



FOR PARENTS:

What is a DBQ?

How to help your child with Document-Based Questions

A publication of New York State United Teachers, the people who help New York to learn.

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Raising standards with DBQs

What do a map of Europe, an Army recruiting poster and some newspaper editorial cartoons have in common? They could be the basis for the answer your kids give to a Document-Based Question on the next social studies test.

Once found only on high school Advanced Placement tests, "DBQs" are working their way down to the elementary grades as the state moves to raise standards of teaching and learning in all schools.

As early as fifth grade, your children will be tested on their ability to analyze a collection of documents, tap their own knowledge and come up with reasoned answers to complex questions or multi-faceted topics.

It's a real-world skill they'll use all their lives.

Unfortunately, kids lose points on DBQs - and other tests, for that matter - because they don't focus on the details or the directions. Some simple steps can help you to help them develop their powers of observation. Above all, start these efforts early. After all, the DBQ your children will face on their fifth-grade social studies test is based on what they've learned from kindergarten through fourth grade.

Following are a few ways you can help give your kids the analytical skills they'll need to succeed at DBQs.

Elementary school and beyond

- Read to your kids and with them. Depending on their age, you can share observations from newsmagazines, newspapers and special-interest publications as well as books. Remember, DBQs test kids on their ability to analyze and understand many perspectives on the same issue.
- Quiz them on what they've read, but don't just have them parrot something back to you. As

questions that require them to use critical-thinking skills.

- Encourage your child to compare and contrast toys, movies or books they have read. For example, discuss how toys have changed over time.
- You can teach even the youngest kids how a time line works by having them arrange family members by age or put the days of the week in order.
- Take advantage of the experiences - and priceless historical documents - available at New York's many museums and historical sites.

Middle school and beyond

- Share with your child an appropriate newspaper, magazine or TV advertisement and have th child explain the message. What is the advertiser trying to say? What is the advertiser really selling?
- The ability to read and understand maps and charts is important. On family trips, have the child draw a simple map or trace the route on a roadmap or atlas. Older children can take ar active role as navigator.
- Visit an old cemetery and discuss the stories the headstones tell - How long did people live? Why did some children die so young? How have given names changed over the years?
- Help kids find their own documents around the house. Every family has old newspapers, family papers, home movies, photos and souvenirs to look at and discuss.
- Encourage your child to write whenever possible. Start a family journal and trade it back anc forth on trips or during summer vacation,
- TV has much to offer if you exercise some control over what your children are watching. Spend some time on the many channels with history, science and news programming.
- Instead of asking "How was the movie?" help your child analyze a film or video they've just seen. What was the main idea of the film? What was the director trying to say?
- Just because your kids have grown up as part of a visual generation, it doesn't mean they know how to observe something. When looking at a painting, for instance, ask if the child knows what's going on in one corner of the work. Do the people in the painting represent something?

What's a DBQ?

Students taking the Global History and Geography Regents are asked to read a collection of documents and answer a series of questions about them. Known as "scaffolding" questions, they are designed to help the student build a foundation to respond to the document-based essay question that follows.

In one sample DBQ on the United States becoming a more industrialized society, documents included a chart on the impact of industrialization from 1870-1910, quotations from noted figures of the day and a political cartoon. After answering a "scaffolding" question about each document, students had to write an essay discussing the advantages and disadvantages of industrialization to American society between 1865 and 1920 and how it affected different groups.



State tests

Although scaffolded-response questions and other DBQ-related items are showing up on many tests, the most intensive use of Document-Based Questions and essays will be found on social studies tests. State exams include:

- Elementary Social Studies - Grade 5
- Intermediate Social Studies - Grade 8
- Global History and Geography Regents - Grade 10 and up
- U.S. History and Government - Grade 11 and up

For more information

- To better understand how DBQs help test student ability to meet the state's new standards for learning, check out the State Education Department's Web site at www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/social.html. Here, you can also view sample DBQs for all grade levels.
- www.tier.net/oestrich/DBOs.htm links to a number of DBQ-related sites aimed at parents and teachers of students of all ages.

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