Primary Source Circles
A Process for Group Document Study in History
Roles and Responsibilities

Team Facilitator (Can play more than one role)
- Make sure everyone understands the document.
- Make sure that everyone has whatever help they need to carry out their roles.
- Make sure that all members have an opportunity to contribute what she or he has learned and that all base their contribution on evidence from the document.
- Make sure that everyone listens and understands everyone else.
- Make sure that the group has access to resources for additional information that an individual student or the group as a whole might want.
- Make sure the group organizes and writes down what they have learned after the summary.

The Author
- Look for information about the author.
- Look for evidence in the document that would help you to understand what the author believes, values, or thinks.
- Look for evidence in the document that would help you to understand why the author wrote it (the author’s intent.)
- Think of information about the author that you would need in order to better understand her or his ideas, values, intentions, etc.
- Think about how what you believe, value, and think might affect what you decide the author believes, values, and thinks (your bias).

The Audience
- Look for evidence in the document that would help you to understand the author’s sense of audience at the time the document was written.
- Look for evidence that might help you understand why the author might have focused on a particular audience
- Think of additional information that you would like to have in order to help you to understand the intended audience and the document’s relevance to them.

The Connector
- Make connections between the document and other documents that you know.
- Make connections between the document and other historical information.
- Make connections between the document and ideas or issues of today.
- Note any statements or ideas in the document that seem to support each other (internal consistency).
- Note any statements or ideas in the document that seem to contradict each other.

The Time Researcher
Look for evidence in the document that helps you to understand the “historical context” - the social, economic, or political concerns, issues, or beliefs of the day.

Look for statements in the document that either fit with or conflict with what you know about the historical context.

Think about additional background about the time - for example, particular men or women, the social or political issues, the ideas, the geographical developments - that would help you to understand the document and its significance better.

The Wordsmith

- Keep a list of unfamiliar words and your ideas of what they mean from reading the document or from looking them up in a reference book.
- Think about how the author constructs the argument (the “rhetoric”) and whether the evidence the author uses supports the argument.
- Try to describe the tone (is it respectful, angry, somber…?). What does the tone say about the author, the author’s intentions, or the author’s bias?
- Think about who or what you would expect to be included. Think about who or what is not included and what their exclusion might mean.

The Summarizer

- Summarize what you think the group has learned about and from the document; reach agreement with the group.
- Summarize what questions, ideas, or issues the document raises; reach agreement with the group.
- Summarize what you would like to know more about; reach agreement with the group.