

USING HISTORIC DOCUMENTS AND STUDENT TRAVEL TO GAIN MASTERY OF DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS

High School level activity

Working Title: Teaching Document Based Question skills with historic landmark related documents

This activity may be used as either an assessment tool following an appropriate unit or may be used to help students interpret historical documents and generate original understandings and conclusions based upon the document inquiry . This Document Based Question relies heavily on the Blue Ridge Parkway specifically (since our school is only a few miles from the BRP and students are very familiar with it) and FDR's New Deal in a general; as such it may be used to assess student understanding of that material, or as a model for study of events specific to any locale.

As an option, (and in a perfect world) this assessment could be used as a summative activity for field trips or field studies of local or regional historic landmarks.

CONTENT AND COGNITIVE GOALS:

Few assessments allow for a clearer demonstration of both cognitive and content mastery better than a Document Based Question (DBQ). The dreaded DBQ of Advanced Placement test lose some of their intimidation when used to examine a familiar landmark, political activity, or local or regional event.

In this example the content of FDR's New Deal, the understanding of the role of the government in such massive public works projects as the Parkway must be understood. Additionally, and of equal importance, the classical ideals of "liberal" and "conservative" should find their way into this discussion.

Cognitively, crafting an argument as a proper essay and balancing the opposing points-of-view give the student an opportunity to hone the skills necessary for engaging in higher order thinking.

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THIS LESSON:

By utilizing familiar landmarks or landmarks recently visited, the question will call upon firsthand knowledge, allowing the student to be a first person observer.

For this particular lesson the essential questions may vary by teacher emphasis. For this particular application the Guiding Question is: Was the Blue Ridge Parkway, and FDR's New Deal in general, a massive public works/welfare program or a continuation of government's pandering to the needs of big business?

ASSESSMENT:

Though the DBQ is frequently seen as an assessment in and of itself, through the use of a good rubric which emphasizes a proper balance of document based info, outside information, and the student's

own narrative, a good essay may be crafted. As with many formative writing assignments, peer editing, peer evaluations or even group writing may be part of the assessment. The discretion of the teacher is the primary determining factor.

THE QUESTION:

Using the following documents, as well as your own knowledge of the era, develop a well written essay which addresses the following:

To what extent was the Blue Ridge Parkway Project a defining event in government's transformation from an instrument of big business in the 1920's into the primary conduit of assistance for citizens' welfare?

DOCUMENT A

The United States tried to pretend that the rest of the world did not really exist. Its people turned inward, and they found that they had plenty to do. For in the 1920s the United States became a modern middle-class economy of radios, consumer appliances, automobiles and suburbs. Nearly thirty million motor vehicles were on the road in 1929, one for every five residents of the country. Mass production had made the post-World War I United States the richest society the world had ever seen.

DOCUMENT B

Motor Vehicle Production (Thousands)								
Year	United States	Canada	France	United Kingdom	Germany	Italy	Czechoslovakia	Russia
1907	45	3	25	12	4	0	0	0
1913	485	15	45	34	14	2	0	0
1924	3504	135	145	133	18	35	2	0
1928	4359	242	210	212	90	55	13	1
1935	3971	173	165	404	240	44	10	97

DOCUMENT C:

“The Eastern band of Cherokees stood alone among western North Carolinas less prominent citizens in sustaining opposition to the Blue Ridge Parkway’s massive land requirements and its limited accessibility. The Cherokees focused for state highway department and for federal officials the questions that many people outside of the Asheville area expressed individually: Whose interest did the Parkway serve? Whose highway was it? Was a scenic Parkway the highway what most western North Carolinians needed? As these questions were raised on t he Cherokee reservation, they revealed that the class and cultural politics of the early development of the Parkway were more complicated than many Parkway enthusiast and federal and state policy makers anticipated or liked to admit.”

Anne Whisnant in “Super-scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway
History

DOCUMENT D

“I’ll tell you what the WPA meant to us; it meant we had something on our table to eat”

Mrs. Kathleen Small (2005) whose Father was trained as a mason under
the WPA

DOCUMENT E

“Even after the Great Depression brought the tourist industry crashing down after the 1930’s, mountain entrepreneurs held fast to their vision of the “Land of the Sky”. They convinced the Federal Government to invest millions of dollars in tourist friendly projects such as the Great Smokey Mountain National Park and The Blue Ridge Parkway. While these massive government projects contributed to the regions post-war success they also exacerbated growing tensions within mountain society. The Great Smokey Mountains National Park brought prosperity to towns near its official entrances but left other towns isolated and burdened with new regulations restricting alternative economic activity. The Blue Ridge Parkway benefitted hotel owners but infuriated mountain farmers who were prevented from driving their commercial vehicles on the new road.”

Dr. Karl Campbell from Journal of Social
History Fall 2007

DOCUMENT F

[As an option the instructor might use an artifact of local import or from a preceding class trip]