

# Move Forward with Backward Design: 5 Ideas for Document Analysis

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## (AKA Good Old-Fashioned Planning)

It's August. A new school year awaits. You can't plan every minute of the first 100 days of class in the time that remains, so start by designing some strategic scaffolding.

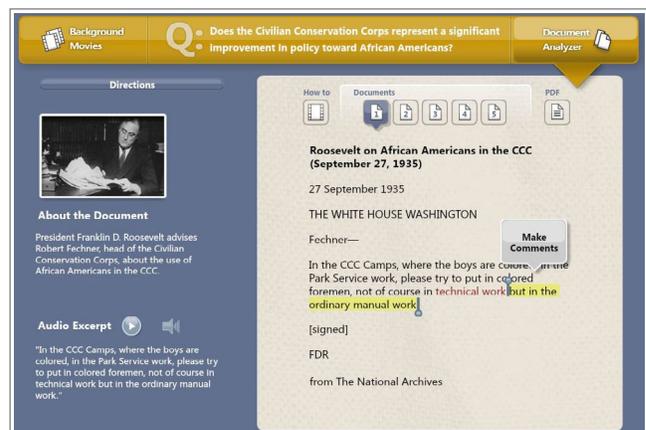
Identifying overall goals is essential to developing lessons that help your students achieve their goals. The buzzwords here are backward design or understanding by design.

I teach history. Chronology is an obvious structuring principle for my discipline, but it helps both me and my students if we attack the time sequence with a loftier goal in mind: getting students excited about reading and analyzing primary-source documents. Reaching a challenging long-term goal like that demands meaningful practice.

Backward design suggests following a logical road map with a key destination in focus. Random acts of teaching and learning will not suffice. The activities presented in daily lessons should be part of a master plan to teach skills essential to primary-source analysis. Outlining a series of activities to use throughout the year goes a long way toward building the necessary scaffolding.

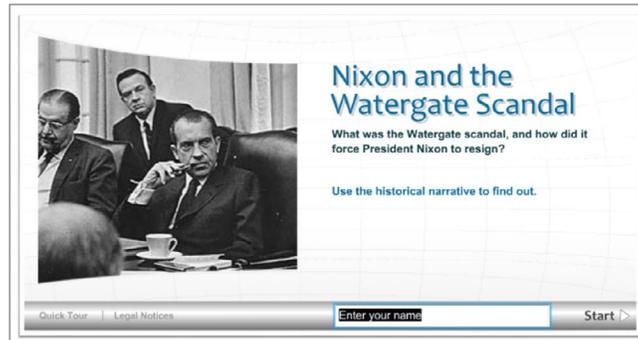
Here are some examples of learning templates designed to provide the focus and depth students need to achieve challenging curricular goals like primary-source analysis:

1. Set up monthly Paideia seminars. As you are planning each unit, select a primary-source document central to the events and themes of that period. One of my favorites is the 1852 Frederick Douglass speech *What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?* Each seminar requires preparation of Socratic seminar questions. Students learn how to provide textual evidence to support the arguments they present in discussions.
2. Use our online document analyzer tool to practice active reading of primary-source excerpts, no matter the time period or social studies course you are teaching.
  - The U.S. History series explores Anne Hutchinson, the Progressive Era, LBJ and the Vietnam War, and more.
  - The World History series has an exhaustive list, from Enlightenment philosophers to Imperialism.
  - The Civics & Economics series covers topics from the Constitutional Convention to Supreme Court cases.



The document analysis tool allows students to identify key sections of documents and construct their own meaning.

3. Remember, for many students, added clarity comes from listening to primary-source audio, reading out loud, or enacting a dramatic reading of a primary-source transcript. Integrate these activities. Check out this recording of Lady Bird Johnson reading her diary entry about the day JFK was shot.
4. Engage in thematic time travel. When students are learning about executive privilege debates in the Jacksonian Era, play a clip from Nixon's 1977 interview with David Frost, defining executive privilege in the Watergate Era.



**Historical narratives include documents and audio clips.**

5. Finally, remind students that contemporary primary sources are all around them, and encourage them to write journal entries about the history they are currently experiencing.