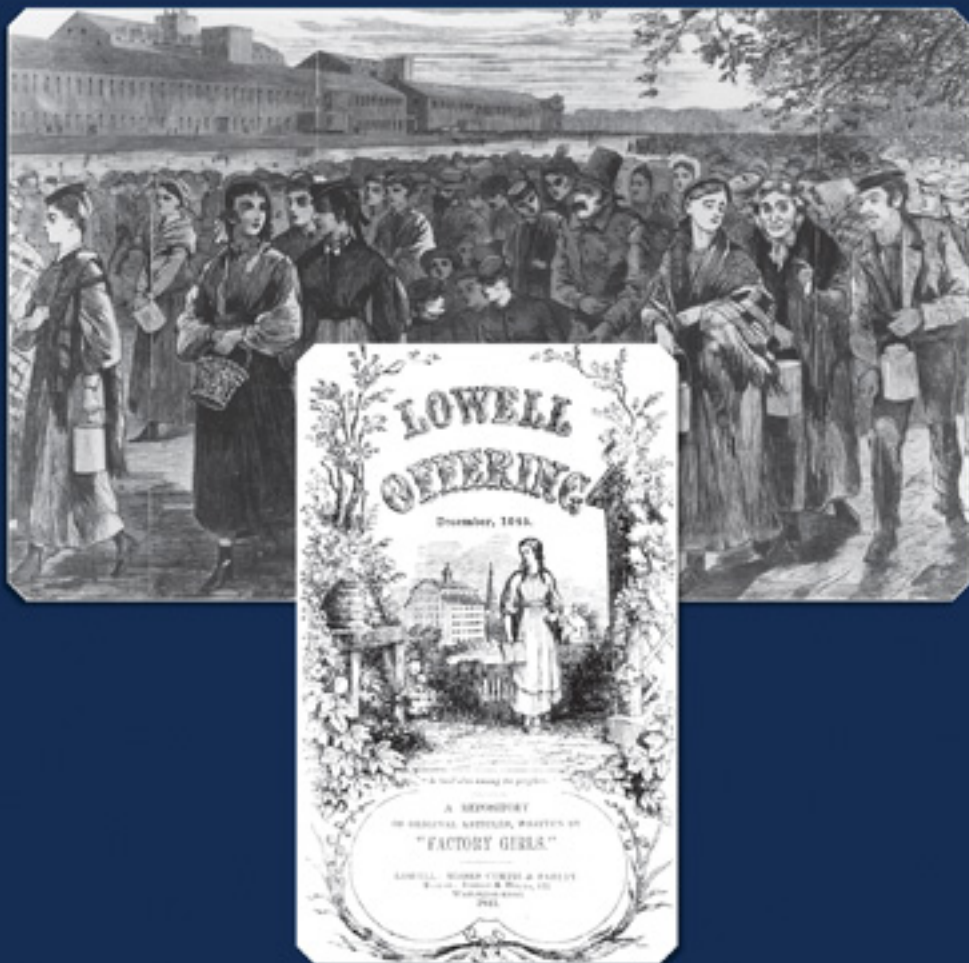


Debating the DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

The Lowell Experience

*How successful were Lowell's founders in their efforts
to create an ideal industrial community?*



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Teacher Introduction

★ Using Primary Sources

Primary sources are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past era or historical event. They are the raw materials, or the evidence, on which historians base their “secondary” accounts of the past.

A rapidly growing number of history teachers today are using primary sources. Why? Perhaps it’s because primary sources give students a better sense of what history is and what historians do. Such sources also help students see the past from a variety of viewpoints. Moreover, primary sources make history vivid and bring it to life.

However, primary sources are not easy to use. They can be confusing. They can be biased. They rarely all agree. Primary sources must be interpreted and set in context. To do this, students need historical background knowledge. *Debating the Documents* helps students handle such challenges by giving them a useful framework for analyzing sources that conflict with one another.



*“Multiple,
conflicting
perspectives are
among the truths
of history.
No single
objective or
universal account
could ever put an
end to this endless
creative dialogue
within and
between the past
and the present.”*

From the 2011 Statement on Standards
of Professional Conduct of the Council of
the American Historical Association.

★ *The Debating the Documents Series*

Each *Debating the Documents* booklet includes the same sequence of reproducible worksheets. If students use several booklets over time, they will get regular practice at interpreting and comparing conflicting sources. In this way, they can learn the skills and habits needed to get the most out of primary sources.

Each *Debating the Documents* Booklet Includes

- **Suggestions for the Student and an Introductory Essay.** The student gets instructions and a one-page essay providing background on the booklet's topic. A time line on the topic is also included.
- **Two Groups of Contrasting Primary Source Documents.** In most of the booklets, students get one pair of visual sources and one pair of written sources. In some cases, more than two are provided for each. Background is provided on each source. *Within each group, the sources clash in a very clear way.* (The sources are not always exact opposites, but they do always differ in some obvious way.)
- **Three Worksheets for Each Document Group.** Students use the first two worksheets to take notes on the sources. The third worksheet asks which source the student thinks would be most useful to a historian.
- **One DBQ.** On page 20, a document-based question (DBQ) asks students to write an effective essay using all of the booklet's primary sources.

★ *How to Use This Booklet*

1. Have students read “Suggestions for the Student” and the Introductory Essay.

Give them copies of pages 5–7. Ask them to read the instructions and then read the introductory essay on the topic. The time line gives them additional information on that topic. This reading could be done in class or as a homework assignment.

2. Have students do the worksheets.

Make copies of the worksheets and the pages with the sources. Ask students to study the background information on each source and the source itself. Then have them take notes on the sources using the worksheets. If students have access to a computer, have them review the primary sources digitally.

3. “Debate the documents” as a class.

Have students use their worksheet notes to debate the primary source documents as a class. Urge students to follow these ground rules:

- Use your worksheets as a guide for the discussion or debate.
- Try to reach agreement about the main ideas and the significance of each primary source document.
- Look for points of agreement as well as disagreement between the primary sources.
- Listen closely to all points of view about each primary source.
- Focus on the usefulness of each source to the historian, not merely on whether you agree or disagree with that source’s point of view.

4. Have students do the final DBQ.

A DBQ is an essay question about a set of primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, students write essays using evidence from the sources and their own background knowledge of the historical era. (See the next page for a DBQ scoring guide to use in evaluating these essays.)

The DBQ assignment on page 20 includes guidelines for writing a DBQ essay. Here are some additional points to make with students about preparing to write this kind of essay.

The DBQ for this Booklet (see page 20):

“Lowell’s founders hoped to create an ideal industrial community. But industrial reality in time prevented their dream from coming true.”
Explain this statement and assess its validity. (That is, explain why you do or do not agree with it.)

- Analyze the question carefully.
- Use your background knowledge to set sources in their historical context.
- Question and interpret sources actively. Do not accept them at face value.
- Use sources meaningfully to support your essay’s thesis.
- Pay attention to the overall organization of your essay.

★ *Complete DBQ Scoring Guide*

Use this guide in evaluating the DBQ for this booklet. Use this scoring guide with students who are already familiar with using primary sources and writing DBQ essays.

Excellent Essay

- Offers a clear answer or thesis explicitly addressing all aspects of the essay question.
- Does a careful job of interpreting many or most of the documents and relating them clearly to the thesis and the DBQ. Deals with conflicting documents effectively.
- Uses details and examples effectively to support the thesis and other main ideas. Explains the significance of those details and examples well.
- Uses background knowledge and the documents in a balanced way.
- Is well written; clear transitions make the essay easy to follow from point to point. Only a few minor writing errors or errors of fact.

Good Essay

- Offers a reasonable thesis addressing the essential points of the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least some of the documents and relates them to the thesis and the DBQ.
- Usually relates details and examples meaningfully to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some relevant background knowledge.
- May have some writing errors or errors of fact, as long as these do not invalidate the essay's overall argument or point of view.

Fair Essay

- Offers at least a partly developed thesis addressing the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least a few of the documents.
- Relates only a few of the details and examples to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some background knowledge.
- Has several writing errors or errors of fact that make it harder to understand the essay's overall argument or point of view.

Poor Essay

- Offers no clear thesis or answer addressing the DBQ.
- Uses few documents effectively other than referring to them in “laundry list” style, with no meaningful relationship to a thesis or any main point.
- Uses details and examples unrelated to the thesis or other main ideas. Does not explain the significance of these details and examples.
- Is not clearly written, with some major writing errors or errors of fact.

Suggestions to the Student

★ *Using Primary Sources*

A primary source is any record of evidence from the past. Many things are primary sources: letters, diary entries, official documents, photos, cartoons, wills, maps, charts, etc. They are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past event or time period. This *Debating the Documents* lesson is based on two groups of primary source documents. Within each group, the sources conflict with one another. That is, they express different or even opposed points of view. You need to decide which source is more reliable, more useful, or more typical of the time period. This is what historians do all the time. Usually, you will be able to learn something about the past from each source, even when the sources clash with one another in dramatic ways.

★ *How to Use This Booklet*

1. Read the one-page introductory essay.

This gives you background information that will help you analyze the primary source documents and do the exercises for this *Debating the Documents* lesson. The time line gives you additional information you will find helpful.



2. Study the primary source documents for this lesson.

For this lesson, you get two groups of sources. The sources within each group conflict with one another. Some of these sources are visuals, others are written sources. With visual sources, pay attention not only to the image’s “content” (its subject matter) but also to its artistic style, shading, composition, camera angle, symbols, and other features that add to the image’s meaning. With written sources, notice the writing style, bias, even what the source leaves out or does not talk about. Think about each source’s author, that author’s reasons for writing, and the likely audience for the source. These considerations give you clues as to the source’s historical value.

3. Use the worksheets to analyze each group of primary source documents.

For each group of sources, you get three worksheets. Use the “Study the Document” worksheets to take notes on each source. Use the “Comparing the Documents” worksheet to decide which of the sources would be most useful to a historian.

4. As a class, debate the documents.

Use your worksheet notes to help you take part in this debate.

5. Do the final DBQ.

“DBQ” means “document-based question.” A DBQ is a question along with several primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, write an essay using evidence from the documents and your own background history knowledge.

Lowell: The Historical Background

The Industrial Revolution began in England, and the wealth and power it gave that nation soon became apparent to the rest of the world. However, some less appealing features of industrialism became apparent as well.

In England's new factory towns, entire families—men, women, and children—worked long hours to support themselves in cramped, rat-infested slum quarters. The rural regions they left behind may well have been worse than this. Still, industrialism clearly meant new forms of dire poverty for many, along with an overall rise in national wealth.

In 1810, Francis Cabot Lowell, a member of Boston's wealthy merchant class, visited textile mills in England. He came away with detailed memories of the design of certain machines and was able to build a working power loom in America. This enabled Lowell and his "Boston Associates" to build a fully mechanized cotton textile mill in Waltham, Massachusetts. After Lowell's death, the Boston Associates found a better site at East Chelmsford, in northern Massachusetts, along the Merrimack River. It was there that a vast expansion of the textile industry would take place. This industrial center was later renamed Lowell.

Lowell's founders wanted their city to avoid the harmful features of industrialism. They designed a planned community where the largely female labor force was to be protected by owners concerned for both their spiritual and physical well-being. These owners hoped to prove that the new industrial order could actually strengthen America's democratic, small-town virtues.

Lowell's first mills started operating in the 1820s. Into the 1840s, its workforce was largely made up of young women from surrounding New England farms. They came to Lowell to work, usually for a year or so at a time, to add to the family income and get a taste of life outside their small communities. In Lowell, they were supervised in dormitories. Strict rules protected them and confined them. Even church attendance was sometimes required.

For a time, the ideal seemed close to the reality. But within two or three decades, the dream faded. Soon, a more typical factory town took its place. By 1850, Lowell produced a fifth of the nation's cotton cloth, and it was the largest industrial center in the nation. The Lowell Machine Shop also sold textile manufacturing equipment, machine tools, and locomotives. But the dream of Lowell as a model industrial community was fading. Facing stronger competition, the mills had to lower prices and make up for losses by lowering wages as well. Many of the New England female workers were driven away and replaced by a diverse group of European immigrants.

Still, for a time, Lowell combined state-of-the-art technology with social planning to become a major center of the early Industrial Revolution in America.

The Lowell Experience Time Line

1812

• • • Francis Cabot Lowell returns from England. Mechanic Paul Moody helps him build a working power loom.

1817

• • • Lowell dies.

1821

• • • Lowell's Boston business partners choose a location on the Merrimack River as the site for the Lowell textile mills.

1822

• • • Irish work gangs take part in digging the first power canals.

1826

• • • The town of Lowell is incorporated. It has a population of 2,500. About 2,000 of its citizens are textile workers.

1831

• • • Open violence occurs between Irish and Yankee workers.

1834

• • • Lowell textile businesses cut wages. This leads to one of the first strikes led by female workers.

1836

• • • Lowell has about 18,000 people. Nearly 9,000 are textile workers.

1840

• • • Female workers begin writing and publishing *The Lowell Offering*.

1840s

• • • Irish workers begin to find jobs in the textile mills. In 1847, famine in Ireland forces thousands of men, women, and children to move to America.

1844

• • • The Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (LFLRA) is organized. It demands a 10-hour workday. This was one of the first long-lasting labor organizations for working women in the United States.

1850

• • • Lowell is producing around 50,000 miles of cloth a year. It is the largest industrial city in the United States. Its population of 33,000 makes it the second largest city in Massachusetts.

1853

• • • More strikes and protests take place in Lowell; some are successful.

1855

• • • The Irish now make up more than one-fourth of Lowell's population.

Visual Primary Source Document 1



American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA

Information on Document 1

For a time, Lowell relied on female workers from surrounding New England towns who lived in supervised dorms while working in the Lowell mills. Cultural teachings were not neglected at Lowell. The *Lowell Offering* was a literary magazine that published articles, stories, and poems written by factory girls. In addition, evening lectures,

plays, and other cultural events were provided. Newspapers, magazines, and books were available through lending libraries. Literary circles, Sunday schools, and other church activities, as well as Lowell's shops and stores, provided these rural women much wider cultural horizons and a real sense of independence.

Visual Primary Source Document 2



New England Factory Life—“Bell Time.” By Winslow Homer. Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Information on Document 2

By 1850, Lowell was the largest industrial center in the United States. Not only did it produce its own textiles, but it also sold textile manufacturing equipment, machine tools, and other industrial products to the rest of the nation. But as Lowell grew, its workforce also changed. Growing competition led the mill owners to cut prices and, in turn, lower the wages of its workers. In time, European immigrants willing to work for these low

wages began replacing female workers from rural New England. This 1868 illustration by Winslow Homer shows immigrant laborers on their way to work at Lowell. The background shows Lowell's "mile of mills" along the Merrimack River. The drawing suggests that instead of single females, entire families often worked in the mills and divided up the lower wages they could earn.

Study the Document: Visual Source 1

Instructions: Take notes on these questions. Use your notes to discuss the documents and answer the DBQ.

1 Main Idea or Topic _____

What is this document about? What key events, facts, attitudes, or other ideas does it show or express?

2 Context _____

What do you need to know to better understand this document? In particular, how does knowing something about the previous mainly female workforce at Lowell help in understanding this document?

3 Visual Features _____

Notice the way the girl is dressed, her posture, and the setting framing both her and the factory in the background. What idea about life at Lowell do these and other visual features give you?

4 Bias _____

What overall opinion of Lowell and its factories does this image seem to express?

5 Usefulness _____

This illustration may express a bias. Is it still useful to a historian as evidence? Does it provide evidence about early industrial America in general, or only about Lowell?

Study the Document: Visual Source 2

Instructions: Take notes on these questions. Use your notes to discuss the documents and answer the DBQ.

1 Main Idea or Topic

What overall impression of Lowell does this painting suggest to you?

2 Context

This work of art is dated 1868. The cover of the *Lowell Offering* (Document 1) was from 1845. What changes in Lowell and in the nation as a whole might help to explain the difference between these two views of Lowell?

3 Visual Features

Compare the Lowell buildings here with the factory in the *Lowell Offering* cover in Document 1. Also, notice the types of people in this painting and how they are drawn. What do these visual features suggest about the way Lowell and its workforce changed between 1845 and 1868?

4 Usefulness

If you were a historian, how do you think you might use this document in writing a history of Lowell?

Comparing the Documents

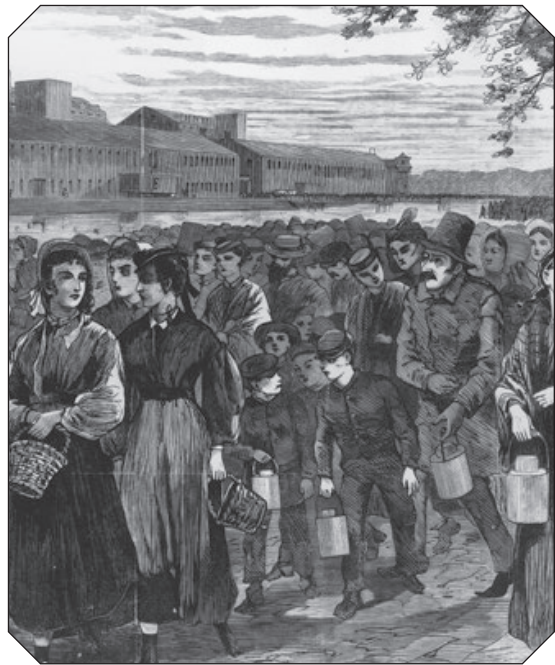
★ *The Visual Sources*

Answer the question by checking one box below. Then complete the statements on the Comparison Essay worksheet. Use all your notes to help you take part in an all-class debate about these documents—and to answer the final DBQ for the lesson.

Which of these two primary source documents would be most useful to a historian trying to understand Lowell and its place in America's early industrial order?



Document 1

☐

Document 2

☐

Comparison Essay

I chose Document _____ because:

*I did **not** choose Document _____.*

However, a historian still might use the document in the following way:

Keep this in mind: Some sources are very biased. A biased source is one that shows you only one side of an issue. That is, it takes a clear stand or expresses a very strong opinion about something. A biased source may be one-sided, but it can still help you to understand its time period. For example, a biased editorial cartoon may show how people felt about an issue at the time. The usefulness of a source depends most of all on what questions you ask about that time in the past.

Written Primary Source Document 1

Information on Document 1

This is part of a letter to a cousin by Adeleen Blake, a young worker in the Lowell textile mills in 1840, as reproduced in *The Lowell Mill Girls: Life in the Factory*, Joanne Weisman Dietch, ed. (Discovery Enterprises, 1998). Lowell's mill workers before the Civil War were mainly young single women from New England farming communities. Most were in their teens or early 20s. They often signed up to work for a year at a time. Most of them worked for just a few years before returning home to get married, head west, or seek out jobs elsewhere.

Document 1

Dear Cousin Hannah,

Please forgive me for not writing to you since I left home six months ago. Never in my fifteen years has the time seemed to pass so swiftly. Whenever I can, I write to my folks since I am the oldest and the first to leave home to work in the mills.

I feel so proud that I now support myself. I am also able to save money toward my dowry and still have some left for an occasional luxury. I now have a sense of being on my own that I never had on the farm, and as you will see I have learned many things. [A long description follows of work, dorm life, lectures, church activities, and shopping at Lowell.]

Our working conditions, however, are less than ideal and it has led to public debate over more than one

issue. Some of the operatives (which is what mill workers are called) are trying to get our working day cut to ten hours. They are also asking for better wages, more time for meals and a healthier working environment. These requests have not yet been answered by the management.

There is also a growing concern over excessive illness among the workers and available health care. The Lowell Corporation Hospital will be open in several months to respond to the health needs of mill workers.

As you can tell, there are some changes taking place. There are so many new and interesting things to learn about that I have never been sorry I came.

Written Primary Source Document 2

Information on Document 2

Part of “Factory Tract Number 1,” by the Female Labor Reform Association in Lowell in 1845, from *The Lowell Mill Girls: Life in the Factory*, Joanne Weisman Dietch, ed. (Discovery Enterprises, 1998). In the 1820s and 30s, female workers at Lowell sometimes went on strike when wages were cut. In 1844, some of them formed the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association. When new rules forced them to tend more machines and work faster, they petitioned state lawmakers complaining of the dangers and health hazards this was causing. Later protests focused on the call for the 10-hour work day.

Document 2

*After thirteen hours unremitting toil,
day after day and week after week,
how much energy and life would
remain to nerve on the once vigorous
mind in the path of wisdom? . . .*

*Let us look forward into the future,
and what does the picture present to
our imagination! Methinks I behold
the self same females [workers in
the Lowell mills] occupying new
and responsible stations in society.
They are now wives and mothers!
But oh! How deficient in everything
pertaining to those holy, sacred
names! Behold what disorder,
confusion and disquietude reigns,
where quiet, neatness and calm
serenity should sanctify and render
almost like heaven the home of
domestic union and love!*

*Instead of being qualified to rear a
family . . . they, themselves, have
need to be instructed in the very
first principles of living well and
thinking right. Incarcerated within
the walls of a factory, while as
yet mere children—drilled there
from five to seven o'clock, year
after year—thrown into company
with all sorts and descriptions of
minds, dispositions and intellects,
without counsellor or friend to
advise—far away from a watchful
mother's tender care, or father's
kind instruction—surrounded on all
sides with vain orientation of fashion,
vanity and light frivolity—beset
with temptations without, and the
carnal propensities of nature within,
what must, what will be the natural,
rational result? What but ignorance,
misery, and premature decay of both
body and intellect?*

Study the Document: Written Source 1

Instructions: Take notes on these questions. Use your notes to discuss the documents and answer the DBQ.

1 Main Idea or Topic _____

What overall point does this writer seem to make about life at Lowell?

2 Author, Audience, Purpose _____

The writer was a young girl, writing in 1840 to a family member back home on a farm. How important are these facts in understanding this document? Why?

3 Bias _____

What attitude does this writer take toward Lowell? How favorable or unfavorable toward Lowell is she? Do you think her account is believable? Why or why not?

4 What Else Can You Infer? _____

That is, what is suggested or implied about the times by this document? For example, what does the document suggest to you about childhood and youth in America at the time?

Study the Document: Written Source 2

Instructions: Take notes on these questions. Use your notes to discuss the documents and answer the DBQ.

1 Main Idea or Topic _____

What overall view of Lowell does this writer express?

2 Author, Audience, Purpose _____

We only know that this passage was written in 1845 by someone working with the Female Labor Reform Association in Lowell. How does this help you better understand the passage and its point of view?

3 Bias _____

How does this writer's view of Lowell differ from that of Adeleen Blake, the writer of Document 1? Which of the two views seems more biased? Why?

4 What Else Can You Infer? _____

That is, what does this passage suggest or imply about life in America? For example, what can you infer about the Female Labor Reform Association and its goals? About family life in America at the time? Or about the roles of men and women in the family?

Comparing the Documents

★ *The Written Sources*

Answer the question by checking one box below. Then complete the statements on the Comparison Essay worksheet. Use all your notes to help you take part in an all-class debate about these documents—and to answer the final DBQ for the lesson.

Which of these two primary source documents would be most useful to a historian trying to understand Lowell and its place in America's early industrial order?

*Part of a letter
to a cousin by
Adeleen Blake,
a young worker in the
Lowell textile mills
in 1840.*

Document 1 ☐

*Part of "Factory
Tract Number 1," by
the Female Labor
Reform Association
in Lowell, in 1845.*

Document 2 ☐

Comparison Essay

I chose Document _____ because:

*I did **not** choose Document _____.*

However, a historian still might use the document in the following way:

Keep this in mind: Some sources are very biased. A biased source is one that shows you only one side of an issue. That is, it takes a clear stand or expresses a very strong opinion about something. A biased source may be one-sided, but it can still help you to understand its time period. For example, a biased editorial cartoon may show how people felt about an issue at the time. The usefulness of a source depends most of all on what questions you ask about that time in the past.

Document-Based Question

Your task is to answer a document-based question (DBQ) on the industrial town of Lowell. In a DBQ, you use your analysis of primary source documents and your knowledge of history to write a brief essay answering the question. Using all four sets of documents, answer this question.

Document-Based Question

“Lowell’s founders hoped to create an ideal industrial community. But industrial reality in time prevented their dream from coming true.”
Explain this statement and assess its validity.
(That is, explain why you do or do not agree with it.)

Below is a checklist of key suggestions for writing a DBQ essay. Next to each item, jot down a few notes to guide you in writing the DBQ. Use extra sheets to write a four- or five-paragraph essay.

- *Introductory Paragraph*
Does the paragraph clarify the DBQ itself? Does it present a clear thesis, or overall answer, to that DBQ?
- *The Internal Paragraphs—1*
Are these paragraphs organized around main points with details supporting those main ideas? Do all these main ideas support the thesis in the introductory paragraph?
- *The Internal Paragraphs—2*
Are all of your main ideas and key points linked in a logical way? That is, does each idea follow clearly from those that went before? Does it add something new and helpful in clarifying your thesis?
- *Use of Primary Source Documents*
Are they simply mentioned in a “laundry list” fashion? Or are they used thoughtfully to support main ideas and the thesis?
- *Concluding Paragraph*
Does it restate the DBQ and thesis in a way that sums up the main ideas without repeating old information or going into new details?

Visual Primary Sources

First Group—Document 1



American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA

First Group—Document 2



New England Factory Life—"Bell Time." By Winslow Homer. Courtesy of the Library of Congress