



Examiners' Report  
Principal Examiner Feedback  
Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced  
Level in History (WHI03)  
Paper 3: Thematic Study with Source  
Evaluation  
Option 1A: The USA, Independence to Civil  
War, 1763–1865

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There was a good sized entry for this series for WHI03 1A. Most candidates were able to finish the paper, and the knowledge applied was generally focused on the demands of the questions. WHI03 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. Candidates appear to be generally well prepared; however, some 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. It is pleasing to see that comments made in previous Examiner Reports regarding AO2 skills are being taken into account and candidates are becoming more able to draw inferences from the sources and interrogate the evidence with support from relevant contextual knowledge. The question requires candidates to use the sources 'together' and it is good to see that many candidates are aware of this requirement. It can be achieved using a variety of different approaches. However, there are still some candidates who deal with 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 very good knowledge of the periods studied and were able to develop arguments which crossed and linked the key topics being considered. The

most successful candidates were able to identify the conceptual focus required by the question and build a sustained argument up addressing this focus throughout. 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 the nature of the tension between Britain and its colonies regarding the introduction of the Stamp Act (1765). Both sources were full of possibilities to draw inferences and to link these to the utility for the historian in the context of the enquiry, e.g. both imply that tensions were high and that the issue of rights was at the core of these. 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 conciliatory tone of The Stamp Act Congress in comparison to Grenville's assertive conveyance. 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 the nature of the tension between Britain and its colonies regarding the introduction of the Stamp Act, 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. Furthermore, in some responses there was considerable knowledge displayed and focused on the specified enquiry but with 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.

## Question 2

This question was the less popular choice in section B. The question considered how significant Alexander Hamilton was to the creation and stabilisation of the new American nation in the years 1775-91. Hamilton's military role as well as his involvement with fiscal stability and a push for a more centralised federal government were countered by a range of alternatives. These included the roles of other individuals such as Jefferson and Washington. The Great Compromise also featured in many responses. Details were considerable, especially on individuals. The very best answers were wide-ranging in the evidence they assembled and sustained in their argument weighing up points with a consideration of relative significance. 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 both creation and stabilisation and so sometimes simply became a narrative of events. These responses struggled to make supported judgements relevant to the question. Occasional responses only engaged with Hamilton and failed to offer alternatives to assess his significance against.

## Question 3

This was by far the most popular essay question and asked candidates to consider whether the legacy of Andrew Jackson's presidency (1829-37) was largely responsible for political and economic instability in the years 1850-61. Strong answers successfully discussed issues and events surrounding Jackson's strengthening of presidential authority and the formation of a two-party system which led to increased opposition as well as his involvement in the Second Bank's renewal and his willingness to deploy troops. Opposing arguments addressed issues like the role of national politics, the growth of the abolitionist movement and the continuation of slavery as well as other events such as the publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin and the reactions to 'Bleeding Summer'. Lincoln's election in 1860 was also a popular alternative reason. The best answers were wide-ranging in the evidence they assembled and focused on both political and economic instability. 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 alternative causal reasons was lacking which the ability to score highly.

