

WRITING—DBQ EVIDENCE, SOURCING, AND COMPLEXITY PART 1

Preparation

- [Download the WHP DBQ Rubric](#)

Purpose

This activity will help you continue to gain familiarity with elements of good writing by digging into the Evidence, Sourcing, and Complexity rows of the WHP DBQ rubric. This will help you learn to develop nuanced, evidence-based arguments in your writing. Analyzing a sample student essay will help you become more familiar with the specific expectations for WHP AP writing, as well as prepare you for the AP® World History: Modern exam.

Process

In this activity, you will take a close look at the Evidence, Sourcing, and Complexity rows of the WHP DBQ Writing Rubric. You will analyze a student essay against the criteria included in the rubric. This activity will be similar to the one you did in Unit 2, when you analyzed a sample LEQ to look for thesis and contextualization. For this activity, you will analyze the use of evidence, sourcing, and complexity in a student essay that was written in response to this DBQ prompt: “Evaluate the extent to which the Columbian Exchange transformed the Americas from c. 1500–1750 CE.”

Before you start your analysis, download the WHP DBQ Writing Rubric, and review the Evidence, Sourcing, and Complexity rows of the rubric with your class. Once you’ve reviewed these criteria, work with your class to identify the major claim in the essay. Although you will not be focusing on the major claim in this activity, it’s difficult to assess the rest of the essay without being aware of it, since everything in the essay should be in support of that claim.

Once you’ve identified the thesis, your teacher may put you in a small group to work through steps 2 through 4 of the worksheet. First, underline evidence in the essay, making sure at least four documents and at least one outside piece of evidence were used as support. Then, for at least two sources, show how the essay explains how or why each source’s historical situation/context, audience, purpose, or point of view is relevant to an argument being made. Finally, look for where the essay demonstrates a complex understanding of the historical development that is the focus of the prompt, or where the writer uses advanced argumentation or effective use of evidence to construct a response that fully addresses the prompt. Be prepared to share your answers with the class!

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Directions: After reading the essay, follow the steps below.

1. Circle the major claim/thesis.
2. Look for evidence and underline any instances you find.
3. **Highlight** portions of the essay where the author provides sourcing information—historical context, audience, purpose, or point of view—that is relevant to the argument or thesis of the essay.
4. Look for where the essay demonstrates a complex understanding of the historical development that is the focus of the prompt, or where the writer uses advanced argumentation or effective use of evidence to construct a response that fully addresses the prompt. Note these areas in the margin of the paper.

Essay prompt: *Evaluate the extent to which the Columbian Exchange transformed the Americas from c. 1500–1750 CE.*

The Age of Exploration, and in particular, the discovery of the Americas in 1492, signified an era of significant change. Most of these changes were the direct result of the Columbian Exchange. This was a period when the widespread transfer of plants, animals, diseases, and populations between Afro-Eurasia and the Americas took place. Europeans benefitted much more than any other society as a result of the Columbian Exchange. The Americas fared far worse, in particular with the destruction of early Indigenous American societies. From 1492 to 1750 CE, most of the Americas experienced tremendous change, such as the decimation of Indigenous populations and the influx of new people, crops, and diseases but there were also a small number of continuities, most notably the fact that many territories remained under the control of Indigenous authorities despite the fire power and diseases of the Europeans.

One of the most profound changes in the Americas during this time period came as a result of wars with Indigenous societies. In his firsthand account of the discovery of Tenochtitlan, Bernal Diaz del Castillo portrays in his memoir to the Spanish public the immense beauty of the city, comparing it to places described in legends (Document 2). Unfortunately, Spanish conquistadores such as Hernan Cortes were unwilling to preserve such beauty, the desire for wealth and riches being more important. Despite this, Castillo's description of Tenochtitlan is significant because it gives historians a glimpse of what life was like in Nahua (Aztec) society before the Spanish conquest. Because the Spanish destroyed the city so soon after discovering it, there are not many documents detailing what Aztec culture was like. As a result, historians must rely on memoirs such as this one as well as a small collection of documents and artifacts found to understand early Indigenous Americans' way of life.

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In a poem written shortly after the conquest of Tenochtitlan in 1521, an unnamed Aztec poet describes the state of the city, stating that the Spanish left only blood, spears, and death (Document 3). Gruesome and unsettling, this Aztec poem details how Spanish conquistadors and other European explorers destroyed native societies in order to increase their own riches, without thought as to the consequences of their actions. Similar to Bernal Diaz del Castillo's memoir detailing the discovery of Tenochtitlan, this unnamed poet's poem is significant because it details the Spanish conquest from an Aztec perspective. The destruction of Tenochtitlan not only marked the destruction of a city but also the destruction of documents and artifacts that may have told historians what life was like in Aztec society. Thus, the discovery of poems like this one are important because they provide a firsthand Aztec account of the destruction brought about by Spanish colonization of the Americas.

Spanish exploration and conquest of the Americas not only transformed Indigenous societies through war but also through the devastation of disease. In the Florentine Codex, Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún describes the deadly effects of smallpox on the native populations (Document 1). Originally intended to be an encyclopedic work of the peoples of the Americas, Friar Bernardino's writings are significant because they give historians and students a firsthand account of the disastrous effects European diseases had on Indigenous populations. With native populations rapidly declining and the demand for products such as sugar, tobacco, and coffee quickly rising, the need for a new labor force arose (Document 4). As a result, more than 5.6 million Africans from West Central Africa and another 6.2 million from other communities in Africa were involuntarily shipped across the Atlantic to work on plantations in South, Central, and North America (Document 6). Forced into harsh working conditions, enslaved Africans, much like Indigenous Americans, were often seen as inferior to their European counterparts. Unfortunately, slavery and the humanitarian issues associated with it continued to plague the New World well into the Colonial Era, with the racial prejudices experienced by Africans still a prominent problem in the United States today.

Despite these monumental changes that occurred in the Americas as a direct result of the Columbian Exchange, there were some regions of the Americas that continued to live in much the same ways as they had for centuries. Ned Blackhawk, a member of the Te-Moak tribe and professor of history at Yale University, explains to historians and teachers in his article "Teaching the Columbian Exchange" how much of the interior of North America was left unchanged. This included the fact that many Indigenous societies maintained self-rule through the eighteenth century (Document 5). After contact was made, Indigenous peoples did not simply fade away but rather many adapted by using both Indigenous and European ideas and

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practices (Document 5). It was this blending of old and new (continuity and change) that came to define the Americas after contact and well into the eighteenth century. In conclusion, the Columbian Exchange resulted in significantly more harm than good. Indigenous populations were decimated as a result of diseases and wars brought by wealth hungry conquistadors and approximately 12 million Africans were transported across the Atlantic and forced to work on European plantations. Despite the horrors that the Columbian Exchange caused, Indigenous societies persisted and many communities in the Americas were transformed, as people and cultures blended. However, even positive outcomes were tempered with negative reactions. In order to maintain European power and avoid the blurring of social and economic classes, new caste systems were created. Paintings such as “Las Castas” were made as a way of ranking the various interracial peoples and maintaining a social hierarchy (Document 7).