

Doing History: A Strategic Guide to Document-Based Questions **Research and Program Efficacy**

Document-based questions help connect students to history.

The use of primary sources, such as photographs, advertisements, political cartoons, graphs, letters, and newspaper accounts helps make history come alive for students and allows them to make connections to the past (Holt, 1998). Teaching students to analyze primary and secondary source documents involves critical thinking, evaluation of political ideas, reading information that is represented in a graphic or chart, and connecting prior knowledge to new information. *Doing History: A Strategic Guide to Document-Based Questions* teaches students to evaluate historical documents and write well-planned responses for the purposes of document-based question assessments or to gain insight into key events from the past.

Document-based questioning is an excellent method for improving student writing skills in the social studies classroom (Stovel, 2000).

The benefits of frequent writing have been emphasized by many authorities, including the National Reading Panel (2000) and the U.S. Department of Education Office of the Secretary (2001) in the summary of evidence-based instruction essential to the No Child Left Behind initiative. Many opportunities and extended time to practice, share, and discuss writing builds confidence and skill in student writers (e.g., Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983, 1994).

Because students are not equally familiar with all modes of writing, such as expository and persuasive writing, students need instruction in various forms of writing and how they are organized (Downing, 1995; Lenski & Johns, 2000). By teaching students to write essays in response to document-based questions, they are able to practice the required format and develop as writers.

Teaching students to read graphics is an important goal of literacy instruction.

Since many document-based questions ask students to examine information that is presented in the form of a graphic, it benefits students to learn to read graphics. Helping students learn to read graphics is an important goal in literacy instruction (Fry, 1981). Because graphics are abstract and often oversimplify or appear to distort information (Roe, Stoodt, & Burns, 1998),

deciphering them can be confusing. However, the need to read graphics accurately is likely to become increasingly important. *Doing History* scaffolds students' efforts to read and interpret information from graphics. This includes reading the title or caption, making inferences, drawing on prior knowledge, and examining the objects and surrounding images in a photograph or poster.

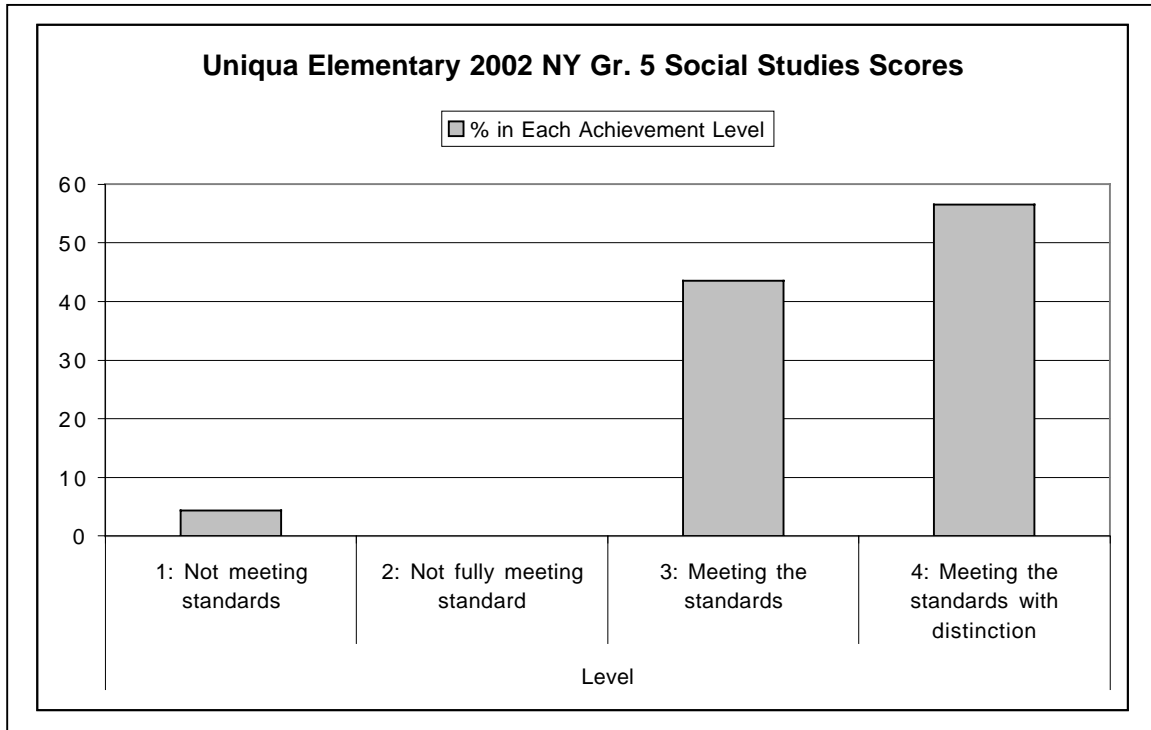
The use of document-based questions on social studies assessments is an innovative testing procedure.

Document-based questioning is an innovative social studies testing procedure that encourages and develops independent thinking (Alpren, 1976). However, document-based questions that are used on history assessments often ask students to respond under time constraints and with the pressure of a test-taking situation. By preparing students how to take document-based assessments, they are prepared to do their best on test day and learn important critical thinking tools. Research indicates that document-based questioning provides mechanism for assessing critical thinking skills and so should continue to be used (Stovel, 1987).

***Doing History* is an effective form of test preparation.**

Each book in the *Doing History* series contains two pre-tests, two post-tests, and numerous practice activities in answering document-based questions. It also contains lessons dedicated to specific types of historical documents, such as historical photographs, advertisements, letters, eyewitness accounts, political cartoons, and political documents (such as bills, constitutions, and treaties). Customers who have used *Doing History* to prepare for standardized tests, such as state history assessments and the AP History exam have seen improvement in their students' scores. Kelly Diamond who used *Doing History* with her fifth graders at Fairfield Elementary to prepare for the New York state history exam, reports, "The documents were clear, easy-to-read and authentic. The information was presented in a logical sequence for fifth graders to comprehend...my students scores improved with the use of supplemental resources like *Doing History*." Providing students with opportunities to practice critical thinking skills like document-based questioning in a test-taking format prepares them to be successful on high-stakes tests.

Results from Kelly Diamond's fifth-grade classroom after using *Doing History* as part of test preparation.



References

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