

Deconstructed DBQ Document Set and Teacher Context

Teacher Resource

Resource Overview

This document provides teacher support for implementing the Unit 7: American Expansion Deconstructed DBQ in the middle school classroom. It includes seven documents, each designed to help students explore connections to the DBQ question while understanding the relevant historical context.

Use the context in this document to guide your students in making these connections and help them engage with the primary sources effectively.

Scaffolding note: For students who need additional support, you can assign or allow them to choose 2-3 documents. For students who need more of a challenge, provide all documents and require them to use each source at least once in their analysis.

Document Exposure Table

This table shows where each primary source in the Deconstructed DBQ appears throughout the unit. Use this overview to help with lesson planning, reinforce key concepts, or activate prior knowledge before students engage with the full DBQ.

Teacher note: As students move through the curriculum, they encounter more documents overall, but each one appears fewer times. This gradual decrease in exposure is intentional—it helps shift the responsibility for document analysis to the student, supporting the development of independent thinking and source analysis skills over time.

Document	New or Repeated Exposure	Unit Resources Using the Document
Document A: Interview with Harriet Scott Palmer (1939)	Repeated	<i>Voices From Western Expansion</i> Lesson Plan
Document B: American Progress by John Gast (1872)	Repeated	<i>America in Transition</i> Interactive Timeline <i>Land Acquisition and Westward Movement Timeline</i> Lesson Plan

Document C: Excerpt from the Gadsden Treaty (1853)	Repeated	<i>America in Transition</i> Interactive Timeline <i>Land Acquisition and Westward Movement Timeline</i> Lesson Plan
Document D: Excerpt from the Indian Removal Act (1830)	Repeated	<i>America in Transition</i> Interactive Timeline <i>Land Acquisition and Westward Movement Timeline</i> Lesson Plan <i>Trail of Tears Stations</i> Lesson Plan
Document E: Handbill from the California Emigration Society, Boston (1856)	New	
Document F: Excerpt from President James Polk's Message to Congress (1845))	New	
Document G: Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (1848)	New	

Document Set with Teacher Context

Each Deconstructed DBQ document is accompanied by background information to enhance teacher understanding of each source. The information is organized by key concepts in the DBQ question.

Scaffolding note: You may choose to share some or all of this information with your students to support their understanding of the documents.

Documents

Documents A: Interview with Harriet Scott Palmer (1939)

On and on, we journeyed — averaging 15 miles a day over cactus, sagebrush , and hot sand. Everybody's shoes gave out, and we bartered with Indians for moccasins , but that didn't help much about the prickly pears . One by one, the oxen fell by the way . We came to Burnt River — a most desolate country. Here,	sagebrush - dry, shrubby plants bartered - traded goods without money moccasins - shoes worn by Native Americans
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our baby brother, Willie, fell sick. It was in the heat of August. The train was halted so that the darling child of four years could be better cared for, but he became unconscious and passed away.

prickly pears- a type of cactus
fell by the way- died
desolate- deserted, empty

Historical Significance

Harriet Scott Palmer's interview records a firsthand account of the harsh realities of westward migration during the nineteenth century. Recorded later in her life, her memories of the Oregon Trail highlights the struggles faced by settlers, such as the loss of family members, exhaustion, and survival against challenging conditions.

Territorial Expansion and National Identity

Palmer's journey was part of the broader trend of Manifest Destiny during this time period—the idea that America was ordained by God to expand across the continent. Her family's perseverance through a dangerous journey symbolizes the American spirit of resilience and the drive to settle new land despite significant obstacles. This expansion contributed to a national identity that valued exploration and settling of new lands.

New Challenges

The hardships described in Palmer's interview, including the death of her younger brother and lack of supplies, illustrate the physical and emotional toll of westward expansion. Settlers faced challenging landscapes, illness, and loss, testing their endurance and reshaping cultural expectations of frontier life. These challenges reveal the stark contrast between the idealized vision of Manifest Destiny and the more complex realities settlers had to face when choosing to move west.

Document B: American Progress by John Gast (1872)



<https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3b49282/>

In *American Progress*, painter John Gast portrays Manifest Destiny by showing Columbia, a symbol of the United States, floating westward with settlers, trains, and telegraph wires following her. As she moves into the dark frontier, Native Americans and wild animals flee.

Historical Significance

John Gast's painting American Progress is an artistic representation of Manifest Destiny, symbolizing the nation's push westward during the nineteenth century. It reflects the widespread belief that American expansion was necessary for progress. The painting depicts the point of view that American expansion was both a right and a duty.

Territorial Expansion and National Identity

In American Progress, the figure of Columbia leads settlers, telegraph lines, and railroads into the frontier, symbolizing technological advancement and the spread of American civilization. She also carries a book, representing education and the transmission of knowledge as part of America's westward expansion. This portrayal of westward movement depicts America's identity as a nation of progress, exploration, and dominance over untamed lands. The image reinforces the belief that American values were destined to spread across the continent.

New Challenges

While the painting glorifies expansion, it also depicts the displacement of Native Americans and wildlife, who are shown fleeing. This reflects the darker consequences of Manifest Destiny, as Native populations were forced from their ancestral lands. It also signifies the environmental changes that came with technological and territorial growth.

Document C: Excerpt from the Gadsden Treaty (1853)

The Republic of Mexico and the United States of America desiring to remove every cause of disagreement which might interfere in any manner with the better friendship and **intercourse** between the two countries, and especially in respect to the true limits which should be established... In consideration of the **foregoing stipulations**, the Government of the United States agrees to pay to the government of Mexico... the sum of ten millions of dollars, of which seven millions shall be paid immediately upon the exchange of the **ratifications** of this treaty, and the remaining three millions as soon as the boundary line shall be surveyed, marked, and established...

intercourse-communication or dealings

foregoing stipulations-conditions or agreements already mentioned

ratifications- approvals

Historical Significance

The Gadsden Treaty, signed in 1853, was signed by the United States to secure land for the development of a southern transcontinental railroad. This agreement with Mexico added territory to the American Southwest, further advancing U.S. expansion goals. The treaty illustrates how diplomatic negotiations were used as tools for territorial growth.

Territorial Expansion and National Identity

The acquisition of land through the Gadsden Treaty highlights America's work to connect its vast territories through railroad infrastructure. This purchase symbolized national progress and the belief that expanding transportation networks would help settle areas and drive economic growth. It is a reflection of how territorial expansion became entwined with technological advancement.

New Challenges

Despite its benefits, the Gadsden Treaty also contributed to sectional tensions by raising questions over the spread of slavery into newly acquired territories. It increased debates over the balance of power between free and slave states, foreshadowing conflicts that would later erupt into civil war.

Document D: Excerpt from the Indian Removal Act (1830)

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, That it shall and may be lawful for the President of the United States to cause so much of any territory belonging to the United States, west of the river Mississippi, not included in any state or organized territory, and to which the Indian title has been **extinguished**, as he may judge necessary, to be divided into a suitable number of districts, for the reception of such tribes or nations of Indians...

enacted- made law

extinguished- ended,
terminated

Historical Significance

The Indian Removal Act was signed by President Andrew Jackson in 1830. It authorized the forced relocation of Native American tribes from their lands in the southeastern part of the United States to territories west of the Mississippi River. This legislation helped open up land for settlement by Americans who were eager for new opportunities for farming.

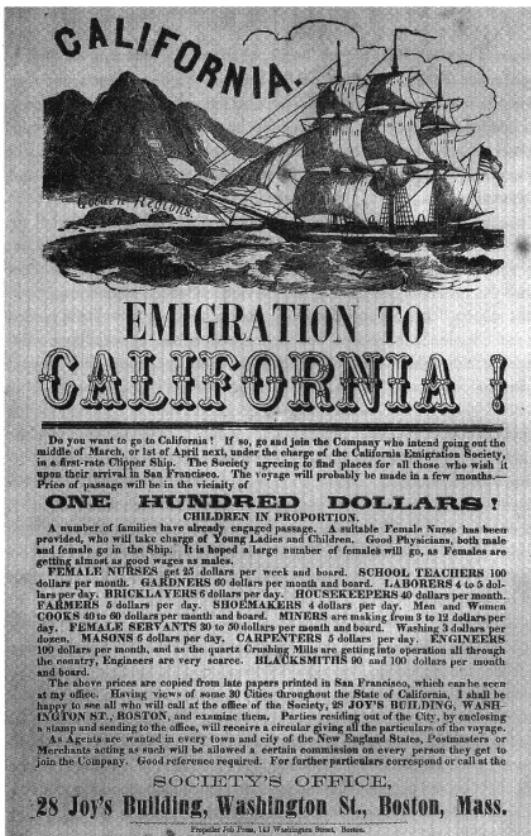
Territorial Expansion and National Identity

The act was rooted in the belief that America had a divine right to acquire western lands, reflecting the nation's belief in Manifest Destiny. By clearing the land for farmers and settlers, the U.S. government solidified its control over the expanding frontier, reinforcing a national identity that prioritized growth.

New Challenges

The forced removal led to the Trail of Tears, where thousands of Native Americans suffered and died during their journey west. This act sparked significant resistance from Native tribes and criticism from some Americans, revealing the moral and humanitarian costs of expansion toward western lands. It also deepened conflicts between the U.S. government and Native populations that would last for decades.

Document E: Handbill from the California Emigration Society, Boston (1856)



Gold was discovered in California in 1848. Afterward, getting to California to strike it rich was a pull factor for many people. Once the gold miners arrived, others were needed to join to make cities. This handbill features information for people, including families, interested in moving west to California for reasons other than gold.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gold_Rush_flyer.jpg

Historical Significance

The handbill from the California Emigration Society encouraged families to move west to California, reflecting the optimism and economic opportunity tied to the Gold Rush and settlement in California. It illustrates advertising and organized efforts that facilitated mass migration to newly acquired territories. This movement contributed

to the rapid development of Western cities and infrastructure surrounding mining towns that popped up in response to the gold rush.

Territorial Expansion and National Identity

The promotion of westward migration like this handbill illustrated belief in opportunity and individual success, which became key aspects of national identity. The handbill represents the lure of new opportunities for ordinary citizens where they could seek prosperity and build new communities in new western territories.

New Challenges

Mass migration led to overcrowding in cities, environmental strain, and increased conflicts with Native American populations. Settlers had limited resources and sometimes experienced legal disputes over land claims, challenging their visions of easy wealth and prosperity. This influx also intensified debates over statehood and slavery in the West.

Document F: Excerpt from President James Polk's Message to Congress (1845)

...The terms of **annexation** which were offered by the United States having been accepted by Texas, the **public faith** of both parties is **solemnly** pledged to the compact of their union... This **accession** to our territory has been a bloodless achievement. No arm of force has been raised to produce the result. The sword has had no part in the victory. We have not sought to extend our territorial pos-sessions by conquest, or our republican institutions over a **reluctant** people. It was the deliberate **homage** of each people to the great principle of our federative union. If we consider the extent of territory involved in the annexation, its **prospective** influence on America, the means by which it has been accomplished, springing purely from the choice of the people themselves to share the blessings of our union, the history of the world may be challenged to **furnish a parallel**.

annexation- the taking of land where one party voluntarily gives it up

public faith- promise or commitment

solemnly- in a formal manner

accession- to add

reluctant-hesitant

homage- acknowledgement

prospective- future effect

furnish a parallel- provide an equal

Historical Significance

President James Polk's 1845 address to Congress justified the annexation of Texas as part of America's expansionist goals. His speech reinforced the notion that the U.S. had a right and obligation to extend its borders, reflecting the popular sentiment of Manifest Destiny. Polk's message helped set the stage for further territorial acquisitions.

Territorial Expansion and National Identity

Polk's message to Congress reflected the American belief in territorial growth as a key part of national strength and identity. His support for annexation as President bolstered the idea that the United States was destined to span the continent, and executive actions like this made the idea of Westward Expansion reality.

New Challenges

The annexation of Texas led directly to the Mexican-American War, igniting conflict over borders and territorial claims. It also fueled disputes over the extension of slavery, further deepening the sectional divide within the United States.

Document G: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in American (1848)*

"The state of Kentucky was founded in 1775, the state of Ohio only twelve years later...Today the population of Ohio already exceeds that of Kentucky by 250,000 **inhabitants**....

These **diverse** effects of slavery and freedom are easily understood....

On the left bank of the Ohio work is blended with the idea of slavery; on the right bank, with that of well-being and progress; there it is **degraded**, here they honor it; on the left bank of the river, one cannot find workers belonging to the white race; on the right bank one would seek in vain for an **idle** man....

inhabitants-people who live in an area

diverse- varied

When looking at the Ohio River from the East, Ohio is on the right bank and Kentucky is on the left.

degraded- lowered in value

idle- not working, without purpose

The whites on the right bank, **obliged** to live by his own efforts, has placed in material well-being the **principal** goal of his existence....The American on the left bank **scorns** not only work, but all the undertakings that work makes successful; living in idle ease."

obliged- morally bound

principal- main or most important

scorns- to feel or express distaste

Historical Significance

Alexis de Tocqueville's observations in Democracy in America contrast the development of free and slave states, illustrating how expansion contributed to regional economic and social differences. His work was a critical analysis of American society during the era of westward expansion and demonstrated the moral and economic failures of the system of slavery.

Territorial Expansion and National Identity

Tocqueville's analysis highlights how territorial growth fostered distinct identities in the North and South. The expansion of free and slave states shaped the nation's political landscape and contributed to the perception of America as a land of opportunity. However, the social and economic fabric of free states and slave states were very different.

New Challenges

His observations foreshadow the intensifying conflict over slavery, which would soon erupt into civil war. The rapid settlement of western territories raised questions about the systems of free labor vs. slave labor and whether slavery should be allowed in new territories, exacerbating national tensions.

