

---

**OBJECTIVES  
FOR THIS LESSON:**

1. To learn to evaluate the reliability, the bias, and the usefulness of primary source documents.
  2. To use your history background knowledge to understand and make inferences about primary source documents.
- 

# Evaluating Evidence & Primary Source Documents

---

*The primary source documents for this lesson are displayed on the next three pages. All of the exercises for this lesson are based on these primary sources and the background information provided here.*

---

**THE PRIMARY SOURCES  
AND THE EXERCISES**

**INTRODUCING THE LESSON**

The primary sources for this lesson have to do with ideas about the individual in the age of the European Renaissance and Reformation. These primary source documents are all displayed on the next three pages. The sources range from famous works of art by Renaissance painters to the writings of key figures in both the Renaissance and Reformation. All help illustrate ideas people in those centuries held about the individual and the place of the individual in society.

These sources could be used to write a complete essay on changing attitudes toward the individual in those centuries. However, in this lesson we do not give you a document-based question (DBQ) focusing on all nine of the sources. You will deal with DBQs and other essay questions in later lessons. The aim of this lesson is simply to help you think more carefully about primary sources. Working with such sources is a skill. The exercises for this lesson will help you learn to use primary sources and better understand what historians can and cannot learn from them.

**KEY CONCEPTS  
AND LEARNING STRATEGIES**

Basically, the exercises will focus your attention on the following broad concepts and strategies in analyzing primary sources:

1. You need to decide how **reliable** or trustworthy a primary source is — that is, how dependable the information or evidence in it is.
2. You need to decide how **biased** or one-sided a source is — and whether or not it is still useful, either in spite of or *because of* its bias.
3. You need to use all your **background history knowledge** in making sense of any primary source.
4. You need to make reasonable **inferences**, or logical conclusions, about sources.
5. You need to deal with and use **sources that often conflict** with one another.

## Lesson 1 — Evaluating Evidence & Primary Sources

# The Documents

## The Individual in the Renaissance and Reformation

### Document 1

A Medieval Byzantine depiction of Christ's announcement of betrayal at the Last Supper. John is resting his head in Christ's lap while Judas sits at the opposite side of the table.

© David Lees/CORBIS



### Document 3

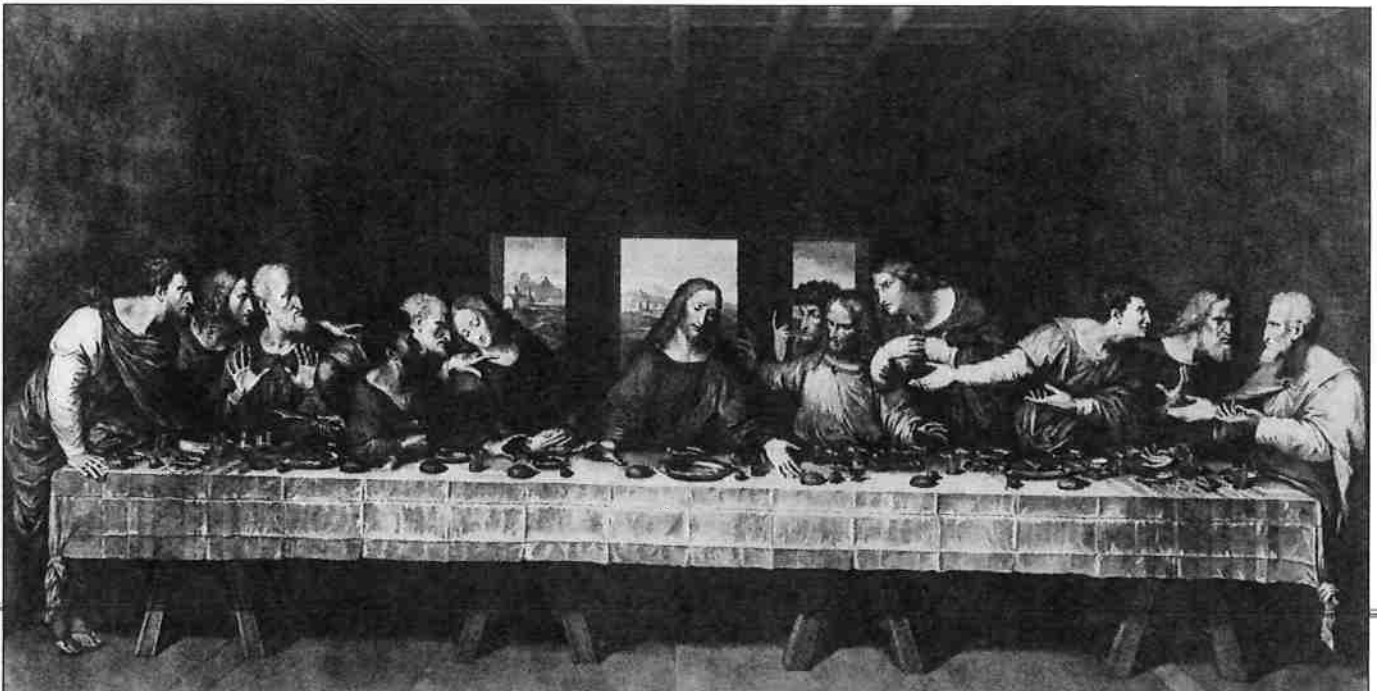
"Oh, the supreme generosity of God the Father. Oh, the highest and most amazing happiness of man. To him it is granted to be what he chooses to be, whatever he wills to be. The beasts, as soon as they are born, bring with them from their mother's womb (according to Lucilius) all they will ever possess. Spiritual beings, from the beginning or soon thereafter, become what they are to be for all eternity. But to man, at his creation, the Father gave the seeds of all possibilities and of every way of life. Whichever of these seeds a man cultivates, they will grow and bear in him their proper fruit. If they are vegetative, he will be like a plant. If they are of the senses, he will be brutish. If rational, he will develop into a heavenly being. If intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God. And if dissatisfied with all created things, he withdraws into the center of his own unity, his spirit, one with God, in the solitary darkness of the Father who is above all things, will surpass all creatures."

*From the "Oration on the Dignity of Man," by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, an Italian philosopher and scholar, 1463-1494.*

### Document 2

"The Last Supper." Undated engraving after the fresco by Leonardo da Vinci.

© Bettmann/CORBIS



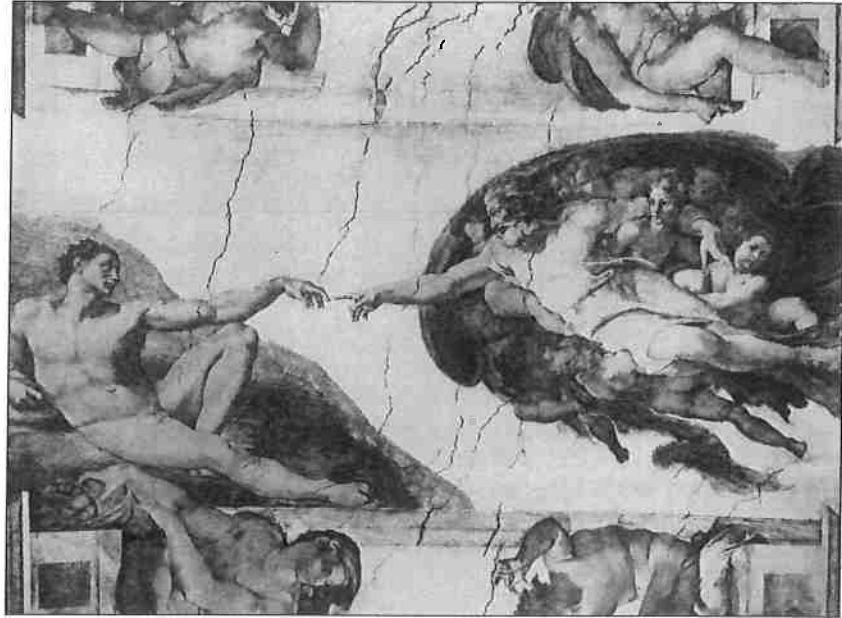
## Lesson 1 — Evaluating Evidence & Primary Sources

### The Documents

#### Document 4

“The Creation of Adam,” one key panel in Michelangelo’s vast painting of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome between 1508 and 1512

© Bettmann/CORBIS.



#### Document 5

“Upon this a question arises: whether it is better [for a prince] to be loved than feared or feared than loved? It may be answered that one should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, it is much safer to be feared than loved, when, of the two, either must be dispensed with. Because this is to be asserted in general of men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous, and as long as you succeed they are yours entirely; they will offer you their blood, property, life, and children, as is said above, when the need is far distant; but when it approaches they turn against you. And . . . men have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserves you by a dread of punishment which never fails.”

Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), in *The Prince*, ed. W. K. Marriott, (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1908). *The Prince* was originally published in 1513.

#### Document 6

“The Troubled Church In a Discontented Sea,” Undated woodcut of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

© Bettmann/CORBIS



## The Documents

### Document 7

"Unless I am convicted by scripture and plain reason — I do not accept the authority of popes and councils for they have contradicted each other — my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."

*Luther's reply at the Diet of Worms when urged to recant his teachings, April 18, 1521. It is said that Luther ended this statement with, "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me, Amen!" There is ground for doubting that Luther added these lines. Although the earliest printed versions contain these lines, official transcripts do not.*

### Document 8

After taking his stand at the Diet of Worms, Luther was declared a heretic. But a powerful German prince, the Elector of Saxony, hid him. This 17th century work of art depicts him at Wartburg castle with Philip Melancthon translating the Bible.

© Bettmann/CORBIS



### Document 9

"This then is the only road to happiness: first, know yourself; do not allow yourself to be led by the passions, but submit all things to the judgment of the reason. . . . Nothing is harder than for a man to conquer himself, but there is no greater reward or blessing."

—From the "Handbook of the Militant Christian"

"We must look for peace by purging the very sources of war, false ambitions and evil desires. As long as individuals serve their own personal interests, the common good will suffer. No one achieves what he desires if the methods employed be evil. The princes should use their wisdom for the promotion of what is good for the entire populace."

—From "The Complaint of Peace"

*Northern European philosopher, theologian and humanist, Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536).*