

DBQ Activity

In this activity, you'll learn to apply your DBQ skills to a writing prompt about the Columbian Exchange. Try to use as many sources as possible to help you answer the question!

Directions: The following question is based on the accompanying Documents A-F. This activity will help you understand how to write an essay on the following topic. A DBQ generally integrates your analysis of the documents; in no case should documents simply be cited and explained in "laundry list" fashion. You may refer to historical facts and developments not mentioned in the documents.

Historical Background: In the late 1400s, European explorers "found" the North American continent. Native American peoples who were already living in North America had created a system of government and society that rivaled Europe's. The cultural exchange between the "New World" and the "Old World" (North America and Europe, respectively) is often called the Columbian Exchange. This is in reference to Christopher Columbus.

Task: Analyze the positive and negative effects of exchange between Europe and the New World.

Writing a DBQ: Step-by-step

As Dory once said, "Just keep swimming!"

Step 1: Read the historical background and decode the task question. What is the task asking you to do/answer? Are there any limiting factors, like time period or location? What do you know about this topic already?

Step 2: Read the documents and analyze! In this exercise, we'll be answering questions, but this is what you'll have to learn to teach yourself over the course of the year. This step will take some time initially, but it's important to learn this if you want to be successful!

As you read and examine each document, you need to do three things:

1. Answer the scaffolding question(s) below each document. What do you think the document/author is trying to say?
2. Label each document based on what topic you think it would best fit with: "P" for positive, "N" for negative.
3. Fill out the chart/outline below.

Document A

As We have ordered provision to be made that from henceforward the Indians in no way be made slaves, including those who until now have been enslaved against all reason and right and contrary to the provisions and instructions thereupon, We ordain and command that the Audiencias having first summoned the parties to their presence, without any further judicial form, but in a summary way, so that the truth may be ascertained, speedily set the said Indians at liberty unless the persons who hold them for slaves show title why they should hold and possess them legitimately. And in order that in default of persons to solicit the aforesaid, the Indians may not remain in slavery unjustly, We command that the Audiencias appoint persons who may pursue this cause for the Indians and be paid out of the Exchequer fines, provided they be men of trust and diligence.

New Spanish laws of the Indies, 1542

Question for Doc. A: What was happening in the Spanish colonies? Who was being enslaved?

Document B

The university and Royal schools are so distinguished that they need envy no other in the world...
The Professors are in major part natives of the Indies and especially of this city, where it would appear that the skies, as usually in the Indies, train outstanding and unusual intellects...
The lecture halls in the schools are excellent, and the chapel very fine, but the most remarkable feature is the amphitheater...

"Description of the West Indies" by Antonio Vazquez de Espinoza, a Spanish priest describing the University in Lima, Peru in the early 17th century

Question for Doc. B: What does the source information tell you about where the schools are located?

Document C

The charge of genocide is largely sustained by figures showing the precipitous decline of the Indian population. Although scholars debate the exact numbers, in Alvin Josephy's estimate, the Indian population fell from between fifteen and twenty million when the white man first arrived to a fraction of that 150 years later. Undoubtedly the Indians perished in great numbers. Yet although European enslavement of Indians and the Spanish forced labor system extracted a heavy toll in lives, the vast majority of Indian casualties occurred not as a result of hard labor or deliberate destruction but because of contagious diseases that the Europeans transmitted to the Indians.

The spread of infection and unhealthy patterns of behavior was also reciprocal. From the Indians the Europeans contracted syphilis. The Indians also taught the white man about tobacco and cocaine, which would extract an incalculable human toll over the next several centuries. The Europeans, for their part, gave the Indians measles and smallpox. (Recent research has shown that tuberculosis predated the European arrival in the new world.) Since the Indians had not developed any resistance or immunity to these unfamiliar ailments, they perished in catastrophic numbers.

"The Crimes of Christopher Columbus" Dinesh D'Souza

Question for Doc. C: What was the most significant factor in the decline of Indian populations? Where did it come from?

Document D

Above all, it leaves out the fact that this encounter was inevitable. This is not simply to state the obvious: that if Columbus hadn't set sail in 1492, some other European voyager would have made the trip soon afterward. The key point is that whoever made the first crossing and whenever it occurred, the consequences for the people of the Western Hemisphere would not have been much different. To expect otherwise is to ask that history be rolled back long before 1492 and that its course be plotted along other lines entirely.

In particular, European civilization would have to be recast. What drove Columbus westward was not just a search for a lucrative new trade route to Asia. It is too simplistic to picture him and the other European explorers as mere money-grubbers, early real-estate developers who lucked into an entire continent to subdivide. Money was obviously important to them, but they were also animated by a certain restlessness and curiosity. The voyage into the unknown, after all, had been part of European culture since the days of Odysseus. To some degree this questing instinct was bound up with religious zeal: look, for example, at the search for the Holy Grail and the history of the Crusades. On a more mundane level, it was often a social necessity: families were large, houses were small, land was scarce, and so young people were encouraged to leave home and seek their fortune. Missionaries set out to preach the Gospel. Merchants set out to find new goods and new markets to sell them in. Armies sometimes led this process, sometimes followed. The spread of Western civilization was built on intrusion.

Kenneth Auchincloss, *When Worlds Collide* Newsweek Fall/Winter 1991

Question for Doc. D: Why did Europeans like Columbus set sail for the “new world”? Should Columbus be blamed for the destruction of native populations?

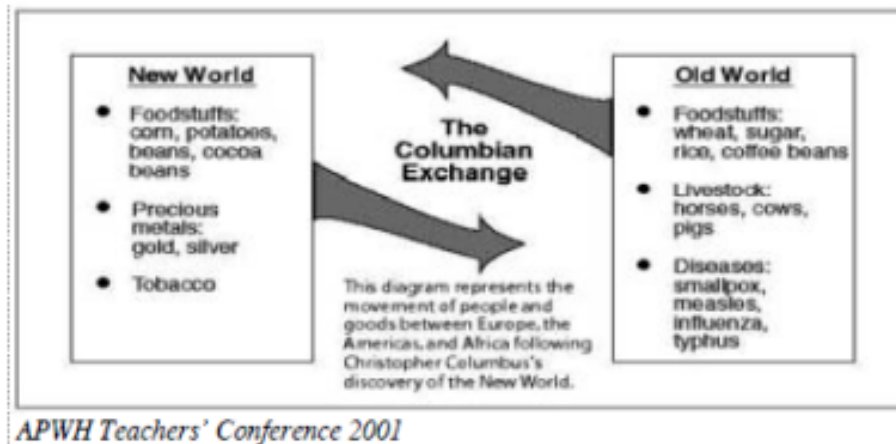
Document E

The disaster began almost as soon as Columbus arrived, fueled mainly by smallpox and measles. Smallpox--the disease that so ravaged Tenochtitlan on the eve of Cortes's final siege-- was a particularly efficient killer. Alfred Crosby, author of "The Columbian Exchange," likens its effect on American history to "that of the Black Death on the history of the Old World." Smallpox made its American debut in 1519, when it struck the Caribbean island of Santo Domingo, killing up to half of the indigenous population. From there outbreaks spread across the Antilles islands, onto the Mexican mainland, through the Isthmus of Panama and into South America. The Spaniards were moving in the same direction, but their diseases often outpaced them. "Such is the communicability of smallpox and the other eruptive fevers," Crosby notes, "that any Indian who received news of the Spaniards could also have easily received the infection."

"The Great Disease Migration" Geoffrey Cowley, in Newsweek Fall 1991

Question for Doc. E: What other civilizations were negatively affected by disease? Why?

Document F



Question for Doc. F: What did Europe receive from the Americas, and the Americas receive from Europeans?

Step 4: Outline

Before you begin writing your essay, you should always create some sort of outline. You don't need to necessarily follow the format below (use what works best for you), but you should have an outline containing all of the same parts. This helps for ease of information access/thoughts as you write your essay in a timed situation. In your body paragraphs, you should use most if not all of your documents.

INTRODUCTION

Historical context sentence:

Thesis:

BODY PARAGRAPH 1 Topic:

List documents you would use to support:

Outside info (bullet points):

BODY PARAGRAPH 2 Topic:

List documents you would use to support:

Outside info (bullet points):

<p>BODY PARAGRAPH 3 Topic:</p> <p>List documents you would use to support:</p>	<p>Outside info (bullet points):</p>
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<p>CONCLUSION</p> <p>Related thesis:</p> <p>Final points:</p>

Step 5: Read the following information. You may use this information to help complete the chart above.

Introductions

Start by writing your historical context sentence, then 2-3 sentences that set up examples you plan to talk about in your essay. These should be in your outline at this point. For this essay, it may be good to have one sentence set up your positive effects and another about negative effects. The last sentence should be your thesis, answering all parts of the task question within a sentence.

Body paragraphs

You should have at least one body paragraph of 4-5 sentences for each part of the task question. Your body paragraphs should contain a balance (about 50%) of information from the documents and background information. This should help prove your thesis.

Each body paragraph should start with a topic sentence, related to your thesis. Then, get into the substance of your essay. You should have multiple sentences any time that you use a document and/or bring in an example of outside information.

Remember to use transition phrases or sentences between documents/changing topics. This means writing a sentence starter like, "Another negative effect..." or "Although x occurred..." Any time you change topics, ALWAYS use a transition phrase/sentence, being sure not to end abruptly.

Conclusions

Conclusions should be easy because you really don't have to say anything new. Restate your thesis in different words, then summarize each of the topics you discussed. Finally, wrap-up the entire essay with one good concluding sentence: make sure it isn't cheesy (read it...if it sounds lame, it probably is).