses like this.

Why? Why would a windmill have been a good source of mechanical power in such a setting?

Why was coping economically in such a setting getting harder for such prairie farmers in the late 1800s, when this photo was taken?

Interpreting meanings

What personal, social, and cultural challenges would a family in this environment have faced?

What positive features about this life might have attracted some to this setting anyway?

Part 3: Analyzing the Secondary Sources

Note to the teacher: This next section includes passages from two secondary source accounts of settlers and the frontier, along with two activities on these sources. We suggest you first discuss the brief comment “Analyzing Secondary Sources” just above the first of the two secondary sources. Discuss the four criteria the first activity asks students to use in analyzing each secondary source. These criteria focus students on the nature of historical accounts as 1) problem-centered, 2) based on evidence, 3) influenced by point of view and not purely neutral, and 4) tentative or aware of alternative explanations.

Specifically, this section includes the following:

- **Two secondary source passages**

Give copies of these passages to students to read, either in class or as homework. The two passages are from “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” by Frederick Jackson Turner, in *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), and from John Mack Faragher’s afterword in the same book.

- **Two student activities**

Activity 1

Students analyze the two passage taking notes on the following questions:

- How clearly does the account focus on a problem or question?
- Does it reveal a position or express a point of view?
- How well does it base its case on primary source evidence?
- How aware is it of alternative explanations or points of view?

Activity 2

In pairs, students select two of the primary sources for the lesson that best support each author’s claims in the secondary source passages. Students discuss their choices with the class.

The Secondary Sources for the Lesson

Analyzing Secondary Sources

Historians write secondary source accounts of the past after studying primary source documents like the ones on the frontier you have studied. However, they normally select documents from among a great many others, and they stress some aspects of the story but not others. In doing this, historians are guided by the questions they ask about the topic. Their selection of sources and their focus are also influenced by their own aims, bias, or point of view. No account of the past is perfectly neutral. In reading a secondary source, you should pay attention to what it includes, what it leaves out, what conclusions it reaches, and how aware it is of alternative interpretations.

* * * *

Secondary Source 1

Information on the source: The passage in the box below is an excerpt from the essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” by Frederick Jackson Turner. The essay is from *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner*, essays by Frederick Jackson Turner with commentary by John Mack Faragher (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994). pp. 53, 58–59.

But the most important effect of the frontier has been in the promotion of democracy here and in Europe. As has been indicated, the frontier is productive of individualism . . .

From the conditions of frontier life came intellectual traits of profound importance. The works of travelers along each frontier from colonial days onward describe certain common traits, and these traits have, while softening down, still persisted as survivals in the place of their origin, even when a higher social organization succeeded. The result is that to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for

evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom—these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier. Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, and the people of the United States have taken their tone from the incessant expansion which has not only been open but has even been forced upon them. He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased. Movement has been its dominant fact, and, unless this training has no effect upon a people, the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise. But never again will such gifts of free land offer themselves. For a moment, at the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant.

The Secondary Sources for the Lesson

Secondary Source 2

Information on the source: The passage in the box below is an excerpt from *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner*, essays by Frederick Jackson Turner with commentary by John Mack Faragher (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994). The passage here is from Faragher's afterword, p. 241.

Turner studied the frontier not merely because it was his special area of interest, but foremost because he believed its history could illuminate the broader story of America. The power of the frontier thesis derived from its commitment to the study of what it has meant to be American. That is part of the Turnerian view we would do well to preserve. But the Turnerian interpretation of western expansion read back into the past both the assurance and the arrogance of the victors in a centuries-long campaign of conquest. Turner made that victory seem inevitable, but the history

of the American West now being written serves to remind us that there was nothing smooth about it at all—that the victory of one people was usually at the expense of another. The deeper history of the frontier that now opens to us is rich with the stories of the diverse peoples who tried to find a place in the American West. It offers cautionary tales as well as ones of inspiration. Just as Turner's frontier thesis responded to his perception of the needs of America of a century ago, so this new history of the frontier speaks to the issues and struggles of our own time.

The Secondary Sources: Activity 1

In this exercise, you read two short passages from much longer secondary sources dealing with settlers and the frontier. For each secondary source, take notes on the following four questions (you may want to underline phrases or sentences in the passages that you think back up your notes):

1. How clearly does this account focus on a problem or question? What do you think that problem or question is? Sum it up in your own words here.

Significance of the Frontier, Turner

Afterword, Faragher

2. Does the secondary source take a position or express a point of view about the frontier? If so, briefly state that point of view or quote an example of it.

Significance of the Frontier, Turner

Afterword, Faragher

3. How well does the secondary source seem to base its case on primary source evidence? Take notes about any specific examples, if you can identify them.

Significance of the Frontier, Turner

Afterword, Faragher

4. Does the secondary source seem aware of alternative explanations or points of view about this topic? Underline points in the passage where you see this.

Significance of the Frontier, Turner

Afterword, Faragher

In pairs, discuss your notes for this activity.

The Secondary Sources: Activity 2

This activity is based on the passages from “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” by Frederick Jackson Turner, in *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), and from John Mack Faragher’s afterword in the same book. From the primary sources for this lesson, choose two that you think best support each author’s point of view about frontier. With the rest of the class, discuss the two secondary source passages and defend the choice of the sources you have made.

1. From this lesson, choose two primary sources that best back up Turner’s interpretation of the frontier. List those sources here and briefly explain why you chose them.
2. From this lesson, choose two primary sources that best back up the Faragher’s critical comments about Turner’s frontier thesis. List those sources here and briefly explain why you chose them.
3. Does your textbook include a passage describing or summing up America’s frontier experience? If so, with which of the two secondary sources (Turner or Faragher) does it seem to agree most? What one or two primary sources from this lesson would you add to this textbook passage to improve it?

Discuss your choices with the rest of the class.

Part 4: Follow-Up Options

Note to the teacher: At this point, students have completed the key tasks of *The Historian's Apprentice* program. They have examined their own prior understandings and acquired background knowledge on the topic. They have analyzed and debated a set of primary sources. They have considered secondary source accounts of the topic. This section includes two suggested follow-up activities. Neither of these is a required part of the lesson. They do not have to be undertaken right away. However, we do strongly recommend that you find some way to do what these options provide for. They give students a way to write or debate in order to express their ideas and arrive at their own interpretations of the topic.

Two suggested follow-up activities are included here:

- **Document-Based Questions**

Four document-based questions are provided. Choose one and follow the guidelines provided for writing a typical DBQ essay.

- **A Structured Debate**

The aim of this debate format is not so much to teach students to win a debate, but to learn to listen and learn, as well as speak up and defend a position. The goal is a more interactive and more civil debating process.

Document-Based Questions

Document-based questions (DBQs) are essay questions you must answer by using your own background knowledge and a set of primary sources on that topic. Below are four DBQs on the American frontier. Use the sources for this lesson and everything you have learned from it to write a short essay answer to one of these questions.

Suggested DBQs

Which did the pioneering experience on the frontier promote more: democracy and equality, or greed, land-hunger, and social inequality?

“Frederick Jackson Turner was wrong. It’s more that American settlers brought democracy to the frontier than that the frontier brought democracy to America.” Assess the validity of this statement (that is, explain why you do or do not agree with it).

“Men and women pioneers in the 1800s had a very different sense of what moving west meant and what they wanted out of the experience.” Assess the validity of this statement (that is, explain why you do or do not agree with it).

“The views and attitudes of settlers prove the conflict with and exploitation of Native Americans was inevitable as the West was conquered.” Assess the validity of this statement (that is, explain why you do or do not agree with it).

Suggested Guidelines for Writing a DBQ Essay

- Planning and thinking through the essay**
 Consider the question carefully. Think about how to answer it so as to address each part of it. Do not ignore any detail in the question. Pay attention to the question’s form (cause-and-effect, compare-and-contrast, assess the validity, etc.). This form will often give you clues as to how best to organize each part of your essay.
- Thesis statement and introductory paragraph**
 The thesis statement is a clear statement of what you hope to prove in your essay. It must address *all* parts of the DBQ, it must make a claim you can back up with the sources, and it should be specific enough to help you organize the rest of your essay.
- Using evidence effectively**
 Use the notes on your “Source Analysis” activity sheets to organize your thoughts about these primary sources. In citing a source, use it to support key points or illustrate major themes. Do not simply list a source in order to get it into the essay somehow. If any sources do *not* support your thesis, you should still try to use them. Your essay may be more convincing if you qualify your thesis so as to account for these other sources.
- Linking ideas explicitly**
 After your introduction, your internal paragraphs should make your argument in a logical or clear way. Each paragraph should be built around one key supporting idea and details that back up that idea. Use transition phrase such as “before,” “next,” “then,” or “on the one hand . . . but on the other hand,” to help readers follow the thread of your argument.
- Wrapping it up**
 Don’t add new details about sources in your final paragraph. State a conclusion that refers back to your thesis statement by showing how the evidence has backed it up. If possible, look for nice turns of phrase to end on a dramatic note.

A Structured Debate

Small-group activity: Using a version of the Structured Academic Controversy model, debate alternate interpretations of this lesson's topic. The goal of this method is not so much to win a debate as to learn to collaborate in clarifying your interpretations to one another. In doing this, your goal should be to see that it is possible for reasonable people to hold differing views, even when finding the "one right answer" is not possible.

Use all their notes from previous activities in this lesson. Here are the rules for this debate:

1. Organize a team of four or six students. Choose a debate topic based on the lesson *Happy Trails: The Appeal of the Frontier in 19th-Century America*.

(You may wish to use one of the DBQs suggested for the Document-Based Questions activity for this lesson, or you may want to define the debate topic in a different way.)

2. Split your team into two sub-groups. Each sub-group should study the materials for this lesson and rehearse its case. One sub-group then present its case to the other. That other sub-group must repeat the case back to the first sub-group's satisfaction.
3. The two sub-groups then switch roles and repeat step 2
4. Your team either reaches a consensus which it explains to the entire class, or it explains where the key differences between the sub-groups lie

Answers to “Source Analysis” Activities

Source Analysis: Document 1

Sourcing: Answers will vary. Like any illustration, it is a version of reality, not reality itself.

Interpreting meanings: Traders, who often traveled alone as this one seems to have done.

Answers may vary. A focus might be on the impact of various kinds of trade on the Native American cultures affected.

Contextualizing: Iron implements, guns, various trinkets, alcohol, etc., were usually exchanged for furs or skins.

Traders often married Native American women, sometimes to aid in dealing with a tribe. Other impacts varied widely and should be discussed.

Source Analysis: Document 2

Interpreting meanings: Answers will vary and should be discussed.

Answers will vary. The point of the question is to focus on how much the frontier shaped settlers versus how much the settlers brought their own culture west and kept it intact.

Point of view: Answers may vary. Palmer’s description is entirely from the perspective of the settlers themselves as they moved from “civilization” into “wilderness.”

Corroborating sources: Answers will vary and should be discussed.

Source Analysis: Document 3

Contextualizing: Large veins of gold were discovered in California.

Small individual miners like those in Photo 3b were rapidly replaced by large, efficient, mechanized mining operations.

Interpreting meanings: Answers will vary, but could focus on the appeal of the frontier to vigorous men driven by dreams of riches, ready to take big risks, etc.

Corroborating sources: Document 7 could be seen as hinting at similar processes of change.

Source Analysis: Document 4

Contextualizing: It was about 2000 miles long, it passed through very arid regions and mountainous areas, sometimes through hostile Indian lands, etc. It took organization and skill to survive.

Voting rights were rapidly extended to all or nearly all white males and to some others. This democratizing trend could be seen as reflected here.

Interpreting meanings: Answers will vary and should be discussed.

Point of View: Interpretations will vary. Field may be suggesting these men from many areas already shared a strong commitment to their country’s democratic ethos.

Source Analysis: Document 5

Contextualizing: As more settlers, miners, railroads, etc., encroached on Indian lands in the trans-Mississippi West after the Civil War, conflict erupted and bitter wars were fought.

Interpreting meanings: Interpretations could easily vary widely on these points, and they should be discussed.

Point of view: Williams uses a variety of adjectives and other ways to describe the tribes. Some may see her as a careful observer who makes many distinctions and seems kind to some of the Native Americans, while others may feel she judges these peoples in terms of her own values, such as proper use of a fork, etc.

Source Analysis: Document 6

Contextualizing: Oxen were cheaper, more docile, better able to live off of the sparse vegetation of the plains, etc.

Interpreting meanings: Answers to both questions may vary and should be discussed.

Corroborating Sources: Several sources for the lesson could be chosen, in particular 2, 4, 5, and 7.

Source Analysis: Document 7

Contextualizing: It suggests how a complex market economy was developing, with long-distant trade patterns, growing cities, etc.

Interpreting meanings: His awareness of the dollar cost of many products, the prices at which he could sell his own goods, the growing markets he could take advantage of, etc.

Point of view: Answers will vary, but could focus on the lack of any explanation of what had led to the Native American attacks. His focus is entirely on the effects of those attacks on settlers, etc.

Source Analysis: Document 8

Interpreting meanings: Her stress is on strenuousness, patience, readiness to endure hardship, appreciation for adventure, beauty, etc.

Sourcing: Answers will vary and should be discussed. Some may note she says little about plans to farm, mine, strike it rich, etc.

Corroborating sources: Answers will vary and should be discussed.

Source Analysis: Document 9

Sourcing: The publication appears to have the interests of St. Louis more in mind than those of the settlers.

Interpreting meanings: Lack of sufficient supplies, harsh conditions on the way, poor opportunities for trade from Oregon, etc.

Point of view: "Poor devils," "ignorant as they are poor," etc.

Corroborating sources: Answers will vary but should note how much careful planning is described in some of the accounts.

Source Analysis: Document 10

Contextualizing: Sod was used because timber was very sparse. High winds were common.

Lower prices and stiffer competition from more-integrated national and international markets, growing debt, etc.

Interpreting meanings: Lack of schools and churches; loneliness from isolation, etc.

Personal independence, the calm beauty of the prairies, etc.

Evaluating Secondary Sources: Activity 1

These are not definitive answers to the questions. They are suggested points to look for in student responses.

1. How clearly does this account focus on a problem or question. What do you think that problem or question is? Sum it up in your own words here.

Turner seeks to understand what the effect of the continually moving frontier has been not only on the pioneers and settlers themselves, but on the entire society.

Faragher specifically addresses Turner's famous thesis. He seeks to show the implications of recent historical scholarship for that thesis.

2. Does the secondary source take a position or express a point of view about the frontier? If so, briefly state that point of view or quote an example of it.

Turner proposes as his central thesis that the frontier has had a continual impact on the larger society, one fostering democracy, individualism, and a series of related character traits. His statement that "America has been another name for opportunity" indicates that he views this impact positively.

Faragher both acknowledges the strength of the Turner thesis but also criticizes its adoption mainly of the point of view of the "victors." Faragher sees these victors as set within a far more diverse cultural context and a pattern of conflict that shaped frontier settlement as it unfolded.

3. How well does the secondary source seem to base its case on primary source evidence? Take notes about any specific examples, if you can identify them.

Turner does not make any references to primary sources in this passage, though he does in great detail throughout the essay of which this passage is a part.

Faragher is dealing here more with debates among historians than with the primary sources directly. He sums up the work of many contemporary historians in this passage and refers to them in detail elsewhere in his essay.

4. Does the secondary source seem aware of alternative explanations or points of view about this topic? Underline points in the passage where you see this.

Turner does not specifically refer to other historians in this passage, but his essay is meant to present an idea about the frontier that he thinks other historians up to his time have not stressed nearly enough, if at all.

Faragher is entirely focused in this passage both on Turner's views and on the wide range of views about the West now being explored by historians.

