

Teacher Edition



THINKING NATION

Prompt

In what ways was the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol historically significant?

Write the prompt in your own words

Having students write the prompt in their own words is a great way to ensure all students understand what the prompt is asking them to focus on in their essay.

Contextualizing the January 2021 Insurrection

Teacher Guide and Overview

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Targeted Historical Thinking Skill: Contextualization

Thinking historically means interpreting historical events, developments, or processes in light of the surrounding historical context.

Overview of Document-Based Question (DBQ)

This DBQ was developed with the aim of having students contextualize the recent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. It will undoubtedly be studied by future generations of historians who try to understand this moment we are living through. Students are asked to begin this process of historical analysis. The key in this DBQ is for students to identify what about the event makes it historically significant. By looking at key articles, photos, and government documents, students can begin to piece together the different aspects that make this such a historical moment in U.S. history. The documents were curated in order to provide multiple perspectives from different Americans or groups of Americans of the insurrection. Document A's picture highlights the connection of the Confederacy and its values to the insurrection. Document B, written by a professor of Africana studies, argues that the insurrection reveals gross racial inequities when it comes to American policing. Document C is the Articles of Impeachment against President Trump. Document D acknowledges the overt Christian influences on the insurrection, requiring students to think through the religious implications of such an event. Each of these documents can be used alongside each other to allow students to identify multiple ways that the event is historically significant.

Contextualizing the January 2021 Insurrection

Suggested Timetable for this Document-Based Question
(Based on a 55 minute class)



Day 1: Introduce the prompt and historical thinking skill for this DBQ. The thinking skill for this DBQ is Contextualization. Complete “Hook” activity, Brainstorm, Connection to the Constitution, relevant to today, and key vocabulary sections.

Day 2: Complete the vocabulary section and read the “What is the Context?” essay with students. Have students begin to read and analyze the documents and make annotations as needed on each document.

Day 3: Have students finish reading and analyzing the documents. Begin thesis creation.

Day 4: Outline essay and produce a rough draft. Reference the rubric to ensure the task is adhered to.

Day 5: Write the essay. Students can use this DBQ, notes, essay organizers, etc.

Grading Rubric

| Category | Criteria | | Guide for Grading |
|--|--|--|--|
| Thesis (0-1 point) (CCSS RH6-8.2; WHST6-8.1a) | Clear thesis which makes a historically defensible claim. | | Thesis must make a claim that clearly answers the prompt and can be defended; it may not be a simple restatement of the prompt. |
| Purpose (0-2 points) (CCSS RH6-8.2; WHST6-8.1) | 2 points | Argument is maintained throughout paper by using logical and historical reasoning and analysis to connect the evidence to the argument. | The argument, supported by evidence and analysis, should be clear throughout the paper to earn 2 points. |
| | 1 point | Argument is mostly maintained throughout paper. | If the argument is mostly clear, but unclear at times, one point is awarded. |
| | 0 points | Argument is not maintained. | If no argument exists, or the argument is unclear, no points are awarded. |
| Textual Evidence (0-2 points) (CCSS RH6-8.1; WHST6-8.1) | 2 points | All but 1 of available documents are used appropriately as relevant evidence (can be direct quotes or paraphrase) to support paper's argument. | 2 points are awarded when all but 1 of available documents are cited in relation to the argument presented in the paper. The evidence used should be relevant to paper's purpose. |
| | 1 point | More than 1 of available documents are used appropriately as relevant evidence (can be direct quotes or paraphrase) to support paper's argument. | If more than one document is cited, relevant to the paper's purpose, one point is awarded. |
| | 0 pts. | 0-1 documents are used in the paper. | If only one document is cited, or no documents are used, no points will be awarded. |
| Outside Evidence (0-1 point) (CCSS RH6-8.1; WHST6-8.1b) | 1 point for use of relevant historical evidence to support the argument that goes beyond the documents. This outside evidence should be included in the body paragraphs and/or conclusion. | | To earn this point, this relevant evidence, used in the body paragraphs or conclusion, can come from the context essay, the connection to the Constitution, or relevant to today sections. It can also be relevant historical evidence from the student's prior knowledge. |
| Historical Thinking Skill: Contextualization (0-3 points) | 3 points | The historical context of the specific historical event, development, or process outlined in the DBQ task is accurately described. Historical context is used to explain the influence and/or historical significance of the specific historical event, development or process. | If the historical event, development, or process is situated in the broader historical context (time and space) in order to explain its significance and/or how that historical context influenced the event, development, or process, 3 points are awarded. |
| | 2 points | The historical context of the specific historical event, development, or process outlined in the DBQ task is accurately described, but is not used to explain anything deeper. | If the historical event, development, or process is situated in the broader historical context (time and space), but that explanation is not used for any deeper analysis, 2 points are awarded. |
| | 1 point | The historical context of the specific historical event, development, or process outlined in the DBQ task is merely referenced. | If the historical context is mentioned but not explained, 1 point is awarded. |
| | 0 points | Any use of historical context is not visible. | If there is no evidence of acknowledging the historical context, 0 points are awarded. |
| Writing Mechanics (0-1 points) (CCSS WHST6-8.1b; WHST6-8.4) | 1 point | Writing style, spelling, and grammar errors are few if any and don't interfere with the paper's clarity. | 1 point is awarded if writing conventions are adhered to. It is clear that student understands conventions such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation. |
| | 0.5 points | Writing style, spelling, and grammar errors exist, and at times can interfere with the paper's clarity. | 0.5 points are awarded if writing conventions are mostly adhered to but can at times interfere with the paper's clarity. In some instances, it is unclear if the student is aware of certain spelling, grammar, or punctuation conventions. |
| | 0 points | Writing style, spelling, and grammar significantly inhibits the paper's clarity. | 0 points are awarded if writing style prevents the paper from being clear to the reader. |
| TOTAL: | _____/10 | | |

Essay Outline (Sample)

Thesis paragraph:

January 6th was supposed to be a rather mundane, even if significant day. Following their Constitutional duties, outlined by the 12th Amendment, there was to be a joint session of Congress where each state's electoral votes were counted, completing the last step in the election of Joe Biden as the United States' 46th President. However, in an effort to prevent this count from happening, thousands of people broke into the Capitol, vandalized the seat of the national government and violently confronted Capitol police officers. It was an attempted coup d'état. The insurrection on that day is historically significant because it showed the dire consequences of allowing false claims to spread, it revealed racism within American systems, and it had ties to the sitting President.

| Topic 1: | Documents | Outside Information |
|--|--------------------|--|
| The protests and insurrection were based on false claims, yet participants fully believed in their actions | Doc C Doc D | Christian nationalism contends that America has been and should always be distinctively 'Christian' from top to bottom and it aims to keep it this way. After the Civil War, the South justified their war and tried to explain their loss through the "Lost Cause" myth. As many as 75% of Republicans believed that there was voter fraud in the time leading up to January 6th. |
| Topic 2: | Documents | Outside Information |
| The insurrection revealed racism | Doc A Doc B | A lynch mob is a group of people who want to attack someone who they think has committed a serious crime. Students can use the Alexander Stephens quote here. |
| Topic 3: | Documents | Outside Information |
| The insurrection could be tied to the U.S. President | Doc C | Impeachment is granted to Congress in Article I of the Constitution to address serious misconduct by a public official, which can lead to removal from office. From November-January, despite no evidence of widespread fraud materializing and federal courts dismissing over 80 lawsuits on Trump's behalf—citing that they lacked evidence—Trump continued to bolster the narrative that the election was stolen from him because of fraud. |

Conclusion (main ideas rephrased and overall conclusion of essay):

What was meant to be a normal day in the democratic process turned violent and dark. Thousands of Americans thought that it was the right thing to break into the Capitol and try to prevent the peaceful transfer of power. Despite there being no actual evidence of the fraud that they claimed robbed Donald Trump of a second term as president, the religious undertones of the insurrection revealed how determined his supporters were to maintain his power. During the insurrection, the entitlement of those who broke into the Capitol and the lack of police action revealed deeper systemic issues of racism in the United States. Lastly, with President Trump being the first ever president to be impeached twice, the insurrection is historically significant because there were clear ties between the violence on Capitol Hill and his own rhetoric, implicating him in the affront on American democracy. January 6 may have rattled America but by 3 a.m. on January 7th, the electoral votes were counted and the democratic process withstood a great threat.



Contextualizing the January 2021 Insurrection



© [Tyler Merbler](#),
CC BY-SA 2.0

Hook

Rumors can ruin friendships. Imagine that one of your former friends begins to spread a false rumor about you to the whole school. Many of your friends begin to share the same rumor, despite there being no evidence that it is true. A few even come to ask you if it is true. Not only do you tell them it isn't, but you show them how it would be so impossible for the rumor to be true given the circumstances. While they do believe you, they stay silent. They watch the rumor spread across the school and don't challenge it, because they value the relationship they built with the original rumor creator. They don't want to jeopardize that, and they are not willing to stand up for the truth that could protect your name.

You feel abandoned, but with everyone believing the rumor and not the truth, no matter how many times you share it, you feel helpless. The person who spread the rumor grows in popularity at your expense. Saddened, you aren't sure what to do and no one is willing to stand alongside you.

1. The above scenario is something no one would want to experience. What ideas do you have about getting the truth out there in order to squash the rumor?

Have students share out their answers. Perhaps create a class list.

2. Why is important to stand against rumors even if you may not directly benefit from making such a stance?

Have students share out their answers. Students can discuss the different implications of standing against rumors or letting them spread.



Brainstorm: What do I already know?

Use this space to write down anything you already know about the subject of this DBQ: **The January 6, 2021 insurrection at the United States Capitol.** What was happening during this time? What people are significant and relevant?

How does this connect to the U.S. Constitution?

On January 6, 2021, Congress was to complete its constitutional duty of counting each state's electoral votes. According to the 12th Amendment, "The President of the Senate [the Vice President] shall, in the presence of the Senate and House of Representatives, open all the certificates and the votes shall then be counted." While this process is usually simply procedural, it does leave the option for members of both houses of Congress to object to these counts. If a member of both the House and the Senate object to counting a particular state's electoral votes, each house of Congress must return to their chambers and debate that objection. In solidarity with President Trump's baseless claims of widespread voter fraud, some Republicans announced that they would object to states like Wisconsin, Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Georgia. These objections would only delay the finally counting of the vote and not actually change the outcome. Still, they claimed that they were ensuring that the voices of their constituents, who believed that the election was rigged, were heard. Early on in the state count, objections were made to Arizona's votes. During this debate, the Capitol went on lockdown after rioters breached the building.

After hours of lockdown, the joint session of Congress was able to continue. In these late night hours, seven Republican senators and 138 Republicans in the House maintained their objection to Pennsylvania's votes. While members of the House objected to the votes from Georgia, Michigan, and Nevada, no senators did, and thus no debates occurred. By 3 a.m. on January 7th, the count was complete. The Constitutional process withstood the insurrection, and the last step in the election process was finished.

1. Which Constitutional Amendment outlines the process for counting each state's electoral votes in Congress?
The 12th Amendment.



What connection can be made to the past?

When southern states seceded from the United States in late 1860 and early 1861, their motives were clear. The Vice President of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens, demonstrated this in his famous “Cornerstone Speech.” “Our new government is founded” he declared, “upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition.” Simply, the Confederacy fought the United States in order to preserve slavery.

After the Civil War ended and the South lost, however, many people tried to hide these clear motives. White Americans, North and South, wanted to reconcile with one another; therefore, they tried to hide their motivation to preserve inhuman bondage behind the lie of “state’s rights.” Unfortunately, this “Lost Cause” ideology, born of fraudulent history, persisted in American culture.

Similar to that Lost Cause ideology, the claims of voter fraud that led to the January 6 insurrection were built on distortions of reality. In the 19th century, white southerners claimed a myth: that though their cause was just, northern industrial might was too strong. Now in 2020-21, a new myth serves as the foundation of this new lost cause, that Trump’s defeat was not because his ideas were wrong and democracy voted him out, but because there was widespread voter fraud, despite no evidence sustaining that claim.

1. Describe the “Lost Cause” ideology that southerners falsely claimed after the Civil War (1861-65). **It was a myth to explain why the South lost the Civil War. It claimed that the South did not fight to preserve slavery, but state’s rights, and that they lost because of “northern industrial might,” not because their cause was unjust.**

What vocabulary should I know?

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. U.S. Capitol E | A. situating a person, place, or event in its larger setting in order to gain a better understanding. |
| 2. insurrection F | B. a proceeding granted to Congress in Article I of the Constitution to address serious misconduct by a public official, which can lead to removal from office. |
| 3. Christian nationalism D | C. a sudden, violent, and illegal seizure of power from a government. |
| 4. impeachment B | D. a type of nationalism that contends that America has been and should always be distinctively ‘Christian’ from top to bottom and it aims to keep it this way. |
| 5. coup d’etat C | E. the meeting place of the United States Congress and the seat of the legislative branch of the U.S. Government. |
| 6. contextualization A | F. a violent uprising against an authority or government. |



What is the context?

While history is so much more than single events, certain events often allow historians to anchor historical eras to particular actions. The insurrection at the U.S. Capitol was such an event. Future historians will analyze this event in order to better understand the United States in this particular time period. This DBQ asks you to begin this process.

On November 3, 2020, millions of voters cast their ballots for the nation's next president. Due to the coronavirus pandemic that engulfed the globe throughout 2020, millions more had already cast their ballots in the weeks before, either through early voting stations or by mail. After days of tallying votes, on November 7, Joe Biden was declared the winner and would become the 46th president **(A)**.

When the current president, Donald Trump, began to see his lead slip in some swing states, he argued that widespread voter fraud was the only explanation. Over the next two-and-a-half months, despite no evidence of widespread fraud materializing and federal courts dismissing over 80 lawsuits on Trump's behalf—citing that they lacked evidence—Trump continued to bolster this narrative that the election was stolen from him because of fraud **(B)**.

News outlets that favored Trump echoed his baseless claims and many Republican members of Congress stood by him publicly, even if they privately knew his accusations had no merit. Many people took to social media, virally spreading these false claims. So many, in fact, that polls suggest that as many as 75% of Republicans believed voter fraud to be rampant **(C)**.

On January 6th, the final step in the electoral process was to take place in Washington, D.C. The joint Houses of Congress were to count each state's electoral votes, cementing Biden's victory two weeks before Inauguration Day **(D)**. During this process, protesters breached Capitol grounds, charged Capitol Police, broke down barriers, and eventually broke windows to open doors and enter the Capitol.

After hours of occupying the Capitol, destroying and stealing property and violently confronting Capitol Police, these protesters-turned-insurrectionists were removed and Congress completed their constitutional duty of counting the votes. But great damage was done. After months of President Trump spreading false claims about election integrity in order to maintain his executive power, his supporters took his words literally. The culmination was a violent coup attempt that shook the center of U.S. democracy. Even though it failed, the divisions which inspired it live on **(E)**.

For this DBQ, use the documents provided and your understanding of this historical moment to answer the question: **In what ways was the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol historically significant?**

A. Why did the counting of votes take multiple days?

Due to coronavirus precautions, many more votes than usual were by mail.

B. How did federal courts respond to Trump's lawsuits claiming voter fraud?

The courts dismissed over 80 lawsuits due to lack of evidence.

C. Did Trump's claims of voter fraud take hold? Explain.

Yes. Republican officials publicly stood by his claims, certain news outlets bolstered them, and many people spread these claims on social media.

D. What process was set to take place at the Capitol on January 6th?

The counting of all of the electoral votes.

E. In one sentence, what happened at the Capitol on January 6th?

Protesters turned into rioters and fought Capitol Police, broke down barriers, and occupied the Capitol in order to disrupt the last part of the electoral process in a failed effort to prevent Joe Biden from becoming president.



Prompt

In what ways was the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol historically significant?

Targeted Historical Thinking Skill:

CONTEXTUALIZATION

Thinking historically means interpreting historical events, developments, or processes in light of the surrounding historical context.

Documents

Document A: Photo of Kevin Seefried carrying a Confederate Battle Flag through the U.S. Capitol, January 6, 2021.

Document B: Kellie Carter Jackson, "The Inaction of Capitol Police Was by Design," *The Atlantic*, January 8, 2021; Photo of gallows set up by protesters outside of the U.S. Capitol, January 6, 2021.

Document C: "Impeaching Donald John Trump, President of the United States, for high crimes and misdemeanors," House Resolution 24, January 11, 2021 (passed on January 13).

Document D: Emma Green, "A Christian Insurrection," *The Atlantic*, January 8, 2021; Photos with Christian symbols outside of the U.S. Capitol, January 6, 2021.

Document A

Source: Photo of Kevin Seefried carrying a Confederate Battle Flag through the U.S. Capitol, January 6, 2021. Photo cropped from FBI [“Seeking Information” Poster](#).

Note: In a deep sense of historical irony, behind Seefried, who holds the Confederate flag, is a portrait of 19th century Senator, Charles Sumner, on the right and 7th Vice President, John C. Calhoun, on the left. Sumner was one of the most vocal abolitionists in Congress before and during the Civil War. He stood against everything the Confederacy stood for. Conversely, Calhoun, who died a decade before the Civil War began, was a staunch supporter of slavery, even calling it a “positive good” on the Senate floor in 1837.



1. Even during the Civil War, this flag never made it into the Capitol. With this history in mind, why is this picture significant?

It demonstrates the innate un-American motives of those who broke into the Capitol on January 6th. The Confederate Flag, which represents the people who wanted to overthrow the U.S. Government in the 19th century, was flown within the very seat of the American government. It demonstrates a disregard for the Constitution and its principles. It solidifies the argument that this was not a mere protest, or even a riot, but an insurrection and attempted coup.

2. If you were asked to describe the January 6th insurrection using just this picture, how would you describe it?

Student answers will vary, but students can write about the significance of the Confederate flag, the fact that it never entered the Capitol during the Civil War, or the pictures of Calhoun or Sumner in their answers.

Document B

Source: Kellie Carter Jackson, “The Inaction of Capitol Police Was by Design,” *The Atlantic*, January 8, 2021; Photo of gallows set up by protesters outside of the U.S. Capitol, January 6, 2021.

Note: Kellie Carter Jackson is an assistant professor of Africana studies at Wellesley College.

What Americans witnessed on their TV screens on Wednesday was not just an insurrection against American democracy—it was also an expression of white supremacy. As mobs of white Trump supporters stormed the Capitol building to ransack offices, terrorize lawmakers, and interrupt the certification of the presidential election, they were met with a notably weak show of force by the Capitol Police, who were responsible for quelling the insurrection...

Why did law enforcement assume that they’d encounter violence from protesters marching for Black lives in June, but think that a largely white crowd of pro-Trump extremists and conspiracy theorists would remain peaceful? ...police brutality against Black Americans and police inaction toward white Americans is not some surprising anomaly; it is the status quo...

The mob attacks on the Capitol are not so much “unprecedented” as they are consistent with America’s history of white backlash to racial equality and white entitlement to political, economic, and social control... Wednesday’s violence... was not an uprising against a tyrannical government; it was an uprising against a multicultural government. And the police reaction—calm, measured, tolerant—to that uprising suggests that when it comes to engaging in violence against the state, white perpetrators have nothing to lose.

© Tyler Merbler, CC BY-SA 2.0



1. According to Kellie Carter Jackson, what did the response by Capitol Police reveal about policing in the United States?

Carter Jackson makes the case that policing looks different for different races as evidenced by the police inaction against the insurrectionists who broke into and vandalized the Capitol. She writes that “police brutality against Black Americans and police inaction toward white Americans... is the status quo.”

2. Based on this article, why is the January 6th insurrection historically significant?

Carter Jackson argues that it is historically significant because it reveals the racial inequities, particularly as they relate to policing, in the U.S. She calls the insurrection “the perpetual retaliation to racial progress” and “an uprising against a multicultural government.” To her, it is clear that the insurrection was motivated, in part, by racism.



Document C

Source: “Impeaching Donald John Trump, President of the United States, for high crimes and misdemeanors,” House Resolution 24, January 11, 2021 (passed on January 13).

Resolved, That Donald John Trump, President of the United States, is impeached for high crimes and misdemeanors...

ARTICLE I: INCITEMENT OF INSURRECTION

[S]ection 3 of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution prohibits any person who has “engaged in insurrection or rebellion against” the United States from “hold[ing] any office ... under the United States”... Donald John Trump engaged in high Crimes and Misdemeanors by inciting violence against the Government of the United States, in that:

In the months preceding the Joint Session [of Congress to count the votes for the Electoral College on January 6, 2021], President Trump repeatedly issued false statements asserting that the Presidential election results were the product of widespread fraud and should not be accepted by the American people or certified by State or Federal officials. Shortly before the Joint Session commenced, President Trump, addressed a crowd at the Ellipse in Washington, DC. There, he... willfully made statements... such as: “if you don’t fight like hell you’re not going to have a country anymore”. Thus incited by President Trump, members of the crowd he had addressed... unlawfully breached and vandalized the Capitol, injured and killed law enforcement personnel, menaced Members of Congress, the Vice President, and Congressional personnel, and engaged in other violent, deadly, destructive, and seditious acts.

...President Trump gravely endangered the security of the [U.S] and its institutions of Government. He threatened the integrity of the democratic system, interfered with the peaceful transition of power, and imperiled a coequal branch of Government...

Donald John Trump, by such conduct, has demonstrated that he will remain a threat to national security, democracy, and the Constitution if allowed to remain in office... [he] thus warrants impeachment and trial, removal from office, and disqualification to hold and enjoy any office of honor, trust, or profit under the United States.

1. What evidence is provided for the second impeachment of President Trump?

The Articles of Impeachment contend that President Trump should be impeached for having “repeatedly issued false statements... of widespread fraud.” He made statements that incited the crowd to “unlawfully” breach and “vandalize” the Capitol, resulting in the death of police officers. He “endangered the security” of the country with these actions which “warrants impeachment.”

2. Citing evidence from these articles of impeachment, why is the January 6th insurrection historically significant?

Since the insurrection was the primary factor in the articles of impeachment, it is clearly historically significant for leading to the first time in U.S. history that a president was impeached twice.



Document D

Source: Emma Green, “A Christian Insurrection,” *The Atlantic*, January 8, 2021; Photos with Christian symbols outside of the U.S. Capitol, January 6, 2021.

Note: All Pictures are cropped © [Tyler Merbler](#), CC BY-SA 2.0

The name of God was everywhere during Wednesday’s insurrection against the American government. The mob carried signs and flag declaring JESUS SAVES! and GOD, GUNS & GUTS MADE AMERICA, LET’S KEEP ALL THREE. Some were participants in the Jericho March, a gathering of Christians to “pray, march, fast, and rally for election integrity.”

...

The Jericho March, [which took place on December 12, 2020] is evidence that Donald Trump has bent elements of American Christianity to his will, and that many Christians have obligingly remade their faith in his image. Defiant masses literally broke down the walls of government, some believing they were marching under Jesus’s banner to implement God’s will to keep Trump in the White House.



1. Emma Green’s article calls what happened on January 6, “A Christian Insurrection.” What elements of Christianity were present that day?

People held a painting of Jesus with a MAGA hat, implying that he would support Trump, people were praying (presumably that the electoral process would be thwarted), people were preaching that “Jesus Saves,” and as Green writes, “they were marching under Jesus’s banner to implement God’s will to keep Trump in the White House.”

2. Consider the vocabulary word, “Christian nationalism” when looking at these photos. With this in mind, why is the January 6th insurrection historically significant?

Since Christian Nationalism is the belief that the country is Christian and should be kept that way, the insurrection is significant because it was based on this belief. Those who adhere to it felt it worth literally fighting against the government and the Constitutional process in order to preserve their version of America.

Developed by Zachary Cote
Thinking Nation ©

