History Skill Builder

Document Analysis
Document Analysis

Historians rely on texts to construct their accounts of the past, citizens should learn to analyze texts to form their opinions about issues.

In an age of digital information overload, it is essential that you learn to distinguish between different types of sources and know how to draw conclusions from them.
Document Types

• A primary source was created during the time period and gives an inside perspective. It can be an original document, artifact, or creative work.
  • Examples: law, essay, speech, letter, song lyrics, painting, news article, political cartoon, etc.

• A secondary source interprets and analyzes primary sources. It is one or more steps removed from the event.
  • Examples: textbooks, encyclopedia articles, research

Is the purpose informational, functional, persuasive, artistic?
Are primary sources always biased? Secondary?
Annotation

Think, interact, and connect with the text!

• Before you read/view: look at titles, pictures and captions, date published, etc.
• Read though once quickly, then do a second close reading
  • Mark it up: Underline, highlight, write notes in the margins, use post-its if necessary
• After you finish annotations: Re-read what you wrote to look for patterns, write critical thinking questions, draw conclusions
Analysis Tools

Tools provided by gov’t sites

• Library of Congress
• National Archives

Tools adapted from AP/College Board

• SOAPSTONE
• APPARTS
Common mistakes

• Assuming you got it the first time. Re-read!
• Marking everything. Focus on the purpose of the assignment!
• Not keeping yourself in the time period. Maintain perspective!
• Expecting the answers to the questions are going to be spelled out for you. Look for clues, read between the lines!
• Forgetting this is history, not English, class. Make connections to what we have learned!
Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

- Amendment XIV (1868)
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- Amendment XIV (1868)
Analyze

Source information: Amendment to Constitution 1868, Congress was dominated by northern state and Republicans after the Civil War. For state governments to comply.

Historical context: Because the Southern states were trying to preserve white power as much as possible after the war, the federal gov’t needed to intervene. The Civil Rights movement had little success until the 1960s, so there will be problems with interpretation/enforcement…

Argument being made by the author: All citizens (including former slaves) must be treated equally by state gov’ts and legal systems.

Quotes from the text that support the argument:

“No State shall..” – federal supremacy over state gov’t

“Life, liberty, and property, without due process of law” – all citizens should have natural rights protected and Bill of Rights protections (ex. lynching)

“equal protection of the laws” – state/local gov’ts cannot treat citizens differently because of their skin color (ex. Jim Crow laws)
Practice, Practice, Practice

As with any skill, you may not get it the first time (or second...)

Review these directions and examples anytime I ask you to annotate or analyze an historical document!

The written portion of the next test will be based on this skill.