

Foundations of American Government

Historical Thinking Skills Assessed: Sourcing, Corroboration, Claim, Evidence

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Course: United States History

Level: Elementary

Task Question: How was the foundation of today's representative democracy established in early colonial America?

Learning Outcome:

Students will be able to source three documents and corroborate evidence to draw conclusions about the development of democratic ideas and practices during the early colonial period.

Standards Alignment:

[Common Core Standards for English Language Arts](#)

- | | |
|--------|---|
| RI.5.3 | Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text. |
| RI.5.9 | Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably. |
| W.5.2 | Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly. |

[National History Standards](#)

Era 2: Colonization and Settlement (1585-1763)

Standard 2: How political, religious, and social institutions merged in the English colonies.

[College, Career, and Civic Life \(C3\) Framework for Social Studies Standards](#)

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| D2.Civ.5.3-5 | Explain the origins, functions, and structure of different systems of government, including those created by the U.S. and state constitutions. |
| D2.His.2.3-5 | Compare life in specific historical time periods to life today. |
| D2.His.11.3-5 | Infer the intended audience and purpose of a historical source from information within the source itself. |
| D2.His.16.3-5 | Use evidence to develop a claim about the past. |

Materials:

- RS#01: Document A – *The Mayflower Compact*
- RS#02: Document B – *House of Burgesses*
- RS#03: Document C – *Penn's Charter of Libertie*
- RS#04: Early Colonial Government Document Analysis Chart
- RS#04A: Early Colonial Government Document Analysis Chart (Answer Key)
- RS#06: Thoughtful Application: Email to a Teacher
- RS#07: ARCH Elementary Historical Thinking Skills Rubric

Background for the Teacher:

The English who settled along the east coast of North America brought with them the political traditions that became the foundation of our representative democracy form of government. Based upon the concept of legal precedent rather than codified law, English common law included a belief in individual liberty that could be traced back to the Magna Carta in 1215. As early as the 1240s, English nobles had begun to expect that the Crown would consult with them on issues of taxation. Later in the century, participation in the British Parliament was broadened to include representatives from all counties and towns, as well as members of the clergy. By the early 1300s, Parliament, which met regularly, had come to be viewed as the people's voice versus that of the king. Over time, the limitations on the power of the British Crown had increased such that by the late 1680s the government was transformed into a constitutional monarchy.

The Jamestown colony was an early example of a representative government in the American colonies. For the first two years of its existence, King James I appointed the colony's president and council, and from 1609-1619, the Virginia Company, which had founded the colony, exercised the exclusive right to appoint the Governor, Council, and other officials. But in 1619, as dissatisfaction within the colony rose, the Virginia Company introduced a House of Burgesses. Twenty-two burgesses, or (male) citizens, two from each borough or plantation, were elected by free adult men to form a General Assembly. This General Assembly had the power to pass laws for the colony and petition the Virginia Company, although both the colonial governor and the Virginia Company had the power to veto any laws passed and dissolve the Assembly itself.

The settlers of Plymouth Plantation also contributed to the experimentation with self-government in the North American British colonies. The King had granted the settlers a patent, or exclusive land grant, to an area in present-day New York. When the colonists landed in present-day Massachusetts and decided to remain there, they had to wait for the king to authorize a new patent and instructions for this territory, which would take months. In the meantime, they needed to establish order within the colony. To do so, they created and signed the Mayflower Compact, in which the colonists mutually agreed to frame, enact, and obey just laws for the common good.

By the time William Penn founded Pennsylvania in 1681, democratic procedures and principles of self-rule were common in the British colonies and were formally incorporated into the colony's charter. In the Charter, the king required that the laws of Pennsylvania be consistent with those of England and be created and enacted with the advice and consent of the colony's freemen, either directly or through their representatives. In December 1682, the colony's first legislature passed a series of laws called the "Great Law" that further outlined the colony's representative government in addition to religious toleration. The Great Law established a bicameral legislature consisting of a Council and an Assembly, detailed voter eligibility and election procedures, and set guidelines for taxation. With such a strong early foundation, the power of Pennsylvania's legislature grew throughout the colonial period.

Although other colonies contributed to traditions of self-government in America, the models established in Virginia, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania were the most influential. The robust early commitment to self-rule in these colonies would help pave the way for their leadership in the movement for American independence.

Sources:

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Historic Jamestowne. "Virginia Company." Accessed 6/3/14. http://apva.org/rediscovery/page.php?page_id=22

The History Channel. "First Legislative Assembly in America." Accessed 6/1/14. <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/first-legislative-assembly-in-america>

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. "The Great Law." Accessed 6/3/14.

http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/documents_from_1681_-_1776/20421/the_great_law/998171

Plymouth Plantation. "Mayflower and the Mayflower Compact." Accessed 6/3/14. <http://www.plymouth.org/learn/just-kids/homework-help/mayflower-and-mayflower-compact>

University of California at Berkeley. "The Common Law and Civil Law Traditions." The Robbins Religious and Civil Law Collection, School of Law. Accessed 6/1/14.

<https://www.law.berkeley.edu/library/robbins/CommonLawCivilLawTraditions.html>

Procedure

Context Setting:

- Share the following scenario with students:
 - "Imagine that you and your class are taking a field trip on a spacecraft to a newly discovered planet near Earth. NASA scientists have explored the planet, but only slightly. They know that there are natives of the planet living near the spacecraft's landing site. You will be the first long-term visitors, however, and the reusable spacecraft will eventually bring many more fifth graders to join you."
 - Pose the following question: What is the first thing you would do?
 - Accept all reasonable answers, but guide the discussion toward the establishment of order and rules so that the new settlers will be safe and can explore.
 - Explain to students that colonization in North America was similar to this scenario. Settlers came to a region that was populated by Native Americans and had to establish their own order while at the same time protecting themselves and exploring their new land.
- Ask the following questions to the class in order to elicit background knowledge on the government in the colonies:
 - What type of government existed in England at the time of the founding of the American colonies?
A Monarchy
 - Who was in charge of the colonies?
Great Britain, but colonies would need to govern themselves on a day-to-day basis since communication across the Atlantic took months
 - Why did the American colonists revolt against Great Britain in 1776?
They wanted to rule themselves.
- Discuss the definition of democracy with the whole class.
 - Democracy – Government by the people; government that gives power to rule to the people it governs; people exercise the power to rule on their own or by electing others to represent them.
- Explain to students that the United States is a representative democracy. In a true democracy, every citizen votes on every law and policy. In a representative democracy, citizens elect a few people to represent their interests and vote on their behalf. The roots of representative government were established very early in the colonies.
- Tell students that their job will be to examine three documents to answer the Task Question: How was the foundation of today's representative democracy established in early colonial America?

Document Analysis:

- Distribute copies of *The Mayflower Compact* (RS#01), *House of Burgesses* (RS#02), and *Penn's Charter of Libertie* (RS#03), along with RS#04 Early Colonial Government Document Analysis Chart.
- Allow the students to work in small groups to examine each of the three documents, source them, and determine key ideas. If necessary, review how to source a document and seek key ideas by modeling the process with one of the three documents.

- After sufficient small group work time, engage students in a discussion of the documents using the guiding questions suggested below or others that will assess students' comprehension of the documents. (Explain to students that Penn's *Charter of Libertie* is an excerpt of the entire original document. Remind students that excerpts like this, while only part of the whole document, are still primary sources of information and that this portion of the document was selected because it deals with how the government will be established.)
- Teachers' note: Use RS#04A, Early Colonial Government Document Analysis Chart (Answer Key), as well as the possible responses listed below, to assess student comprehension of the sources.

Guiding Questions for RS#01, *Mayflower Compact*

- Why was this document written?
To maintain harmony among the settlers
- When was it written and signed?
1620
- Can we tell what the author believed?
Important for there to be harmony among colonists, there needed to be rules and laws to maintain order, and elected leaders were needed to help make these

Guiding Questions for RS#02, *House of Burgesses*

- When was this written and for what purpose?
1915 to inform readers about the history of the House of Burgesses before presenting historical documents generated by the House of Burgesses
- What kind of source is this?
Secondary
- What key ideas does this source provide?
House of Burgesses was first elected representative body in the colonies

Guiding Questions for RS#03, *Penn's Charter of Libertie*

- When did William Penn write this?
1684
- Why did he write it?
Establish the colony of Pennsylvania and set up its government
- What can the reader tell the author believed?
Representatives should be chosen for their wisdom and ability to conduct the business of the colony

Corroborating Evidence and Constructing Interpretations – *Close Analysis*:

- Discuss the democratic principles that can be inferred from the three documents, which were influential in establishing the foundation for today's American democracy. For example, the House of Burgesses was an elected group of men who represented the entire colony. The government in Pennsylvania would be constructed in the same manner.
- Remind students that they have been closely examining the sources for information. One aspect of sourcing is the concept of reliability. To determine if a source is reliable, ask students to consider the following questions.
 - Does the author of the source have any reason to "stretch the truth" (lie)?
 - Does the information in the source make sense in the context of everything you know about the time?

Thoughtful Application:

- Remind students that they have been asked to identify democratic principles that were evident in the establishment of the early colonies and how they contributed to the development of today's American democracy.
- Distribute RS#05, Thoughtful Application: E-mail to the Teacher. Remind the students that they should refer to any reliable sources they have studied.
- Review RS#06, ARCH Elementary Historical Thinking Rubric, with the class.
- If possible, have students complete this assignment on a computer so they can send an actual e-mail to the teacher. Allow approximately 20-30 minutes for students to complete the task.
- Assess the students using the rubric.

Resource Sheet #01

Document A – *Mayflower Compact*

In the name of God, Amen. We, whose names are underwritten, the Loyal Subjects of our dread Sovereign Lord King James, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, &c. Having undertaken for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour of our King and Country, a Voyage to plant the first Colony in the northern Parts of Virginia; Do by these Presents, solemnly and mutually, in the Presence of God and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil Body Politick, for our better Ordering and Preservation, and Furtherance of the Ends aforesaid: And by Virtue hereof do enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions, and Officers, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general Good of the Colony; unto which we promise all due Submission and Obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunto subscribed our names at Cape-Cod the eleventh of November, in the Reign of our Sovereign Lord King James, of England, France, and Ireland, the eighteenth, and of Scotland the fifty-fourth, Anno Domini; 1620.

Source: *Mayflower Compact*, 1620. The Avalon Project, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law Library. Accessed 5/29/14. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/mayflower.asp

In Other Words...

In the name of God, Amen. We, the first settlers in this colony, promise in the presence of God and each other to be joined together as a political group in order to organize and preserve the colony we came here to begin. We will discuss and make fair and equal laws and constitutions and elect leaders who will work for the good of the colony as a whole, and we pledge our obedience to those laws and leaders. We signed this at Cape Cod on November 11, 1620.

Resource Sheet #02

Document B – *House of Burgesses*

Preface

The General Assembly of 1619

This Assembly is of peculiar interest as being the first legislative body that ever met in America. . . This first Assembly was composed, as was the case in later times, both of members elected by the people and of members of the Council appointed by the authorities in England. . . At this first meeting of the General Assembly the Burgesses – two from each plantation – and the members of the Council, with the governor, sat together as one body, in which each member had one vote, and questions were decided by the vote of the majority, the governor, however, having the power to veto any measure whatever.

Source: McIlwaine, H.R., ed. *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1619-1658/59*. Richmond, Virginia: 1915. Accessed 5/29/14. <https://play.google.com/books/reader?printsec=frontcover&output=reader&id=mrA-AAAAYAAJ&pg=GBS.PR27>

In Other Words . . .

Introduction

The General Assembly of 1619

This Assembly is of special interest because it was the first legislative group that ever met in America. . . This first Assembly was made up, as it was in later time, both of members elected by the people and of members of the Council appointed by the government in England . . . At this first meeting of the Assembly , the representatives – two from each area – and the members of the Council, along with the governor, sat together as one organization. Each member had one vote, and questions were decided by a majority vote; however, the governor had the power to veto any measure at all.

Resource Sheet #03

Document C – PENN'S CHARTER OF LIBERTIE

. . . the Government of this Province shall according to the Powers of the Patent consist of the Governour and Freemen of the said Province in the fform of a Provincial Council and General Assembly by whom all Laws Shall be made Officers Chosen and publick affairs Transacted . . .

. . . THAT the freemen of the said Province shall on the Twentieth day of the Twelfth Month which shall be in this present year One Thousand Six hundred Eighty and two Meet and Assemble in some fit place of which timely notice shall be beforehand given by the Governour or his deputies and then and there shall chuse of themselvs Seventy-Two persons of most note for their Wisdom Virtue and Ability who shall meet on the Tenth day of the ffirst month next ensuing and always be called and act as the Provincial Councill of the said province . . .

. . . AND TO THE END that all Laws prepared by the Governour and Provincial Council aforesaid may yet have the more-full Concurrence of the Freemen of the Province it is declared granted and confirmed that at the time and place or places for the Choice of a Provincial Council as aforesaid the said FREEMEN shall yearly chuse to serve in a General Assembly as their representatives not exceeding Two hundred persons . . .

Source: Penn, William (1682). *Charter of Libertie*. The Avalon Project, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School. Accessed 5/29/14. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/pa03.asp

In Other Words...

The government of Pennsylvania will consist of a Governor and the free men of the colony in the form of a Provincial Council and General Assembly that will make laws, choose officials, and handle public business.

On December 20, 1682, the free men of the colony will gather and choose from the group 72 persons known for their wisdom, good conduct, and ability. This group will meet on January 20 and always be called and act as the Provincial Council of the colony. . .

. . .And so all laws made by the Governor and Provincial Council are approved by even more of the colony's citizens, each year the free men will choose up to 200 persons to serve in a General Assembly. . .

Resource Sheet #04

Early Colonial Government Document Analysis Chart

Name: _____

Date: _____

Directions: Complete the chart below by answering each question for each of the three sources.

Questions	<i>Mayflower Compact</i>	<i>House of Burgesses</i>	<i>Penn's Charter of Libertie</i>
Is this a primary or secondary source?			
<u>When</u> was it written? By <u>whom</u> ?			
For <u>whom</u> was this document written?			

Questions	<i>Mayflower Compact</i>	<i>House of Burgesses</i>	<i>Penn's Charter of Libertie</i>
For <u>what purpose</u> was it written?			
What are some <u>key ideas</u> given in this document?			

Resource Sheet #04A

Early Colonial Government Document Analysis Chart (Answer Key)

Question/Points Possible	<i>Mayflower Compact</i>	<i>House of Burgesses</i>	<i>Penn's Charter of Libertie</i>
Is this a primary or secondary source? <i>1 point for each source</i>	Primary	Secondary	Primary
<u>When</u> was it written and by whom? <i>2 points for each source</i>	Written by Pilgrims/Settlers on Mayflower November 11, 1620	Written by H.R. McIlwaine in 1915	Written by William Penn in 1682
For <u>whom</u> was this document likely written? <i>1 point for each source</i>	It was written for the settlers	It was written for people today	It was written for the citizens of the new colony, Pennsylvania
For <u>what purpose</u> was it written? <i>1 point for each source</i>	It was written to make an agreement and promise of how to live together in the new colony.	It was written to inform people about the first representative government in the colonies.	It was written to establish the government in the colony of Pennsylvania.

	<i>Mayflower Compact</i>	<i>House of Burgesses</i>	<i>Penn's Charter of Libertie</i>
What are some <u>key ideas</u> in this document? <i>3 points for each source</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They would be joined together as a group rather than living separate lives.• They would discuss and make laws to keep order and peace in the colony.• They will elect leaders to work for the common good.• They would obey the laws the leaders established.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It was the first representative legislative body in the colonies.• Two people were elected from each area.• They made decisions based on majority vote.• The governor could veto any vote.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The government of Pennsylvania will make laws, choose officers and handle the business of the public.• They will be chosen based on their wisdom, good conduct and ability.

Resource Sheet #06

ARCH Elementary Historical Thinking Skills Rubric

	Close-Reading Strategies	Strategies/Procedural Concepts	Procedural Concepts	
Criteria	Sourcing	Corroboration	Claim	Evidence
4	Identifies all authors and all original dates of primary and secondary sources. Evaluates the reliability of sources based on the author's perspective and when and why they were produced.	Analyzes multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences.	Formulates a plausible interpretation, argument, or claim based on an evaluation of the evidence found in a variety of primary and secondary sources.	Justifies claims using appropriate direct evidence from a variety of reliable sources.
3	Identifies most authors and most original dates of a variety of primary and secondary sources. Examines the reliability of sources based on the author's perspective and when and why they were produced.	Identifies similarities and differences by comparing information and perspectives in multiple sources.	Generates a reasonable interpretation, argument, or claim based on an evaluation of the evidence found in selected primary and secondary sources.	Justifies claims using some appropriate direct evidence from a variety of reliable sources.
2	Identifies some authors and some original dates of primary and secondary sources. Attempts to evaluate the reliability of sources.	Identifies similarities and differences in two or more sources.	States an interpretation, argument, or claim that may or may not be based on the evidence found in selected primary and secondary sources.	Justifies claims using generalizations or limited appropriate direct evidence.
1	Identifies few authors and few original dates of primary and secondary sources. Does not attempt to evaluate the reliability of sources.	Demonstrates little to no attempt to examine sources for corroborating or conflicting evidence.	Does not state an original claim, argument, or interpretation.	Does not justify or support claims using appropriate direct evidence.