



wasatch range writing project Demonstration Lesson Format

Lesson Title: How to Describe a Document and Write a Document Analysis

Burning Question:

How can we explain document analysis to Middle and High School students?

Objectives:

Students will understand what analysis means.

Students will be able to describe and analyze an individual document, then pairs or groups of documents.

Context:

Materials:

*Documents from AP European History exams

*Teachers can find other documents from sources below

*PowerPoint presentation

Time Span:

Two days (two hours in class; a block day and a regular class period)

Procedures:

- 1) Teacher presents the concepts of Description and Analysis to students in PPT.
- 2) Students take notes (on their handout) on the PPT, and ask questions.
- 3) Students write responses to prompts during PPT presentation.
- 4) Students write a paragraph describing and analyzing documents.

Extensions:

Use these skills to describe and analyze a current newspaper/online news report.

Use these skills to describe and analyze political speech in the news.

Rationale:

Students need modeling in order to understand these skills; here, we break the process down into understandable steps that make such analysis easier to do.

Resources:

Analyzing Documents

What do we mean by ‘document’? Almost any piece of evidence.

Written documents: descriptive accounts, essays, letters, government reports, etc.

Visual documents: paintings, photos, maps, tables, statues, buildings, etc.

Media: film, video, Youtube, etc.

Here we concentrate on written documents, but this can be extended to the analysis of other kinds of documents.

How Does One Write About and Analyze a Document?

Describe the Content of the Document:

Explain what the author argues. What is the main point? Secondary themes? You might need to regroup ideas in your discussion.

Analyze what this document says about the topic at hand?

Does the source tell a consistent story? Are there contradictions? Are there errors? What may be behind these?

Explain any allusions made by the author that are unclear.

Evaluate How Trustworthy the Document Is:

Given what you know about the period and the content of the document, how credible is it? Do other sources/text book agree? Does the document avoid important issues? Using other credible evidence, can you confirm or contradict the thesis of the document? Is the testimony sincere, exact? What makes you think so? Are there assertions made that are incorrect?

Make Connections Between Various Sources of Information:

Comment on how a document might be connected to others: did one influence another? Are the theses of two or more documents opposed to one another? Distinguish between the short and the long term. If possible, situate the document in a wider context. If it is a document produced by a specific group, or written from a clearly identifiable point of view, discuss to what extent it is typical of that point of view. It is in the conclusion that you really show that you have mastered the art of document analysis

Some rules to follow:

- Avoid meaningless statements (“This is an interesting document.”). Instead say “this is interesting because” Or better still, “Wollstonecraft’s voice is almost unique because she is among the first to....”
- Never use first-person (“To me this means...”); avoid second person (“As you can see...”)
- Refer to the document by the author (“Mr. Churchill argues...”, or “one can see that Wollstonecraft believed...”).

Analytical points to consider: SOAPS (SOAPS is a College Board acronym)

Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Subject

Speaker: who is the voice that is speaking?

Identify the historical person (or group) that created the document.

What do we know about this person? Tell the reader.

What role does he/she play in the events being described?

Why might *this* speaker have said/written *this* thing?

Occasion: What is the time and place? What KIND of document is it?

Describe the historical or geographic context in which the primary source was created?

Describe what kind of document it is—a letter, entry in someone’s diary, a painting, a newspaper report, a sermon, government website—your reader needs to know this.

Audience: For whom was this document intended?

Analyze the likely audience (a person, a small group or a large one?) of the document.

Does that audience have any particular interests served by this source?

Purpose: What is the reason behind the text?

What goal(s) did the author have in mind?

Subject: What is the general topic, content, or idea contained in the text?

Summarize concisely what the document says; then connect it to some of the other sections in SOAPS

SOAPS Worksheet

NAME: _____

Title of Document: _____

Use the SOAPS description to help you fill out this form. You may need to look some things up, either in the textbook or on-line. Think about the sources and try to make connections between the history and what this text is saying.

Describe the **Speaker** responsible for this document.

What was the **Occasion** of the document being written? What **KIND** of document is it?

Describe the intended **Audience**.

—over—

Analyze the likely **Purpose(s)** behind the document.

Thoroughly describe the **Subject** of the document.