

Creating a Document Based Essay

Formulate an Essential Question

- This will be the guiding question the students will use the documents to answer
- Your Essential Question should reflect an important historical theme
- Keep it simple & direct
- If you want to further guide the students, include 1-2 bulleted sub-questions which can be used to fully answer the Essential Question

Gathering Sources

- Find primary source documents; choose an even number, depending on the age, experience, and academic level of the students
- Use a variety of sources, including speeches, political cartoons, maps, poems/songs, broadsides, laws, Supreme Court cases, charts/graphs, etc.
- Select passages from longer documents that will assist the students in answering the Essential Question; vary the length, but keep them challenged
- Select some documents that the students have not seen before
- Make sure all sources are cited correctly

Organizing Sources

- Depending on the historical theme, documents may be organized chronologically, point/counterpoint or so that they "talk" to each other

Writing the Document Based Essay

- Write a clear set of directions; utilize your State's format
- Write a brief description of the historical context of the D.B.Q.; include background information to frame the question
- "Box" the Essential Question so the students can clearly see their task
- Generate 2-3 questions for each document that will help students analyze these primary sources and then answer the Essential Task Question; these questions should require both understanding and synthesis of the information