



# Document *Skill*

## Determining What Documents Mean

One of the critical skills necessary for success in the AP History course, and ultimately on the examination, is the ability to read and understand primary documents. Each chapter of this book will develop this skill. The early chapters will build basic understandings of how to analyze a primary source. Later in the book, you will be asked to combine documents with other primary sources to argue a thesis in a document-based essay.

When you see a primary document, you should analyze it in a consistent and systematic manner. You should always ask the four *Ws*.

1. *When* was it written? (time or setting)
2. *Who* wrote it? (author)
3. *What* is it saying? (Limit yourself to no more than three major ideas; otherwise, you will just be recopying the document.)
4. *Where* is the message directed? (audience)

These four questions should be the first things you address whenever you examine a document in your AP History class.

## Practicing the Skill

Look at the sample document below. After reading this letter, discuss the answers to the four *Ws* that are suggested.

### *Document*

—William Penn to the Delaware  
Indian Chiefs, 1681

My friends, there is one great God and power that has made the world and all things. This great God has written his law in our hearts by which we are taught to love, help, and to do good to one another. Now this great God has been pleased to make me concerned in your part of the world. The king of the country where I live has given unto me a great province, but I desire to enjoy it with your love and consent, that we may always live together as neighbors and friends. . . . I have great love and regard towards you and I desire to gain your love and friendship by a kind, and peaceable life . . . .

1. *When*: 1681, when Pennsylvania was founded.
2. *Who*: William Penn, proprietor of colony and a devout Quaker.
3. *What*:
  - a. God brought the Quakers to Pennsylvania.
  - b. The Quakers want to follow the teachings of God.
  - c. Penn wants cooperation and peace with the Native Americans.
4. *Where*: The audiences are the Delaware Indians and the Quaker settlers.

Below you will find two more primary documents. You should identify the four Ws for each and discuss them with your class.

Applying the Skill

We the inhabitants and residents of Windsor, Hartford and Wethersfield. . . . well knowing where a people are gathered together the word of God requires that to maintain the peace and union of such a people there should be an orderly and decent government established according to God

Document A

- 1. It is ordered, sentenced and decreed that there shall be yearly two general assemblies or courts.
- 4. It is ordered that no person be chosen governor above once in two years, and that the governor be always a member of some approved congregation.

—Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, January 14, 1639

When:

Who:

What:

Where:

Now, dear brother, I will obey your command and give you a short description of the part of the world in which I now live. South Carolina is a vast region near the sea. Most of the settled part is flat . . . South Carolina is filled with fine navigable rivers and great forests of fine timber. The soil in general is fertile. There are few European or American fruits or grains that cannot be grown here . . .

Document B

The people in general are hospitable and honest. The better sort of people are polite and gentle. The poorest sort are the laziest people in the world. Otherwise they would never be poor and wretched in a land as rich as this.

—Eliza Lucas, Journal and Letters, 1742

When:

Who:

What:

Where: