

Debating the DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

Blue or Gray

Why Men Fought in the Civil War

Hundreds of thousands of soldiers died fighting in the Civil War. Why did they fight, and what was the war like for them?



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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):

What led men on both sides to join up and fight in the U.S. Civil War?

- 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.

Blue or Gray: Why Men Fought in the Civil War

Is it possible to know why human beings act as they do?

Historians face this question all the time. After all, most historians want to do more than simply describe what happened in the past. They want to understand why it happened. To do that, they need to try to learn what motivates people. That is, what causes them to do what they do? What goals, wishes, dreams, and fears move them to act?

When it comes to war, this effort to know another's motives can be especially difficult. Why do soldiers decide to fight and kill other human beings and risk their own lives? Even if they have been forced to fight, they still face the question of what they will and will not do in the most desperate and terrifying situations imaginable. How can we know what moves soldiers to take on such awesome and bloody challenges in the face of such incredible danger? Their own feelings and motives may not be clear even to them in such settings. Their own words in letters and diaries may not tell us accurately what they truly felt and believed.

As for the Civil War, it was more terrifying and brutal than most. Huge battles with close fighting often resulted in thousands of casualties. Thousands more died as a result of wounds and disease in the unsanitary conditions of army life. More Americans died in the Civil War than in either World War I or World War II, and at a time when the overall population was lower. Civil War fighting pitted American against American in the greatest and most agonizing conflict the nation has known.

Not all Americans on either side agreed about the reasons for the war, or even that it was necessary at all. Political leaders on each side gave two main reasons for it: union and slavery. That is, the North said it was fighting to protect the existing

federal Union and to put an end to slavery. The South said it was fighting to protect slavery and win the Confederacy's independence. Both sides insisted their fight was a patriotic struggle for liberty.

Is that really why the men in the vast armies of the Union and the Confederacy fought and died (and in this war, it was mainly men who did the fighting)? Or was it for more complex reasons, hard to decipher or fully understand?

In explaining why they fight, many soldiers honestly offer noble and idealistic reasons. Others may only sound that way in order to cover up their blind rage, their desire for revenge, or their ambition to make a name for themselves. Some soldiers may sound courageous and daring when they are in fact terrified. Some may be responding to pressure from their peers or family and community. Others may act from a powerful sense of duty, honor, or religious conviction no matter what they feel about the reasons their leaders give them for fighting. Still others (perhaps most) fight out of deep and abiding loyalty to their regiment, their company, or just the handful of men they go into battle with day after day.

Historian James McPherson asks, in the title of one of his books, if Civil War soldiers fought for "Cause or Comrades?" Or was it for both reasons and many others as well? To help you decide, you will find two kinds of primary source evidence here. The visuals (pages 8–9 in the booklet) all depict soldiers or are directed at soldiers. The written sources (pages 14–15) are all by soldiers, two from the North and two from the South. Together, these will give you a sense of the varied and complex nature of the motives soldiers had for fighting in the Civil War.

Civil War Time Line

1861

January: Several Southern states quit the Union following Abraham Lincoln's election as president in 1860. In time, eleven states form the Confederate States of America. **April:** Shots are fired on Fort Sumter, a federal fort in South Carolina. **July:** The First Battle of Bull Run takes place. Poorly prepared Northern soldiers are chased back to Washington, D.C. A naval blockade of the Confederate coastline begins to work.

1862

April: At the Battle of Shiloh, in Tennessee, Union troops are led by Ulysses S. Grant. Of the 110,000 soldiers taking part, 23,746 are killed, wounded, or missing. May–August: Several big battles take place in Virginia. The South does the best in this fighting. **September:** The Battle of Antietam includes the bloodiest single day of the war (about 5,000 killed). Antietam is enough of a Union victory that Great Britain and France decide not to support the South. It also leads Lincoln to announce his Emancipation Proclamation, which will go into effect on January 1, 1863. On that day, it will free all slaves in areas still fighting the Union. This changes the war's focus from saving the Union to freeing the slaves.

1863

March: The Union passes its first draft law. All men from ages 20 to 45 can be called to serve in the military, unless they pay a fee or find a substitute. **May–July:** The South wins at Chancellorsville. But it loses one of its best fighters, General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson. In July, two huge Union victories take place—Grant's victory at Vicksburg, Mississippi, and the battle at Gettysburg in Pennsylvania. At Gettysburg, General George Meade's Union forces defeat Robert E. Lee's Confederates. A few days later, huge anti-draft riots break out in New York City. Irish immigrants and other poor people burn buildings and lynch several black people. Similar draft protests take place in the South.

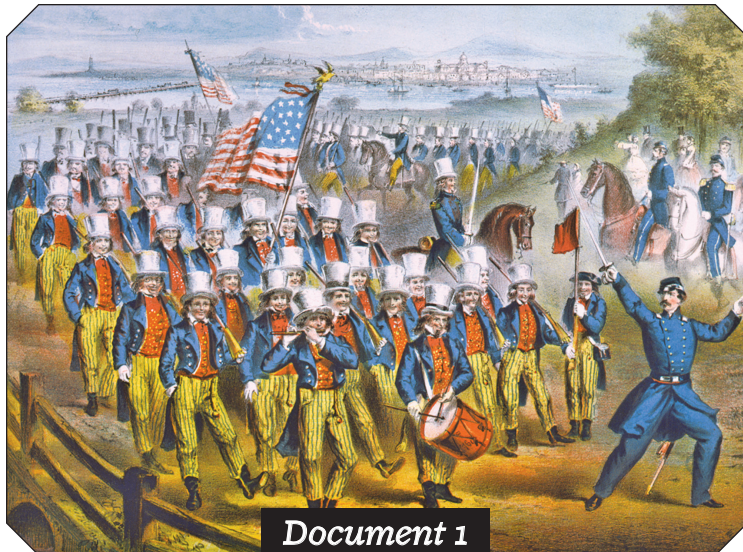
1864

May–June: Grant begins a long campaign against Lee in Virginia. Several big battles are followed by a 10-month siege of the rail center of Petersburg, Virginia. **September:** Union General William T. Sherman's forces take Atlanta, Georgia, an arms center for the entire South. **November:** Sherman's victory helps Lincoln's popularity, and he wins re-election as president against Democrat and Union General George B. McClellan. Sherman soon begins his famous and very bloody “March to the Sea” through Georgia. His aim is to destroy the South's will to fight.

1865

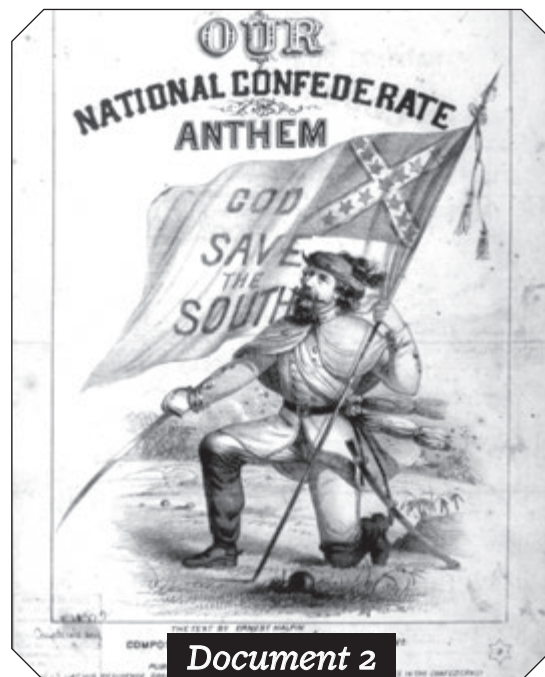
January–April: Both Sherman and Grant fight on in North and South Carolina, and in Virginia. In April, Grant takes the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia. Lee surrenders to Grant at Appomattox Courthouse on April 9. His men are allowed to use their horses to go home. The Civil War is basically over. (Some surrenders continue into May.) On April 14, John Wilkes Booth shoots and kills Lincoln at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C.

Visual Primary Source Documents 1 & 2



Document 1

Lithograph by John H. Buford, 1862
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC USZC4-1977



Document 2

Library of Congress,
Prints and Photographs Division, LC USZ62-33407

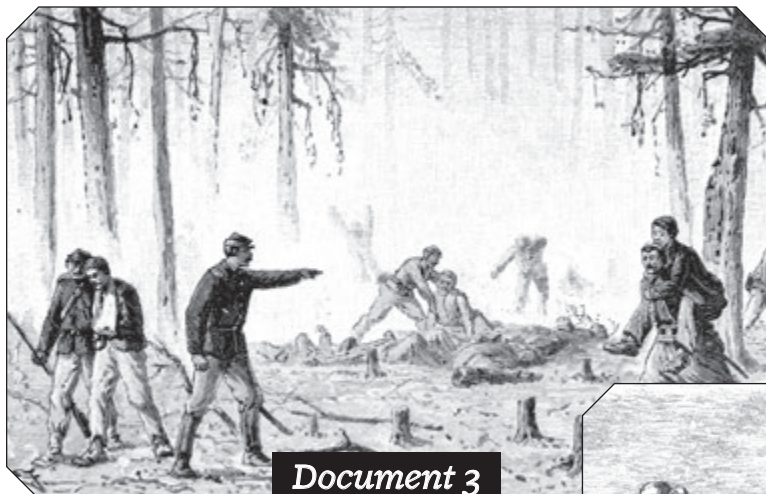
Information on Documents 1 & 2

At the start of the Civil War, the first recruits often left to cheers and honors from crowds gathering to wish them well. Often, these crowds fully expected most of them to return victorious after only a few months of what was expected to be a short war. In the early phases of the war, both armies relied on volunteers. Only later did each side feel the need to set up a draft to get enough soldiers. Many young men did try to avoid serving. Still, both sides were able to find tens of thousands of enthusiastic recruits right up to the end of hostilities.

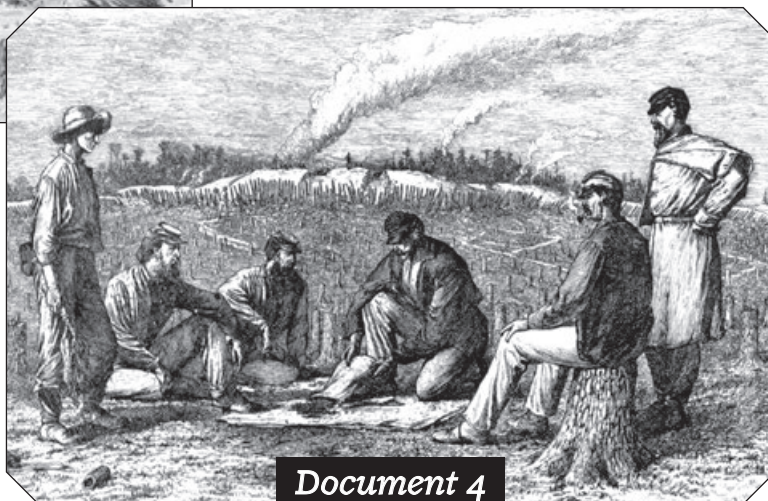
Document 1. An 1862 music cover titled "Yankee Volunteers Marching into Dixie." It shows Union forces dressed in large white top hats, striped pantaloons, and jack boots, the dress of the "Yankee Brother Jonathan," a cartoon character who stood for the North.

Document 2. An 1862 sheet music cover published in Richmond, Virginia. It features a Confederate cavalryman holding a large flag. A cannonball lies in the grass before him. In the distance soldiers fire a cannon toward an advancing troop of infantry.

Visual Primary Source Documents 3 & 4



Document 3



Document 4

Information on Documents 3 & 4

Document 3. In the heat of battle, men often fought fiercely to survive and to come to the aid of the men in their company with whom they lived and fought daily. This illustration is titled “Rescuing the Wounded on Sunday, May 3rd, from the Burning Woods.”

Document 4. Often in the Civil War, two armies of Americans—one Union, one Confederate—camped near each other for long stretches of time. It was not uncommon for soldiers from both sides

to meet together, talk, exchange goods, etc., in the long, boring stretches between battles. This illustration is captioned “Traffic Between the Lines During a Truce.”

Both of these illustrations are from *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, Vol 3. Based upon The Century War Series. Edited by Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel. (The Century Co., 1884.)

Study the Documents: Visual Sources 1 & 2

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

1 Main Idea or Topic _____

Pretend you are thinking of signing up to fight in the Civil War for either the South or the North. You see these two images. Write a letter to a family member describing the impact of these images on you as you decide whether or not to become a soldier.

2 Visual Features _____

What features add to the drama of the scene in Document 1? What elements help it create an image of a united and confident Union off to fight the war? In Document 2, how do the words add to the emotional impact of this sheet music cover?

3 Background Information _____

What do you know about the mood in both the South and the North at the very start of the Civil War? Do these images fit with what you know about the mood in each region? Why or why not? What do these images help you see about the general public mood in each region then?

Study the Documents: Visual Sources 3 & 4

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

1 Main Idea or Topic

These two drawings are of Civil War soldiers in battle and at rest. Read the descriptions that accompany the images. What overall idea of soldiers' lives do you get from these two images? What, if anything, can you infer from these illustrations about what motivated soldiers to fight in the Civil War?

2 Visual Features

Compare these two drawings to the one in Document 1 (page 8 in this booklet). In what ways are the soldiers depicted in a similar manner in all three drawings? What differences among them stand out? Notice such things as clothing, posture, gestures, actions, etc.

3 Background Information

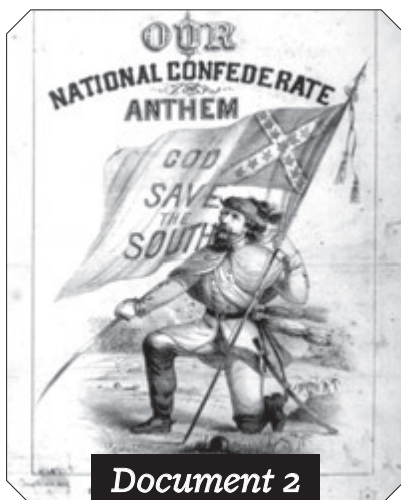
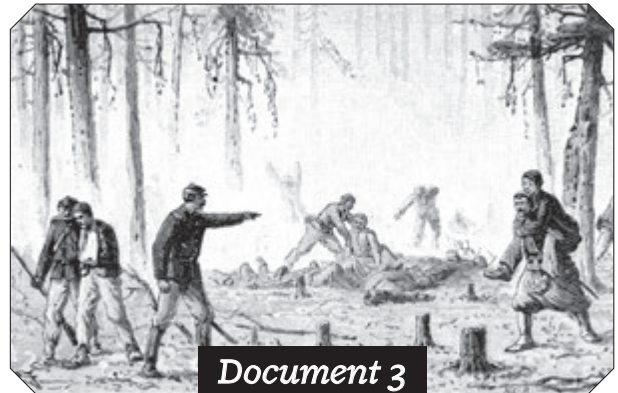
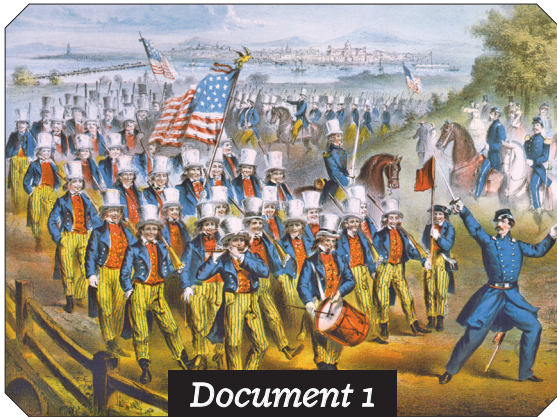
It was not uncommon for Northern and Southern soldiers to make contact as they are in Document 4 when no fighting was taking place. Does this seem strange to you? Based on what you know about the Civil War, why might such contact across the lines have been more common in this war than in many others?

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 primary sources would be most useful to a historian trying to understand the lives and motives of soldiers fighting on both sides or either side in the Civil War?



Documents 1 & 2 ☐

Documents 3 & 4 ☐

Comparison Essay

I chose Documents _____ because:

*I did **not** choose Documents _____.*

However, a historian still might use the documents 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 Documents 1 & 2

Information on Documents 1 & 2

Document 1 is part of a letter dated March 7, 1833. It was written in Virginia by Union soldier Daniel M. Holt, a surgeon with the 121st New York infantry. Holt is responding to one of his wife's letters, which he describes as follows: "Last night I received one of those old fashioned soul inspiring letters from home."

Document 2 is from an account by Robert Gould Shaw, a Union soldier from a prominent Massachusetts family. Shaw, a white man, led the 54th Massachusetts, a regiment of black soldiers. Its famous assault on Battery Wagner off the coast of South Carolina cost Shaw his life. In this letter, Shaw describes his concerns about the actions of another white officer during a June 9, 1863, attack he and his troops carried out in a town on a small Georgia island.

Document 1

No man can discharge his duty so cheerfully and promptly when cries of distress and mournful regrets at leaving are constantly poured into his ears, as he can when the partner of his life and object of his affections stirs him up to action by words and patriotic fire and Christian enthusiasm. No, it is only those who are recipients of complaining, fault-finding letters—letters worthy of no Christian mind—letters such as harrow up all the ill nature within us, and those who receive no letters, who are found in the rear when a battle is raging—who can see no beauty in our government—no benefits resulting from its administration and who are ready at all times to despond and talk evil when success does not attend every movement—it is this class of men, who made unhappy by home influence, is sure to turn away and disgracefully leave our country in the hands of traitors, while the loyal brother fights the battle of both. Then give me such letters as make me feel that I am a man and have a country and family to defend, and gives me an idea of freedom such as God intends all to possess.

Document 2

[Colonel] Montgomery ordered all the furniture and movable property to be taken on board the boats. This occupied some time; and, after the town was pretty thoroughly disembowelled, he said to me, "I shall burn this town." He speaks always in a very low tone, and has quite a sweet smile when addressing you. I told him, "I did not want the responsibility of it," and he was only too happy to take it all on his shoulders . . . You must bear in mind, that not a shot had been fired at us from this place and that there were evidently very few men left in it. All the inhabitants (principally women and children) had fled on our approach and were, no doubt, watching the scene from a distance.

The reasons he gave me for destroying Darien were, that the Southerners must be made to feel that this was a real war, and that they were to be swept away by the hand of God, like the Jews of old . . .

Remember not to breathe a word of what I have written about this raid, for I have not yet made up my mind what I ought to do. Besides my own distaste for this barbarous sort of warfare, I am not sure that it will not harm very much the reputation of black troops and of those connected with them.

Written Primary Source Documents 3 & 4

Information on Documents 3 & 4

Document 3 is a brief passage from *A Model Confederate Soldier*, an 1863 account of the wartime experiences of the Rev. Nathaniel D. Renfroe, a lieutenant in the Fifth Alabama Battalion in General A. P. Hill's division. Rev. Renfroe was killed in the battle of Fredericksburg on December 13, 1862. This account is by Nathaniel's brother, the Rev. J. J. D. Renfroe. © Property of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Document 4 is a brief passage from *Life in the Confederate Army: Being Personal Experiences of a Private Soldier in the Confederate Army* by Arthur P. Ford (Neal Publishing Company, 1905). In this passage, Ford describes conditions with Confederate troops fighting in 1864 against Union forces led by General Sherman in North Carolina.

Document 3

In a letter—the last he [Nathaniel Renfroe] ever wrote me—speaking of the march to Fredericksburg he says: “We have just completed another march of one hundred and seventy miles, crossing two awful mountains in the time. We were twelve days on the march. I had no wagon, or horse, or any other means of transportation, except my feet for myself and baggage; we rested, only at night—rising at 4 ½ in the morning and marching until sunset. I suffered much—frequently thinking that I would fall out and rest, but when I would look through the company and see several men barefooted and still keeping up, it would stimulate me, and I would press on. The tramp finished my boots, and both my feet are on the ground, and but little prospect of getting any shoes soon. But it is my duty to bear a little hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, and submit to it cheerfully, and without a murmur in view of my country’s freedom and the honor of my religion. We are certainly on the eve of a great battle here—it will be a grand affair. I may not survive the conflict, but, brother, if I die, I shall fall at my post, and I am ready to go.”

Document 4

One of the Federal wounded, a lieutenant, begged us for some water, and I stepped from the line and gave him a drink from my canteen. . . . I could not refuse a wounded man’s appeal even if he was my enemy; and one of our men, a thrifty fellow, who always managed to have things, produced a little flask of whiskey, and gave a good drink to a Federal who had his leg badly crushed. The blue-coat raised his eyes to Heaven with, “Thank God, Johnnie; it may come around that I may be able to do you a kindness, and I’ll never forget this drink of liquor.”

At this moment Maj. A. Burnett Rhett, of the artillery, rode along the line and called out that news had been received that France had recognized the Confederacy and would send warships to open our ports immediately. The men cheered, few of us realizing that the end was so near. We were blinded by our patriotism. There was Lee with his 30,000 men that moment surrounded by Grant with his 150,000. Here was Johnston with his 14,000 trying to keep at bay Sherman with his 70,000, with the knowledge that Schofield was only two days off with 40,000 more. And this was about all there was to the Confederacy; and they talked of recognition! Oh, the pity of it!

Study the Documents: Written Sources 1 & 2

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

1 Main Idea or Topic _____

In a brief paragraph explain what you think most motivated each of these Union soldiers to fight. How are their motives different? In what ways are they similar?

2 Author, Audience, Purpose _____

Read the background information on Robert Gould Shaw and his letter. What else do you know about Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts regiment? Does what you know about this author make you trust his account more or trust it less? Why?

3 What Else Can You Infer? _____

What is suggested or implied in these documents? For example, what can you infer from Holt's letter about the things of most concern to Civil War soldiers? What can you infer about the reasons other Union soldiers had for fighting or not fighting? And what can you infer from Shaw's letter about the situation faced by black soldiers fighting for the Union?

Study the Documents: Written Sources 3 & 4

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

1 Main Idea or Topic

In general, how similar are these two Confederate soldiers in their views of the war? Sum up the views you think each soldier has of the war and the cause for which he fought.

2 What Else Can You Infer?

What is suggested or implied in these primary source documents? For example, what, if anything, can you infer about the way Confederate views of the war may have changed from around 1862 to 1864? What can you infer about the effect the war had on the attitudes of these soldiers toward the war, the enemy and the cause for which they fought?

3 Comparing Documents

Both of these soldiers refer to “patriotic” feelings. Do you think the “patriotic” feelings of these Confederates differed in any way from those of the Union soldiers (as expressed in Documents 1 and 2 on page 14 in the booklet)? Explain.

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 primary sources would be most useful to a historian trying to understand the lives and motives of soldiers fighting on both sides or either side in the Civil War?

Part of a letter by Union soldier Daniel M. Holt, a surgeon with the 121st New York infantry, and part of an account by Robert Gould Shaw, a Union soldier from a prominent Massachusetts family.

Documents 1 & 2

☐

A passage from an 1863 account of the wartime experiences of Confederate soldier Rev. Nathaniel D. Renfroe, and a passage from Life in the Confederate Army by Arthur P. Ford.

Documents 3 & 4

☐

Comparison Essay

I chose Documents _____ because:

*I did **not** choose Documents _____.*

However, a historian still might use the documents 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 experiences of the soldiers who fought in the Civil War. 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

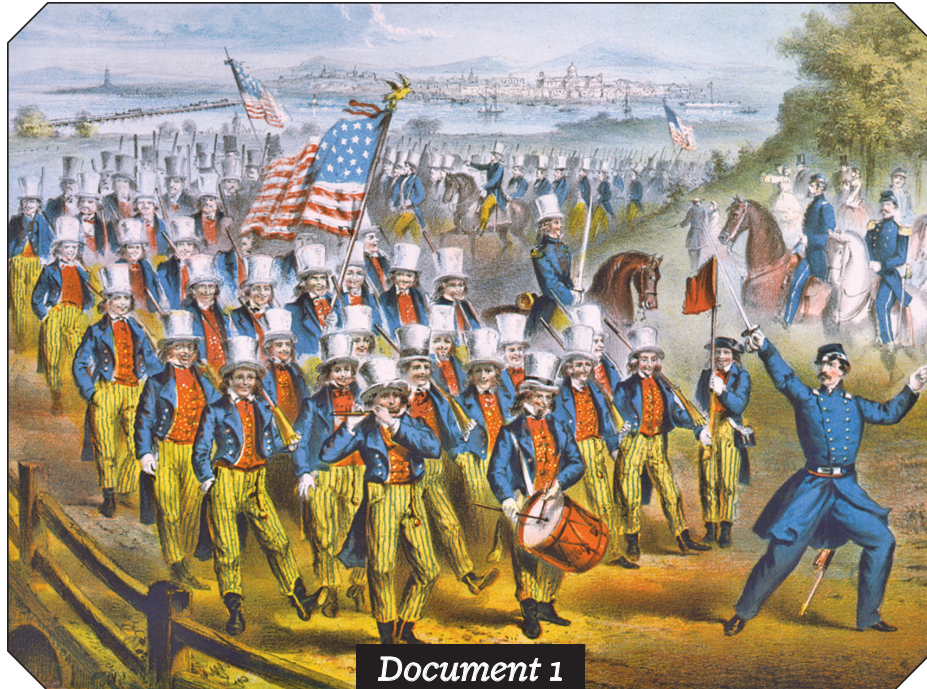
What led men on both sides to join up and fight in the U.S. Civil War?

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.

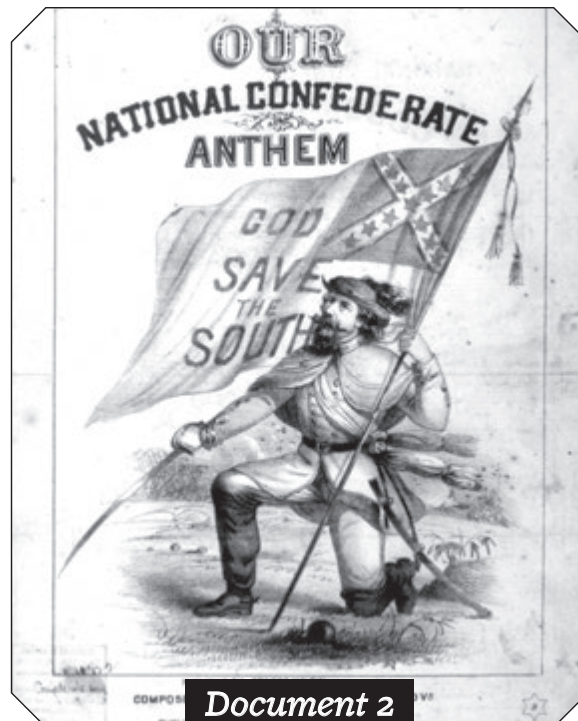
- *Introductory Paragraph*
Does the paragraph clarify the DBQ itself? Does it present a clear thesis, or overall answer, to that DBQ?
- *The Internal Paragraphs—1*
Are these paragraphs organized around main points with details supporting those main ideas? Do all these main ideas support the thesis in 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—Documents 1 & 2



Lithograph by John H. Buford, 1862
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC USZC4-1977



Library of Congress,
Prints and Photographs Division, LC USZ62-33407

First Group—Documents 3 & 4

