

# **Primary Source Circles**

## **A Process for Group Document Study in History**

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

#### **Team Facilitator (Can play more than one role)**

- Make sure everyone understands the document.
- Make sure that everyone has whatever help they need to carry out their roles.
- Make sure that all members have an opportunity to contribute what she or he has learned and that all base their contribution on evidence from the document.
- Make sure that everyone listens and understands everyone else.
- Make sure that the group has access to resources for additional information that an individual student or the group as a whole might want.
- Make sure the group organizes and writes down what they have learned after the summary.

#### **The Author**

- Look for information about the author.
- Look for evidence in the document that would help you to understand what the author believes, values, or thinks.
- Look for evidence in the document that would help you to understand why the author wrote it (the author's intent.)
- Think of information about the author that you would need in order to better understand her or his ideas, values, intentions, etc.
- Think about how what you believe, value, and think might affect what you decide the author believes, values, and thinks (your bias).

#### **The Audience**

- Look for evidence in the document that would help you to understand the author's sense of audience at the time the document was written.
- Look for evidence that might help you understand why the author might have focused on a particular audience
- Think of additional information that you would like to have in order to help you to understand the intended audience and the document's relevance to them.

#### **The Connector**

- Make connections between the document and other documents that you know.
- Make connections between the document and other historical information.
- Make connections between the document and ideas or issues of today.
- Note any statements or ideas in the document that seem to support each other (internal consistency).
- Note any statements or ideas in the document that seem to contradict each other.

#### **The Time Researcher**

- Look for evidence in the document that helps you to understand the “historical context”- the social, economic, or political concerns, issues, or beliefs of the day.
- Look for statements in the document that either fit with or conflict with what you know about the historical context.
- Think about additional background about the time - for example, particular men or women, the social or political issues, the ideas, the geographical developments-that would help you to understand the document and its significance better.

### **The Wordsmith**

- Keep a list of unfamiliar words and your ideas of what they mean from reading the document or from looking them up in a reference book.
- Think about how the author constructs the argument (the “rhetoric”) and whether the evidence the author uses supports the argument.
- Try to describe the tone (is it respectful, angry, somber...?). What does the tone say about the author, the author’s intentions, or the author’s bias?
- Think about who or what you would expect to be included. Think about who or what is not included and what their exclusion might mean.

### **The Summarizer**

- Summarize what you think the group has learned about and from the document; reach agreement with the group.
- Summarize what questions, ideas, or issues the document raises; reach agreement with the group.
- Summarize what you would like to know more about; reach agreement with the group.