

# **Take a Stand! American History**

**Socratic Discussion in History**

**Student's Edition**

## DEDICATION

Dedicated to Zdenka and the De Gree Kids

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## Week One: Western Civilization, Columbus and Colonization Fact or Opinion?

### Fact

A **fact** in history is a statement that is accepted as true and is not debatable. A fact often refers to a date, a person, or a document. For example, “The Declaration of Independence was written and signed in 1776.” We know this happened because we have the original document, the men who wrote and signed this document wrote about it, and observers wrote about it as well. There is no doubt in anybody’s mind whether the facts in this statement are true.

Which of these sentences are facts and which are not?

#### Fact or Not a Fact?

- 1. The first Egyptian settlements were near the Euphrates River.
- 2. Early civilizations often settled near major rivers.
- 3. Another way of saying Old Stone Age is Paleolithic.
- 4. Early man used guns to hunt buffaloes.
- 5. California has the best waves to surf in the United States.

### Opinion

An **opinion** is an expression of somebody’s ideas and is debatable. Opinions that are based on facts and good reasoning are stronger than opinions not based on facts. In history, opinions alone tend to be less persuasive than when a person supports his opinions with facts.

Are the following opinions or facts?

#### Opinion or Fact?

- 1. Life for early man was more peaceful than our life today.
- 2. Teachers who are nice don’t assign homework.
- 3. Almost everybody’s favorite food is pizza.
- 4. Mesopotamia means “the land between two rivers.”
- 5. Sumerians were the first people to use wheeled vehicles.

Now that you've learned the difference between fact and opinion, read the example paragraphs below and answer the questions. These two students attempted to answer the question "Did the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia contribute much to world civilizations?"

**Student 1:** The ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia contributed much to the world. These societies rocked! When there was a really big war, the Sumerians and Assyrians knew how to fight hard. These societies would use a lot of arrows in their battles, and the enemy wouldn't know how to respond. Most of the time, the enemy would just die, or quit. Also, everyone knows that Mesopotamia had the best kind of clothing. Have you seen pictures of the great Babylonian kings? Their clothing was "tight." And, Mesopotamia was the land between two rivers, so therefore this area had to have a lot of water. All in all, the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia contributed much to the world.

**Student 2:** The ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia contributed much to the world. The Sumerians created the first written language. We call this "Cuneiform." Sumerians also were the first people to use the wheel for transportation. The Babylonian king Hammurabi established one of the first written law codes, known as Hammurabi's Code. These laws helped the weak against the strong, protected women's property rights, and regulated doctors' fees. Also, the Hittites discovered how to use iron, which at that time was the strongest metal in the world that humans could work with. Phoenicians gave us the world's first alphabet, with 22 symbols. In addition, the Hebrews were the first people ever to worship only one God. Yes, the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia contributed much to the world.

### Questions

1. Which of these two students uses more opinion than fact? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Copy one sentence that is an opinion. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Copy one sentence that details at least one fact. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Which of these two students' writings is more persuasive? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

## Judgment

**Judgment** in social studies means a person's evaluation of facts. For example, if we use the fact that the Romans believed citizens could vote, we can judge from this that the Romans looked somewhat favorably on democracy. Good judgment is very persuasive but bad judgment is not.

Write facts and judgments in the spaces provided. Discuss your judgments in class.

Fact: 11-year-old Maria Perez won the gold medal in the city 800-meter sprint.
Judgment: Maria is a fast runner.
Fact: Private Smith was killed in war and had one wife and 7 children.
Judgment: Private Smith's death was a tragedy.
Fact: Thursday's temperature in Santa Ana was 105 degrees Fahrenheit.
Judgment: Thursday was very hot.

### Make your own.

Fact:
Judgment:

Fact:
Judgment:

Fact:
Judgment:

## **Week One: Christopher Columbus: Hero, Villain, or Neither? Open-Ended Question #1**

### **Introduction**

Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) was an explorer, cartographer (map maker), and adventurer from the Republic of Genoa (today part of northern Italy). In 1492, he led an expedition from Spain and discovered the islands of the West Indies. He died believing he had found a westerly route to Asia, but in reality, he had opened up the continents of North America and South America for European discovery and colonization. Fifty years ago, Americans viewed Columbus as a hero, and schoolchildren across the country had Columbus Day off from school. Today, students in only a few states honor Columbus, and people in many parts of our country view him with great dislike. Columbus Day is celebrated in some places of the United States on the second Monday of October, sometimes falling on the day he discovered America, October 12, 1492.

### **Question**

Defend or reject this statement: The United States of America is correct to celebrate Christopher Columbus as a federal holiday.

## A. The Age of Exploration

1. When was the Age of Exploration? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. From which continent did the great majority of explorers come from? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What were the primary reasons European sailors explored the world? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Which two countries led the way in exploring the world in the 1400s? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Which areas of the world did the Spanish explore and colonize? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What made Columbus' discovery of America in 1492 different than Leif Ericson and the Viking's discovery of America in 1002? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Why did the Spanish arrest Columbus and bring him back to Spain in chains? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What might some people argue that shows Columbus is someone to honor? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What might some people argue that shows Columbus is not someone to honor? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Unfortunately, most Americans do not know much about Columbus. In your opinion, what is the best way to increase understanding among Americans about Columbus and what he represents? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**B. Legal Concepts of Western Civilization**

1. Belief in one God: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Morality: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Natural Law: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. The Rule of Law: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Written Law: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Limited Government: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Political Liberty of all Citizens: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Rights of the Accused: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **C. Christopher Columbus, Symbol of Western Civilization**

Christopher Columbus is a symbol of Western Civilization. Columbus started the exploration and the later colonization of South and North America. Columbus brought with him both the negatives and the positives of Western Civilization.

#### **Questions to Ponder**

1. Are the eight characteristics of Western Civilization in the Grammar section (the first eight terms) of this lesson good, bad, or neither?

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2. Is Columbus a legitimate symbol of Western Civilization? Does Columbus represent the West? Explain your answer.

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#### **Reflection**

After the Socratic discussion with your classmates, write a Reflection on this topic.

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## Supporting Evidence

**Supporting evidence** refers to everything you use to support your thesis. These include, but are not limited to, the following.

1. Diaries and journals
2. Government documents such as birth certificates
3. Songs and stories
4. Coins, medals, jewelry
5. Artistic works such as pictures and paintings
6. Tools and pottery
7. Documents such as the Declaration of Independence
8. Weapons
9. Burial remains
10. Literature and customs

Good writers overwhelm the reader with so many pieces of supporting evidence that the writing will be quickly accepted. Also, the writer has a duty to explain carefully and logically the meaning of the evidence, showing how it supports the thesis. A writer must be careful, however, not to include unnecessary evidence. For example, the fact that Lincoln was born in a log cabin isn't evidence that he was a good president. Also, the dates a president was born and died may be evidence, but they would not support a thesis arguing who was the best president.

### Practice

With your teacher discuss which of the following is evidence for the topic "Explain what daily life was like in the Roman Republic in the third century B.C."

1. A diary from 234 B.C: \_\_\_\_\_
2. A newspaper article from A.D. 250: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Your friend likes the subject: \_\_\_\_\_
4. A movie about life in the third century B.C: \_\_\_\_\_
5. A song Romans sang in the third century B.C: \_\_\_\_\_
6. A story on the crucifixion of Christ: \_\_\_\_\_
7. A painting of a Roman slave working in 299 A.D: \_\_\_\_\_

## Primary or Secondary Source Analysis

A **primary source** is a piece of evidence authored by a person who witnessed or experienced a historical event. For example, diaries and journals are primary sources. It is usually better to find out something from a person who experienced a particular event than to hear about it secondhand. Primary source documents are usually the most useful for historians.

A **secondary source** is a piece of evidence that has been worked on by somebody who was not a witness to the historical event. Examples of secondary sources are textbooks, documentaries, and encyclopedias. Secondary sources are valuable but not as valuable as primary sources. Secondary sources contain the bias of the writer. This means that the writer of a secondary source will put his ideas into his explanation of the historical event, even when he may be trying not to.

Take a look at these two examples regarding the same event.

Event: Car accident outside of school

Example 1: "Oh no! I was in the back seat of my mom's car. This kid threw his friend's handball onto the street. All of a sudden, his friend jumped in front of my mom's car to get his ball. He didn't even look if a car was coming. My mom hit him and his body smashed against our windshield. Blood was everywhere!"

Example 2: "Did you hear what happened? Mario told me that his brother was walking home when he dropped his handball onto the street. After his brother looked both ways for cars, he stepped out onto the street to get his ball. Then this mad lady came speeding down the street and aimed her car at him. She hit him on purpose!"

Questions
1. Which is a primary source?
2. Which is a secondary source?
3. What is usually more believable, a primary or secondary source? Why? _____
_____
_____

## **Week Two: Jamestown and Plymouth Plantation**

### **Socratic Discussion Open-Ended Question #2**

#### **Background**

In the early 1600s, hundreds of English colonists embarked on a dangerous voyage across the Atlantic Ocean to establish colonies in an unknown world. In the first few years, tragedy and death met many of the European settlers in America. Still, by the 1630s, both Jamestown and Plymouth Plantation were growing, and more English were coming in great numbers.

#### **The Question**

What were the three most important reasons that enabled the English colonists to successfully establish Jamestown and Plymouth Plantation?

## A. Jamestown

1. Who established Jamestown and when was it established? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What was the purpose of establishing Jamestown? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Describe the first year of the Jamestown settlement. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What were the main problems the settlers at Jamestown faced the first few years? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What allowed or enabled the settlers of Jamestown to survive and later thrive? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Who were important leaders of Jamestown? Which leaders helped the Jamestown settlement and which leaders hurt the settlement? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Name and explain the democratic features of Jamestown. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. What was the role private property played in the Jamestown settlement? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## Week Nineteen: Building Greatly

### Socratic Discussion Open-Ended Question #23, Building Greatly

**Question:**

John F. Kennedy said, “An American by nature is an optimist. He is experimental, an inventor and builder, who builds best when called upon to build greatly.” To what extent do you think Kennedy was correct when considering the time period of 1876-1912?

### Socratic Discussion Open-Ended Question #24, Spanish-American War

**Question:**

In 1898, the United States of America fought a war against Spain and acquired territory. Was this a just war? Was America justified in going to war against Spain and in acquiring land?

### Socratic Discussion Open-Ended Question #25, Theodore Roosevelt

**Question:**

Was Theodore Roosevelt an elitist who believed it was his role to govern Americans, using every possible method to steer the country towards what he envisioned as the best possible country, or, was he a politician who believed in supporting and defending the limited role of government the American founding fathers believed in?

### Socratic Discussion Open-Ended Question #26 , Conservationism

Which conservationist held the most correct view of nature and man, John Muir or Theodore Roosevelt? Explain your answer.

### Socratic Discussion Open-Ended Question #27, Race Relations

Question: Describe the three paths Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey promoted for Black Americans. Which one was the best path to achieve equality of rights in America?

### Reflection

After the Socratic discussion with your classmates, write a Reflection on this topic.

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**Week Twenty: Progressivism, Part Two**  
**Socratic Discussion Open-Ended Question #27, Technology**

**Question**

Why was the United States of America the home of so many inventions at the turn of the century, such as the telephone, the airplane, the telegraph, the phonograph, the hand camera, the motor-driven vacuum cleaner the light bulb, the electric iron, the tow truck, etc?

**Socratic Discussion Open-Ended Question #28, Progressivism**

**Question**

In what area of American life did Progressives of the early 1900s make the biggest impact?

**Socratic Discussion Open-Ended Question #29, The Income Tax**

**Question**

What were the main causes and effects of the 16<sup>th</sup> Amendment?

**Socratic Discussion Open-Ended Question #30, World War I**

**Question**

What was the main cause of the United States entering into World War I?

**Socratic Discussion Open-Ended Question #30**

**Wilson's Fourteen Points and the Treaty of Versailles**

**Question**

Did President Wilson help craft a just or unjust peace settlement to end World War I?

**Socratic Discussion Open-Ended Question #31**

**Margaret Sanger, Abortion, and Eugenics**

**Question**

Compare and contrast the early women's rights leaders with Margaret Sanger regarding abortion. Did Sanger continue or break from the work of early women's rights leaders?

**Reflection**

After the Socratic discussion with your classmates, write a Reflection on this topic.

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**Week Twenty-One: The Roaring Twenties**  
**Socratic Discussion Open-Ended Question #32**

**The United States as a World Power**

The Effects of the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Urbanization

After U.S. involvement in World War I, there was no doubt that America had entered the world stage as a formidable country. Before World War I, however, the United States was considered a regional power at best. Heeding the words of first President George Washington, Americans hesitated to get involved in world affairs or European wars. The isolationism of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America changed drastically in the early twentieth century. The United States became an imperialist nation, conquering and controlling many Latin American and Asian lands. The United States was a key reason for the defeat of the Central Powers in World War I. America became an agricultural and industrial powerhouse, setting agricultural and economic examples at which the world could marvel. Various American scientists, inventors, and industrialists set the standard for modernized countries to follow. Furthermore, in World War I, it was the Americans who made the final difference for the Allies.

**Question**

What caused the United States to change from a regional power to a world power? How was the U.S. different from other countries? Explore the key factors that enabled the United States to emerge as one of the most powerful countries on earth.

To answer this question well, you should be familiar with these terms and people:

the Civil War	Reconstruction	democracy	capitalism
natural resources	World War I	imperialism	urbanization
Theodore Roosevelt	Woodrow Wilson	European aristocracy	Manifest Destiny
American industrialists and inventors			

**B. Compare and Contrast:  
Nineteenth-Century Europe and Post-Civil War America**

By using a variety of sources, compare and contrast the two societies on nineteenth-century Europe and post-Civil War America. Your aim is to try to discover what caused the United States to "catch up" to Europe and even surpass her in terms of agricultural and industrial might. Your goal is to discover "What caused the United States to become a world power in the beginning of the twentieth century?"

1. In the early 1900s, what type of government did most European countries have? _____ _____
2. In Europe, how did people become political leaders? _____ _____
3. In the early 1900s, what type of government did the United States have? _____ _____
4. How did Americans become political leaders? _____
5. Define "aristocracy." In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, did European countries or the United States have an aristocracy? _____ _____
6. What is a serf? _____ _____
7. When were the serfs freed in the Austro-Hungarian Empire? When were serfs freed in Russia? _____ _____
8. When were slaves freed in the United States? _____ _____
9. In European countries, who made most decisions involving the economy (e.g., what factories would be built, what farmers would grow)? _____ _____
10. In the United States, who made most decisions involving the economy? _____ _____
11. Compare and contrast the natural resources of European countries with that of the United States. _____ _____ _____
12. What did the United States learn militarily from fighting the Civil War? _____ _____ _____

