**The Document Based Question (DBQ) as the Holy Grail**

**DBQ strengths**

1. DBQs build writing, reading and **thinking skills.**
2. DBQs are an extremely effective way to teach content.
3. DBQs are a powerful and meaningful assessment tool.
4. DBQs can drive curriculum in a highly structured way.
5. DBQs almost define rigor (in a Social Studies class, at least).
6. Perhaps most important, it is not necessary to have students actually write a DBQ in order to get the above benefits. Breaking the DBQ down and teaching its constituent parts is extremely effective.

**Basic tips for teaching DBQs:**

1. **Tell students not to quote from the documents.** One purpose of a DBQ is for students to demonstrate an understanding of the documents by paraphrasing them.
2. **De-emphasize “fluff”.** Another purpose of a DBQ is for students to practice organizing sophisticated arguments. If they worry too much about “hooking” the reader, or get concerned about sounding repetitive, they can get bogged down in minutiae.

*An example: I tell students that if they get stuck, just rewrite their topic sentence as their concluding sentence. The important thing is the structure.*

1. **Formulaic writing is OK.** This goes along with #2. The structure of the essay matters more than the quality of writing.
2. **Emphasize how challenging this work is.** Most students will feel overwhelmed by the task. Relieving stress by de-emphasizing “fluff” is helpful, but reminding them, frequently, that what they are being asked to do is quite difficult is very reassuring and confidence building.
3. **Break the process down.** And then break it down some more. Finally, break it down some more.