

## Lesson Six

### **Objectives:**

- Students will read and analyze selections of primary sources from the Mark Twain's Mississippi site at Northern Illinois University.
- Students will learn the rudiments of the Document-Based Exercise employed on the three Advanced Placement\* history exams.
- Students will write a focused essay in response to a prompt that integrates both the primary sources and relevant historical context.

### **Materials Needed:**

All of the materials for this lesson are provided below, selections from sources referenced at the various sites of the Illinois Historical Digitization Projects at NIU. **Note:** The sources have been lightly edited for this exercise.

### **Time Required:**

One class period is needed for students to read through the sources, discuss the documents in groups, and formulate a thesis to the prompt. Students can write a response to the prompt as a homework assignment that will take approximately 50 minutes.

### **Introduction:**

The Mississippi River forms one of the most important geographic features and economic resources in the history of the United States. While the river has proved a vital asset, its history has also been marked by conquest, ecological problems, and poverty. This lesson employs primary sources to allow students to form a more complex view of the Mississippi River valley and its role in U.S. History. In addition, for teachers who might be interested in preparing their students for the Document-Based Question (DBQ) on any Advanced Placement history exam, the lesson will use a very similar format and requirements as the DBQ.

### **Assignment:**

1. Teachers can begin the lesson by reminding students that events, people, and even places can elicit a variety of responses by people based on a number of factors: age, gender, geographic location, class, occupation, economic interest, or direct vs. indirect knowledge of the topic. Any number of different specifics can serve as a brief hook to illustrate this point. For example, the Lincoln Memorial was constructed (completed in 1922) to serve as a patriotic tribute to the sixteenth president, but since then, it has served as a rallying point for a diverse group of interests, such as civil rights activists, feminists, war protestors, racial boosters, all seeking to claim some place under the mantle of Lincoln.
2. Teachers can now distribute copies of Documents 1-10, the historical background, and the question prompt. Those who are teaching an Advanced Placement history class can remind students of the some of the requirements of the Document-Based Question (DBQ). However, the

lesson can easily be adapted for non-AP classes by simply skipping references to the exam and the AP scoring rubric.

3. Divide students into groups of 3-4 and instruct them to read through the documents, while filling out the attached chart for guidance. Groups may discuss the documents and their insights as they read; however, they should reserve the bulk of the discussion until they have completed all of the documents.

4. Teachers can solicit student feedback on:

- the main points of each document
- the purpose of each document, or why it was created
- the tone of the documents, particularly as they might contrast with one another
- the types of authors and the differing perspectives they bring
- ways in which documents may be grouped (e.g., types of authors; issues raised—economic role of the river; types of reactions—e.g., celebration of the river)
- themes that run through several or all of the documents (e.g., expansion, economic prosperity, regionalism—e.g., North v. South as one traverses the river)

5. For homework, teachers can ask students to write or type out a response to the prompt, integrating both the documents AND references to relevant historical context or developments. For U.S. History classes, an example of a relevant historical development covered in the time span of the documents would be the Civil War and the role the Mississippi River played strategically during that conflict. Students should take no more than one hour to complete their response.

6. For AP history classes, teachers may wish to use the rubric provided as a guide in assessing student work.

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## Lesson Six

### Document-Based Question

*From the documents below and using relevant historical knowledge, identify conditions along the Mississippi River and analyze the role of Mississippi River valley in the nineteenth century. To what extent did perspectives of the Mississippi River valley change over time?*

*Historical Background:* The Spanish were the first Europeans to explore the Mississippi River, in the sixteenth century. During the seventeenth century, the French explored the entire extent and laid claim to the river, exploiting it as a major source of commerce, as well as establishing the city of New Orleans at the mouth of the river (as it emptied into the Gulf of Mexico). With the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the United States gained control of New Orleans and the entire Mississippi River. The first steamboat was introduced on the river in 1811. The river played a major economic and strategic role in the American Civil War from 1861-1865. Throughout its history, the river has changed course numerous times and has been subject to regular flooding along its banks.

#### Document 1

Timothy Flint, minister, writer, and missionary, *Recollections of the Last Ten Years, Passed in Occasional Residences and Journeyings in the Valley of the Mississippi, from Pittsburg and the Missouri to the Gulf of Mexico, and from Florida to the Spanish Frontier*, book, 1826.

With regard to the unhealthiness of New Orleans, it is undoubtedly estimated according to the fact. The hearse is seen passing the streets at all hours. During the prevalence of the epidemic, the destroying angel carries in his hand a besom\*. Multitudes of the poor Catholic Irish, with their ruddy faces, without proper nursing, in crowded apartments, poor strangers of all nations, and the northern young men in preference to all the rest, are swept away with unpitying fury. During the sickly season of the year in which I arrived there, there had been numbered more than two thousand deaths, besides multitudes of cases where the patient died unnoticed and unrecorded. I have heard details of misery and suffering, thrilling tales of whole families of poor, unable to help themselves, or procure help, falling together, which have chilled the blood in the relation. The chance for an unacclimated young man from the North surviving the first summer, is by some considered only as one to two. Yet no provisions that humanity can devise, or benevolence carry into effect to alleviate these evils, are left unattempted. But in such sweeping calamities, there must necessarily be much misery which no human exertions can alleviate.

When the river is full, the common level of the city is but a few feet above that of the river. Of course, the graves that are dug four feet deep will have one or two feet of water. One of the circumstances dreadful to the imagination of a sick stranger, is the probability of being buried in the water. To prevent this, all that de cease, whose estates are sufficient, have their remains deposited in tombs or vaults above the ground.

\* a type of broom associated with witches

## Document 2

Catherine Stewart, writer, *New Homes in the West*, book, 1843.

In a late descent on the Mississippi, while crossing the "Upper Rapids," at Sycamore Chain, the wreck of a steamboat was seen lying on its side, having sunk the day before; abandoned by its passengers, who, with their baggage, were waiting on shore, to be taken off by the first opportunity that might present. It would seem impossible not to accompany melancholy associations with this wreck; leaning on the rock that had dashed away its hopes. Yesterday, a gay and buoyant thing; enviable, careering gracefully over the waves — to-day, deserted, silent, an object of scorn, or the heartless jest; or still more mortifying pity.

The traveler, delayed on his journey, day after day, oppressed with ennui, and "hope deferred," in consequence of these obstructions, is naturally led to inquire, why is this so? It would appear that the inhabitants of a country possessing all the elements of wealth; exporting annually, millions worth of its productions, would perceive the economy of removing these obstacles to the free and unimpeded navigation of the very channel for the healthful circulation of its trade and commerce.

### Document 3

John Banvard, traveler and painter, *Description of Banvard's Panorama of the Mississippi River, Painted on Three Miles of Canvas, Exhibiting a View of Country 1200 Miles in Length, Extending from the Mouth of the Mississippi River to the City of New Orleans, Being by Far the Largest Picture Ever Executed by Man, with the Story of Mike Fink, the Last of the Boatmen, a Tale of River Life*, book, 1847.

No wonder that to the young, who are reared in these remote regions, with that restless curiosity which is fostered by solitude and silence, and who witness scenes like this so frequently, the severe and unremitting labors of agriculture, performed directly in the view of such spectacles, should become tasteless and irksome. No wonder, that the young, along the banks of the great streams, should detest the labors of the field, and embrace every opportunity, either openly, or if minors, covertly to escape, and devote themselves to the pernicious employment of boating. In this view, we may account for the detestation of the inhabitants, along these great streams, of steam boats, which are continually diminishing the number of all other boats and boatmen, and which have already withdrawn probably ten thousand from that employment. We have seen what is the character of this employment, notwithstanding all its seductions. In no employment do the hands so soon wear out. It is comparatively but a few years, since these waters have been navigated in any way. Yet at every bend, and every high point of the rivers, where you go on shore for a moment, you may expect to see the narrow mound, and the rude monument, and the coarse memorial carved on an adjoining tree by brother boatmen, to mark the spot where an exhausted boatman yielded his breath and was buried.

#### Document 4

Richard Edwards, publisher, and Menra Hopewell, physician and author, *Edwards's Great West and Her Commercial Metropolis, Embracing a General View of the West, and a Complete History of St. Louis, from the Landing of Ligueste, in 1764, to the Present Time; with Portraits and Biographies of Some of the Old Settlers, and Many of the Most Prominent Business Men*, book, 1860.

The usual dress of these hunters appeared somewhat in keeping with their character, and the wild attire showed the mongrel blending of civilization and barbarism. Short leather breeches with moccasins covered their feet and legs; a leather flap dropped from their waist to their thighs; and a shirt, sometimes of thick flannel or cloth, and sometimes of deer skin, with a cap made from the fur of some animal, and often nothing on the head, made the complete costumes of *les couriers des bois*\*, as they were significantly called. Some of them had wives in the village, — whom they sometimes visited annually, and sometimes in several years — who were left to their own shifts and the charity of their neighbors; and what was most singular, these women, despite this indifferent treatment, and frequently with the knowledge that their truant husbands had not been true to the marital relations, and had solaced themselves while in the wilderness by cohabiting with some of the swarthy beauties of those regions — would on their return, meet them with the warmest demonstrations of affection, and would endeavor to surround them with every comfort in their power during their short sojourn among the whites; and would mourn their departure with heart-felt sorrow. The hunters and trappers were an important portion of the population of St. Louis, and their services were always in demand by the rival fur-companies, and by many enterprising traders who individually carried on the fur-trade with the savages, which, at that time was the chief avenue to pecuniary success.

\* “runners of the woods”

## Document 5

Author unknown, "The Mississippi River" in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 1866.

The great river and its countless tributaries were ours. Every bubbling fountain on the remote slopes of the Alleghanies; every spring and waterfall on the distant sides of the Rocky Mountains; all the intermediate rivulets, brooks, streamlets, streams, and rivers, were, by an undisputed title, ours. It is fortunate, not only for the United States, but for the race, that this magnificent domain passed into our hands. Only two generations have passed away, and see the results! Great and flourishing commonwealths line its banks from its source to its mouth. Civil and religious liberty; science, literature, religion, art, education and educational institutions, all that can adorn and bless a nation, have here found a home. Every 16th square mile has been set apart for common school purposes. The genius of our free institutions has been extended over it.

Does the reader doubt it? Appeal for a moment to history. Look at Mexico! Cortez, the Spanish robber, overthrew Montezuma one hundred years before the *Mayflower* landed at Plymouth, and the despotism, political and intellectual, of the Spanish rule was established. Why has Mexico in the race of nations thus lagged behind? Pizarro overturned the Inca power, and established permanent Spanish settlements in Peru, three-quarters of a century before Virginia was colonized.

Brazil, as the owner of the mouth [of the Amazon River], claiming the right to do so under the law of nations (how justly is not in our way to discuss), in 1852, made with one De Souza a contract, giving him the exclusive navigation of the river for thirty years, through all the Brazilian territories; and in consideration that he would run six steamboats, agreed to pay him a bonus of \$100,000 per year.

Think of it for a moment! *One man having the exclusive right to navigate the Amazon!* If this contract be carried out not a steam vessel from the outside world can enter the river. Nay more, Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Bolivia are cut off from all direct river connection with the Atlantic. They must stop at the boundaries of Brazil, deposit their merchandise, and allow De Souza's steamboats, and no other, to carry it. They must import in the same way. Contrast this state of things with the vast, free, and profitable commerce and navigation of the Mississippi, and then again inquire into the cause of this difference. The question admits of but one answer: the Amazon has been cursed with despotism, while the Mississippi has been vivified by free institutions, and its free and unobstructed navigation, under the ownership of *one nation*, has lined its banks with great and growing free commonwealths.

## Document 6

James A. Garfield, former soldier and Congressmen, remarks on the Mississippi River Commission Bill, in the U. S. House of Representatives, June 21, 1879.

I believe that one of the grandest of our material national interests — one that is national in the largest material sense of that word — is the Mississippi River and its navigable tributaries. It is the most gigantic single natural feature of our continent, far transcending the glory of the ancient Nile, or of any other river on the earth. The statesmanship of America must grapple the problem of this mighty stream. It is too vast for any State to handle; too much for any authority less than that of the nation itself to manage. And I believe the time will come when the liberal-minded statesmanship of this country will devise a wise and comprehensive system that will harness the powers of this great river to the material interests of America, so that not only all the people who live on its banks and the banks of its confluents, but all the citizens of the Republic, whether dwellers in the central valley or on the slope of either ocean, will recognize the importance of preserving and perfecting this great natural and material bond of national union between the North and the South — a bond to be so strengthened by commerce and intercourse that it can never be severed [Applause].

Document 7

Alexander D. Anderson, writer, *The Mississippi and Tributaries: A Commercial and Statistical Review*, book, data compiled from Report of Department of Agricultural, 1879.

Year 1879.	Corn.	Wheat.	Oats.	Tobacco.	Cotton.	Live Hogs.
	<i>Bushels.</i>	<i>Bushels.</i>	<i>Bushels.</i>	<i>Pounds.</i>	<i>Pounds.</i>	<i>Value.</i>
United States	1,547,901,790	448,756,630	363,761,320	391,278,350	2,367,540,900	\$145,781,515
Mississippi	24,926,400	417,600	662,360		382,230,000	4,418,010
Louisiana	12,592,500		14,000		267,044,000	1,521,570
Arkansas	22,432,800	1,384,000	1,603,120		323,812,500	3,403,620
Tennessee	50,897,500	11,852,800	4,986,000	44,160,000	204,457,200	5,865,300
Kentucky	64,736,000	7,681,800	4,687,200	126,880,000		5,907,120
Ohio	105,686,000	36,591,750	25,716,990	14,091,000		10,246,452
Indiana	134,920,500	43,709,960	14,028,310	6,636,000		10,274,200
Illinois	312,221,000	44,896,830	47,670,400	4,550,000		17,966,586
Wisconsin	39,912,600	20,565,720	34,663,200	5,474,900		2,899,026
Minnesota	15,715,000	31,886,520	17,136,000			1,025,376
Iowa	185,189,200	32,786,880	37,256,400			14,892,224
Missouri	141,939,400	26,801,600	15,429,120	15,050,100		9,014,176
Kansas	89,720,400	18,089,500	12,015,000			6,381,930
Nebraska	62,459,400	13,043,590	6,160,000			3,640,227
Total 14 Valley States	1,263,348,700	289,708,550	222,028,100	216,842,000	1,177,543,700	97,455,823
Per cent. of national product grown in the 14 Valley States.	81	64	60	55	49	66

## Document 8

Mark Twain, writer and satirist, *Life on the Mississippi*, book, 1883.

### Westward the Jug of Empire takes its way

How solemn and beautiful is the thought that the earliest pioneer of civilization, the van-leader of civilization, is never the steamboat, never the railroad, never the newspaper, never the Sabbath-school, never the missionary — but always whisky! Such is the case. Look history over; you will see. The missionary comes after the whisky — I mean he arrives after the whisky has arrived; next comes the poor immigrant, with axe and hoe and rifle; next, the trader; next, the miscellaneous rush; next, the gambler, the desperado, the highwayman, and all their kindred in sin of both sexes; and next, the smart chap who has bought up an old grant that covers all the land; this brings the lawyer tribe; the vigilance committee brings the undertaker. All these interests bring the newspaper; the newspaper starts up politics and a railroad; all hands turn to and build a church and a jail — and behold! civilization is established forever in the land. But whisky, you see, was the van-leader in this beneficent work. It always is. It was like a foreigner — and excusable in a foreigner — to be ignorant of this great truth, and wander off into astronomy to borrow a symbol. But if he had been conversant with the facts, he would have said:

This great van-leader arrived upon the ground which St. Paul now occupies, in June, 1837. Yes, at that date, Pierre Parrant, a Canadian, built the first cabin, uncorked his jug, and began to sell whisky to the Indians. The result is before us. All that I have said of the newness, briskness, swift progress, wealth, intelligence, fine and substantial architecture, and general slash and go and energy of St. Paul, will apply to his near neighbor, Minneapolis — with the addition that the latter is the bigger of the two cities.

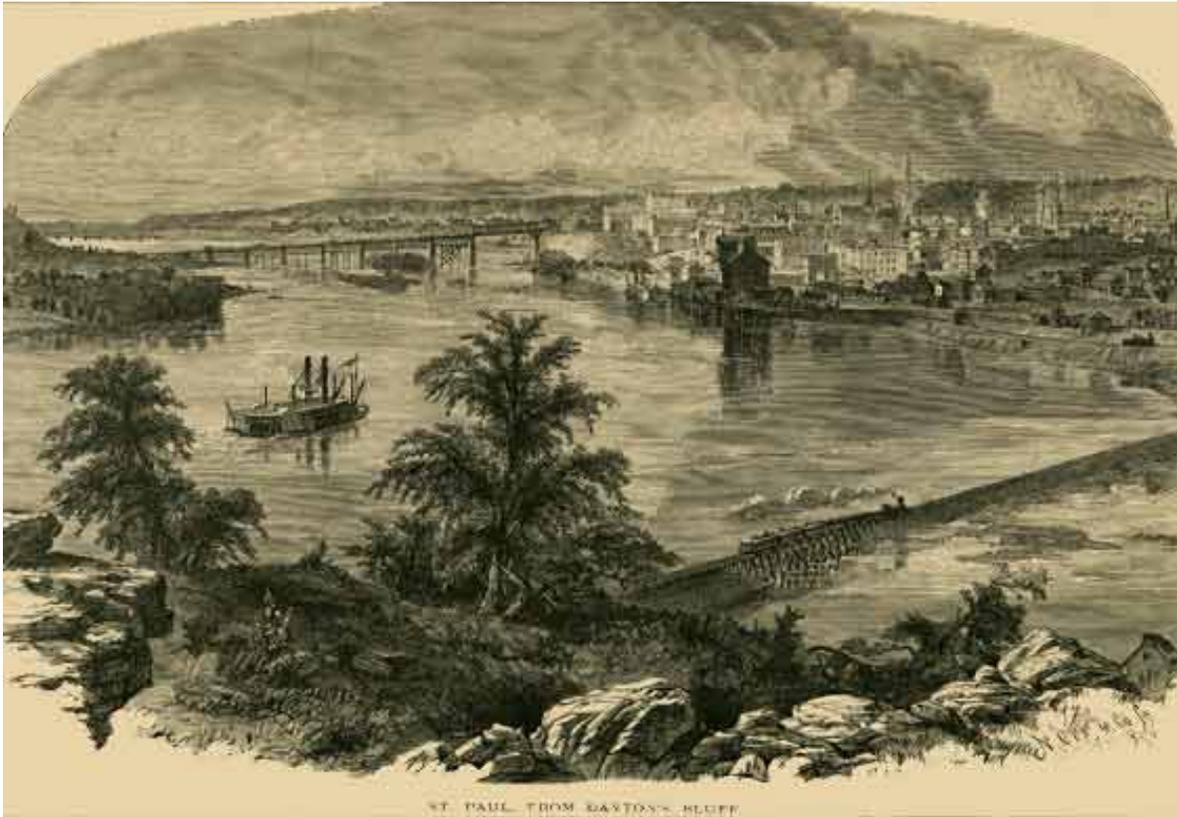
## Document 9

Louis Hughes, writer and businessman, *Thirty Years a Slave, From Bondage to Freedom, The Institution of Slavery as Seen on the Plantation and in the Home of the Planter, Autobiography of Louis Hughes*, book, 1897.

The city of Memphis, from its high bluff on the Mississippi, overlooks the surrounding country for a long distance. The muddy waters of the river, when at a low stage, lap the ever crumbling banks that yearly change, yielding to new deflections of the current. For hundreds of miles below there is a highly interesting and rarely broken series of forests, cane brakes and sand bars, covered with masses of willows and poplars which, in the spring, when the floods come down, are overflowed for many miles back. It was found necessary to run embankments practically parallel with the current, in order to confine the waters of the river in its channel. Memphis was and is the most important city of Tennessee, indeed, the most important between St. Louis and New Orleans, particularly from the commercial point of view. Cotton was the principal product of the territory tributary to it. The street running along the bluff was called Front Row, and was filled with stores and business houses. This street was the principal cotton market, and here the article which, in those days, was personified as the commercial "king," was bought and sold, and whence it was shipped, or stored, awaiting an advancing price. The completion of the Memphis and Charleston railroad was a great event in the history of the city. It was termed the marriage of the Mississippi and the Atlantic, and was celebrated with a great popular demonstration, people coming from the surrounding country for many miles. Water was brought from the Atlantic ocean and poured into the river; and water taken from the river and poured into the Atlantic at Charleston. It was anticipated that this railroad connection between the two cities would make of Charleston the great shipping port, and of Memphis the principal cotton market of the southwest. The expectation in neither of these cases has been fully realized. Boss, in common with planters and businessmen throughout that whole region, was greatly excited. I attended him and thus had the opportunity of witnessing this notable celebration.

Document 10

Unpublished image of St. Paul from Drayton's Bluff, Date, date unknown.



ST. PAUL FROM DRAYTON'S BLUFF

## Lesson Six

### Rubric for DBQ Response

*From the documents below and using relevant historical knowledge, identify conditions along the Mississippi River and analyze the role of Mississippi River valley in the nineteenth century. To what extent did perspectives of the Mississippi River valley change over time?*

#### **The 8-9 Essay**

- Offers a well-developed thesis that clearly identifies conditions and analyzes the role of the Mississippi River valley throughout the entire period.
- Effectively uses a substantial number of documents in the support of the response (8-10).
- Supports the thesis with substantial and relevant reference to outside information.
- Essay may contain minor errors of fact or interpretation.
- Is clearly written and organized.

#### **The 5-7 Essay**

- Offers a thesis that identifies conditions and provides some analysis of the role of the Mississippi River valley in the nineteenth century.
- Effectively uses some documents from the sources provided (5-7).
- Supports the thesis with some reference to relevant outside information.
- May contain errors of fact or interpretation that do not seriously detract from essay.
- Adequate organization and writing; language errors do not detract from comprehension.

#### **The 2-4 Essay**

- Offers a limited or undeveloped thesis; may simplify the evidence.
- Mostly paraphrases, quotes, or cites the documents without significant analysis.
- Does not offer outside information that is relevant and/or accurate.
- May contain major errors of fact and/or interpretation.
- Poor organization and writing skills demonstrated.

#### **The 0-1 Essay**

- No thesis offered or one that does not address the question.
- Shows little or no understanding of documents or ignores them completely.
- Either no or inaccurate outside information.
- May contain substantial errors of fact and/or interpretation that detract from the essay.
- Written weakly so that it interferes with understanding of the essay.

Lesson Six  
Data Collection Sheet

Document	Main Idea(s)	Purpose	Tone	Bias?	Themes
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					

1. Identify relevant historical developments or events that might assist in understanding the topic or placing the evidence in context.

2. In what ways might the documents be grouped?

3. Use the space below to develop a thesis in response to the prompt.

