

# READING WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

## Using Document-based Questions for Historical Writing Video Transcript

### **Amanda Westenberg:**

Our objective today is for you to identify your next steps in writing either a proficient or an advanced DBQ. We're going to complete a group activity in order to assist your learning of your next step on your DBQ.

Part of our curriculum is getting our students to be proficient at writing a document-based essay. So that would be several primary and secondary sources, six to 12 different documents in order to respond to an essay question. Document analysis perspective-- point of view-- is really at the heart of our discipline. So when we teach kids how to do a DBQ, we're teaching kids how to be historians.

So will you please take your packet and will you go to "DBQ Outline" at the top? And on your paper, I want you to mark part of the DBQ you could teach someone. The second thing I want you to mark is, what you believe you still need to learn more about, what you haven't perfected or mastered yet.

The heart and soul of history is not reading what somebody else wrote and memorizing dates and facts and then regurgitating it. It is interpretation, it is the use of evidence, it is developing a hypothesis, it is synthesis and analysis.

I'm going to give you back your last DBQ and I'm going to ask you to self-reflect. You're going to have some comments from me and your essay in order to do that.

The purpose of the activity that we did today is to identify specifically what each kid needs in order to move forward and get a proficient or an advance. What is their next step? On the bottom of the paper, it says "Your plan." This is what you believe are your next steps.

For some students, they need help understanding the documents, and they need to talk through them together. They may get the documents, but they don't see the relationship between them. Other students really need to say, "Well, how do I write this?" And others know how to write it, so we're ready to move into what I would call a point-of-view statement, and that is a more sophisticated

analysis of the document. So because they have a wide array of needs, this type of lesson can meet all of those needs and support them in their next steps. I grouped all of my students according to their needs from the last two DBQs. And then I created an activity that would specifically help them get that skill. Whether it was analyzing another essay, whether it was giving a new skill like writing a point-of-view statement, each group of kids that was missing that exact same skill worked together on a specific activity.

**Christopher:**

We self-assess on what our teacher gives us. She gives us a set of numbers and we have a sheet that shows us what that set of numbers mean. Depending on that, we see what we need to work on. I needed to create a point-of-view statement. I was lacking on that in my last essay. Pretty much everything else was good, so I just need to work on that on my new essay.

So what I wrote as a grabber was, "So most people believe that the attack on Pearl Harbor was a complete surprise to the U.S. This is not absolutely true."

**Student:**

This is such a big subject to remember, though.

**Christopher:**

I know, Pearl Harbor was too much. There were so many things that led up to it, that's what it was. She said I did a great job on the analysis.

**Westenberg:**

I am very comfortable letting my class do a lot of the learning without me constantly directing them. I'm okay with what some people may perceive as chaos. It's not chaos, it's organized learning.

**Student:**

How did you do your conclusion? I just always restate it. I don't know why.

**Student:**

Yeah, I restate it, and then you lead into what happens next.

**Student:**

Yeah, like, what's going to happen next. So, like, at the very end, I just said, "Nevertheless, Japan had not taken the U.S. with much seriousness and had not anticipated the declaration of war in 1941 that would bring about the Second World War."

**Student:**

That's really good. So, I said, "However, by doing this, the U.S. declared war on Germany and..."

**Student:**

Oh, well, then, she probably just wants more from that.

**Student:**

So what are you going to put on our plan?

**Student:**

Which one is it? Topic sentences and also, work on my conclusion.

**Student:**

But then she put us in a group because we had a problem with grouping our documents.

**Westenberg:**

Some students need help understanding the documents and they need to talk through them together. For some students, they may get the documents, but they don't see the relationship between them. Other students really need to say, "Well, how do I write this?"

**Westenberg:**

Let's go to the essay question, first of all. What were the impacts of the One Child Policy, just based on what you know right now?

**Student:**

The amount of boys compared to the girls.

**Westenberg:**

Okay, so gender imbalance.

**Student:**

Population decrease.

**Westenberg:**

Population decrease.

**Student:**

And the resources.

**Westenberg:**

What about resources?

**Student:**

Well, before the One Child Policy, how they were running low on especially water out in China.

**Westenberg:**

Okay. So, good. You actually produced three different ideas. And those ideas have documents that support them.

**Student:**

Oh, so you mean the groupings as the ideas.

**Westenberg:**

Uh-huh, that are in the documents. So let's say documents A and B...

One of the things that I am very explicit about is that you participate. You can be wrong, that's okay, but are you doing the thinking, the reading, the writing and the learning? I simply facilitate. They're the people who are active in the class. So I've set a culture and a precedent and a standard that when you walk into this room, that is what you do.

**Student:**

I picked a really... not a strong hook, honestly.

**Westenberg:**

Why do you feel like that quote wasn't that strong?

**Student:**

I don't know, it's... I found out, like, as soon as, like, when I was halfway through the essay, of course. But at the time it looked good. I'll try to plan ahead more. Maybe I'll do the hook after I write the essay.

**Westenberg:**

Okay. Sometimes that's a good route to go. Okay, first of all, I want to say that you guys as a group, I feel like you have a really good understanding of a lot of the documents, but for whatever reason, I don't fully see that when you group your essay. You've either got two paragraphs that are grouped really, really well and one paragraph that's not, or you really know the information, but you're not writing about the documents enough. I want you to work together at grouping and really talking about the documents, and when you do that, I really want you to think about, "How can we use this document in the essay?"

This type of lesson can meet a wide array of needs and support them in their next steps. The kids can be responsible for their own learning, and so part of the purpose of this is for them to really be able to articulate specifically where they are, and for them to feel comfortable in articulating this. Mine is that I need to add a point-of-view statement because I didn't add that in my other one.

Okay, what have you got?

**Student:**

Just adding better information at the beginning of the introduction.

**Westenberg:**

For those groups, what I was really happy to see is that they were willing to take on something that was very challenging. Authorial can be a lot harder. What is an authorial POV saying?

**Student:**

Why the author of the document would have chosen to put in this type of information.

**Westenberg:**

Okay, good. Why they feel a certain way, why they have a certain belief.

The goal, I believe, of social studies education is to have a population that not only can vote and civically participate, but has a good understanding of what is going on in the world around them. The objective is for us to have literate thinkers, the ability to read and comprehend and create an argument and a hypothesis, and act. And that cannot happen if our students don't know how to read, write and discuss.