

Essay: Which Document Do You Choose?
Differentiated Text

Document-based instruction gives social studies students the opportunity to act as historians and draw their own conclusions and has the potential to enhance student literacy skills. Many text book companies and social studies organizations publish original, edited and modified versions of primary source material organized on activity sheets ready for classroom use. But there are drawbacks. Depending on the primary source document, or even the way it is edited, students can learn a very different version of history. As you can see from these selections, document-based instruction requires that teachers have a broad and deep understanding of events.

It's your classroom:

1. Would you use these activity sheets in your high school class in lessons on the "home front" during the Civil War? Explain?
2. Do you have questions about the news articles and headlines? What are they? Why?
3. In your opinion, are the questions effective for guiding students through the passage? Explain.

A. *The New York Times*, Saturday, November 7, 1863, 1

THE PENNSYLVANIA COAL MINES
An Irish, Welsh and German Row at Mauch Chunk
THE FRUITS OF COPPERHEAD TEACHINGS
The Buckshots and the Molly McGuires on the Rampage
FOUR MEN KILLED

"Last night Mr. C. K. Smith, coal operator at Yorktown, Carbon County, was murdered in a most brutal manner in his house, in the presence of his family, by a gang of Irish outlaws, known as "Buckshots."

Mr. Smith was a loyal and highly respected gentleman, and was suspected of giving certain information to the Deputy Provost-Marshal, by which the latter, with the military under Capt. Yates, was enabled to arrest the drafted men.

No Union man's life is safe in . . . Beaver Meadows and other mines of the middle coal fields.

Seven or eight murders were committed there within the last few weeks. . .

Last August, a peaceable law abiding citizen, residing in Beaver Meadows, was made the object of an attack from a riotous crowd of Irishmen, who, under the names of *buckshots* and *Molly McGuires*, have disciplined themselves into an organization. . . .

The success of this insolent violation of law and order inaugurated the reign of terror which has settled down on the district. Mob orators from Mauch Chunk have told these deluded miners that 'they must not submit to the Lincoln tyranny, . . . that they must stand in the door and resist every officer connected with the draft who comes near them. . . .'

The draft enrollment has been made from the books of the mine owners. No man alive dare serve the notice. . . . These men have openly boasted that 'no draft dare ever be made amongst them, . . . that they would murder any soldier or body of soldiers that came near them.'"

Questions

What is going on in the United States at the time of these events?

According to this news article, what is going on in the coal towns of Pennsylvania?

According to the news article, who is responsible for these actions?

In your opinion, should the people involved in these actions be punished? Why? How?

[This article seems like a good illustration of anti-war and anti-draft sentiments among both Copperheads and immigrants in the North during the Civil War and raises questions about the need to punish violence and prevent treason. But the article only tells a small part of the story. Based on War Department correspondence in the National Archives, it seems that the military draft was being used by coal mine owners allied with local Republican Party officials to break strikes by impoverished miners who were seeking higher wages.

According to a report from General Rausch, the arrival of troops returned the mines to operation and the operators proposed to “discharge the bad characters,” if they were assured on government support. The military eventually arrested about 70 miners, but found little to prove disloyalty or resisting conscription. Charges against most of the accused were dropped. Yet despite the lack of evidence, a military tribunal convicted 13 defendants, who spent the remainder of the war in a prison camp. This part of the story did not appear in *The New York Times* until December, 2002 in an article discussing military tribunals proposed by President George W. Bush (Bulik, 2001).]

B. *The New York Times*, Headlines, May 9, 1863 -

Examine the following headlines from *The New York Times*.

1. What happened in New York City between July 13 and July 18, 1863?
2. In your opinion, why did it happen?

THE CONSCRIPTION LAW. IMPORTANT PROCLAMATION BY THE PRESIDENT. May 9, 1863,
p. 1

THE DRAFT BEGINS. July 11, 1863, p. 3

THE MOB IN NEW YORK. RESISTANCE TO THE DRAFT -- RIOTING AND BLOODSHED. CONSCRIPTION OFFICES SACKED AND BURNED. PRIVATE DWELLINGS PILLAGED AND FIRED. AN ARMORY AND A HOTEL DESTROYED. COLORED PEOPLE ASSAULTED -- AN UNOFFENDING BLACK MAN HUNG. THE TRIBUNE OFFICE ATTACKED ---THE COLORED ORPHAN ASYLUM RANSACKED AND BURNED --- OTHER OUTRAGES AND INCIDENTS. A DAY OF INFAMY AND DISGRACE. July 14, 1863, p. 1

THE REIGN OF THE RABBLE. LARGE NUMBERS KILLED. STREETS BARRICADED, BUILDINGS BURNED. July 15, 1863, p. 1

ANOTHER DAY OF RIOTING. MOBS ARMED WITH RIFLES. NEGROES HUNG. July 16, 1863, p. 1

THE RIOTS SUBSIDING. TRIUMPH OF THE MILITARY. July 17, 1863, p. 1

QUIET RESTORED. CONTINUED PRECAUTIONS OF AUTHORITIES. July 18, 1863, p. 1

THE DRAFT HERE AND ELSEWHERE. THE LAWS AND THE MOB. AID FOR THE INJURED. JUSTICE TO THE VICTIMS. July 18, 1863, p. 1

THE LAW OF THE DRAFT. THE QUESTION OF EXEMPTIONS. July 19, 1863

[I confess that I used these headlines in a lesson for many years without carefully reading the articles. While they point out the injustice of the draft, they primarily paint a very unsympathetic picture of the draft rioters. They are mainly Irish immigrants who assault and kill free African Americans in New York City.

While working on the New York State Great Irish Famine curriculum, I examined the articles much more carefully and was surprised by what I learned. I have highlighted parts of two articles from July 14,

1863 to draw attention to specific points. Note three things: the “mob” did not burn the orphanage until after the attack on the armory; at the armory, police opened fire on a crowd that consisted largely of boys; and the majority the “rioters” at the orphanage were women and children. While this information does not justify what happened, it offers a different explanation of events.]

The Attack on the Armory in Second Avenue

“**At about 4 o’clock** the crowd proceeded from . . . Lexington Avenue and Forty-fourth street to the armory situated on the corner of Second Avenue and Twenty-first street. The building was a large four story one, and was occupied for the manufacture of rifles for the Government. In the early part of the day the police authorities had placed in the building a large number of Policemen. **Their instructions were to protect the building and the property inside**, and to resist with force any attempt of the invaders to enter the premises. . . . At the time the first attempt was made to force the doors of the building, **the mob amounted to from three to four thousand, the greater part of whom were boys**. . . . The doors were burst open by means of heavy sledges, and the crowd made a rush to enter the building. **Those in charge of the building, acting under instructions, fired upon those who were entering** and four or five were wounded. One man was shot through the heart and died immediately.”

“By this time the Fire Department of the District arrived on the ground, and were preparing to work on the fire, but were prevented from doing so by the mob, who threatened them with instant death if their orders were disobeyed. The cars were stopped from running and the horses in several instances were killed. . . . The rioters meanwhile danced with fiendish delight before the burning building, while **small boys sent showers of stones against the office**, smashing its doors and windows. . . . The military soon appeared, but was immediately routed, they fled to the side streets.”

Burning of the Orphanage for Colored Children

“The Orphan Asylum for Colored Children was visited by the mob **after 4 o’clock**. . . . Hundreds, and perhaps thousands of the rioters, the **majority of whom were women and children**, entered the premises and in the most excited and violent manner they ransacked and plundered the building from cellar to garret. . . . It was a purely charitable institution. In it there are on an average 600 or 800 homeless colored orphans. . . . After an hour and a half of labor on the part of the mob, it was in flames in all parts.”

In a lesson using both the headlines and the excerpts from the articles in the Great Irish Famine curriculum, we ask students the following questions.

1. Use the newspaper articles to construct a time line of events.
2. Consider the accuracy and biases of the reports. Whose voice is included in these excerpts? Whose voice is missing? Is there anything that makes you question the accounts? Explain.
3. Why people would people during a time of war? Why did protests turn into riots? What actions, if any, should be taken against people who participated in the riots?
4. If you were sitting on a jury trying rioters for murder and other crimes, would you find them guilty based on the evidence provided here? Be prepared to explain your views to the class.