



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2025

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced
Level in History (WHI03/1A)

Paper 3: Thematic Study with Source
Evaluation

Option 1A: The USA, Independence to Civil
War, 1763–1865

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There was a relatively small entry for this series for WHIO3 1A. Most candidates were able to finish the paper and the knowledge applied was generally focused on the demands of the questions. WHIO3 1A is divided into two sections. Section A comprises a compulsory source based question and assesses source analysis and evaluation skills (AO2). Section B consists of two essay questions of which the student is expected to answer one of them. The essay questions will assess the knowledge and understanding of the period in breadth (AO1). Questions, in section B, will be set so that they connect two or more of the key topics in the specification and will target a range of concepts which might include cause, consequence, significance, similarity/difference and change/continuity.

The time available for the paper enabled candidates to plan their work and many took advantage of this as evidenced by the plans included. This helped to keep the candidates focused more clearly on the task in hand. Most plans were of a reasonable length and detail so as to outline the overall argument but occasionally they became so lengthy that they constricted the time available to actually write the response. Whilst, it would be advisable for candidates to spend a short while getting their thoughts in order before writing their answers this should not be too long. This would be relevant to both sections of the paper.

In general, it was section A that seemed to present the greater challenge to the candidates as they had to consider two primary sources and their use to the historian in investigating an historical issue. There was some evidence that greater familiarity with this type of question was resulting in less very weak, generalised and ill focused answers. Difficulties were still encountered in moving beyond surface comprehension of the sources and evaluation which was little more than either stereotypical judgements or, at best, questionable assumptions drawn from the sources. This was particularly the case when dealing with the provenance of the sources where unsupported references to the bias in a source continue but with little reward. Those that were more successful drew inferences from the sources and interrogated the evidence with support from relevant contextual knowledge that was applied to illuminate the points being made. The question requires candidates to use the sources 'together' and it was pleasing to see that many candidates are aware of this requirement. It can be achieved using a variety of different approaches. However, a significant number treated the sources separately making it much more difficult to access the highest levels.

In section B centres do need to be aware that questions can address the same time periods from the specification and that there is no requirement to always cover all key topics in an individual paper. Section B responses generally scored higher marks as there was much greater development and engagement with the stated issues in the questions and better awareness of the conceptual focus. Many responses showed good knowledge of the periods studied and were able to develop arguments which crossed and linked the key topics being considered. However, there were still some answers which only dealt with one of the time periods being asked about, making it difficult for these to score highly. Although some essays remained predominantly narrative they were in a minority. The generic mark scheme clearly indicates the four bullet-points which are the focus for awarding marks and centres should note how these descriptors progress

through the levels. Candidates do need to be aware of key dates, as identified in the specification, and ensure that they draw their evidence in responses from the appropriate time period.

Comments on Individual questions.

Question 1.

For question 1 stronger responses showed a clear understanding of both sources, used them together and were able to draw out and support inferences from them which related to attitudes to the secession of Southern states in 1860-61. Both sources were full of possibilities to draw inferences and to link these to the utility to the historian in the context of the enquiry, e.g. both imply that secession was a politically and morally contentious issue and the tensions created from this impacted the value of the views conveyed. Moreover, the best answers produced thoughtful observations concerning the provenance of the sources to help judge how far the historian could make use of them to consider the enquiry. Good contextual knowledge was deployed to discuss the strengths of the evidence and some consideration was given to interpreting the material in the context of the values and concerns of the society from which it was derived, e.g. the understanding that South Carolina had considered secession before and was the first state to secede therefore the discontentment conveyed in Source 1 is hardly surprising. The very best answers interrogated the evidence and made clear supported judgements which weighed up the strengths or limitations of the material in relation to the enquiry under consideration.

Weaker responses appeared in a number of different forms. There were those where paraphrasing of the sources dominated and very few, if any, inferences relevant to the stated issue were made. In these types of responses contextual knowledge was often limited and, if evident, used to simply expand, confirm or challenge matters of detail in the sources. On occasions the answers drifted away from the focus on attitudes to the secession of Southern states which was detrimental to the overall mark. Moreover, many responses focused too much attention on what the sources left out and used this as the basis for their evaluation. Unless candidates can show that omissions are deliberate, this line of argument carries little value. Source material cannot be expected to include everything, so observing that the source doesn't mention a specific point, unless being used for an example of deliberate omission is unlikely to be valid criteria for judgement. Candidates are asked to evaluate what is there rather than what is not. If the author of the source has omitted something intentionally in order to modify meaning or distort the message of the source, then it will be relevant to discuss that in reaching a conclusion. However, discussion of all the things that the sources might have contained but failed to do so is unlikely to help in developing the argument. This approach was still evident this year.

Furthermore, in some responses there was considerable knowledge displayed and focused on the specified enquiry but with almost no or exceptionally limited references to the sources. As this question is targeting AO2 (analysis and evaluation of source material) these kinds of responses cannot score highly. Moreover, in a number of cases knowledge displayed didn't relate to the sources but explored race relations in the period more generally. In other instances, where

utility was addressed through the provenance, it was often based on either stereotypical judgements or questionable assumptions.

Question 2

There were a few responses to this essay question. The question considered to what extent the problems of the early republic in the years 1776-83 were solved by 1791. Areas such as slavery, finance and the separation of powers were addressed. Details were secure with the very best answers offering a wide-range in the evidence they assembled. The best answers were sustained in their argument weighing up points in order to reach overall judgements. Weaker responses tended towards either narrative or generalisation. If analysis was present, the support offered tended to be limited in both range and depth. Weaker responses also found it harder to discuss obstacles posed and so sometimes simply became a narrative of events across random periods of time. These responses struggled to make supported judgements relevant to the question. Occasional responses only engaged with one side of an argument and so limited severely their ability to score highly.

Question 3

This question was the most popular and asked candidates to assess if Abraham Lincoln's achievements as President, in the years 1863-65 were greater than those of Andrew Jackson as President in the years 1828-37. Strong answers successfully discussed achievements such as the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, the 1863 National Banking Act, Jackson's 'common man' and the power of President. The very best answers were balanced and wide-ranging in the evidence they assembled, focused on achievements and sustained in their argument. Weaker responses tended towards either narrative or generalisation. If analysis was present, the support offered tended to be limited in both range and depth. Weaker responses also found it more difficult to bring in relevant supporting examples from across the whole period and this made it harder to make supported judgements related to the question. In some responses knowledge of Jackson's presidency seemed to be lacking and so limited severely their ability to score highly.

