

Pullman, Illinois: An “Ideal” Company Town?

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Summary

In this activity, students will examine various aspect of life in Pullman’s company town before the labor strikes-. First, students will complete a writing activity placing them in the role of an employee offered an opportunity to reside in a company town. Next, the groups will watch a video clip showing the conditions of many new immigrants living in the city. Then, the class will review primary source documents highlighting both the pros and cons of company town life. Finally, by working through a series of document based questions, the class will provide a written argument for or against the development of company towns.

Objectives

Curriculum Map Topic: Post Civil War Growth and Change

Lesson’s Essential Question: How did rapid industrialization and the rise of Big Business impact immigration and urbanization?

SS.A.1.4.3 evaluates conflicting sources and materials in the interpretation of a historical event or episode

SS.A.1.4.4 uses chronology, sequencing, patterns and periodization to examine interpretations of an Event

SS.A.5.4.2 understand the social and cultural impact of immigrant groups and individuals on American society after 1880.

SS.C.1.4.4 understand the role of special interest groups, political parties, the media, public opinion, and majority/minority conflicts on the development of public policy and the political process

SS.C.2.4.3 understand issues of personal concern: the rights and responsibilities of the individual under the U.S. Constitution; the importance of civil liberties; the role of conflict resolution and compromise; and issues involving ethical behavior in politics.

U.S. History Event

The rise of big business

Grade Levels

Advanced Middle School through High School

Materials Needed

Overheads 1 – 4 prepared, class set of handouts, download video clip from United Streaming, class set of assessment document based question.

Lesson time

Primary lesson can be completed in one 90-minute or two 45-minute lessons. Extension activities would require additional class time.

Lesson Procedures/Activities

1. Preview Activity – Journaling. (Students must write in pen) You are a new immigrant to Chicago. There are very few houses that you can afford and the city is dirty and crime-ridden. Your employer has offered you an opportunity to work in a factory located in a nearby town. Everyone in the town would work for the same company and rent their house from the owner. He promises that you'll have a clean, safe place to live as long as you are an employee in his company.

- A. What issues would you have about moving to a town entirely owned by your boss? What are the possible negatives to moving there? What are the possible positives?
- B. Would it make a difference if this company had a reputation of paying its good workers a very high wage?

Once students have completed their writings, have them ball of the paper (pencil rubs off – that's why the assignment needed to be completed in pen) and toss the papers randomly around the room. Once time is called, students will pick a paper ball closest to them and then take turns reading a sampling of the answers. Discuss responses.

2. Watch the United Streaming video clip "Getting Out of the Slums". Discuss life in major cities before modern improvements such as sanitation, electricity, etc.

Getting_Out_of_the_Slums__Immigrants_Turning_to_a_Life_of_Crime.asf

3. One at a time, project overhead masters one – four, discussing the questions as you proceed. Have students draw comparisons between the images of this company town and inter-city life projected in the video.

4. After the last image is examined, have the students complete a quick writing assignment. What would it be worth to you, both in money and lack of personal freedom, to move your family out of the slums and into a safe and clean neighborhood? (Be cautious with this discussion since some students may live in areas that are neither clean nor safe.)

5. Place students in mixed-ability pairs. Give each pair a copy of Student Handout One. Have students go through the questions and discuss their answers, then hold a class discussion comparing different responses.

6. Conclude the class by introducing the topic of the Pullman strike, the next topic of discussion in the class.

Assessment

Either as a homework assignment for an advanced class or an in-class assignment for a traditional class, assign the document based question "Pullman – an Ideal Company Town?"

Extension Activities

Review the virtual exhibits located at <http://www.pullman-museum.org>

Complete activities from History Now – George Pullman: His impact on the railroad industry, labor, and American life in the 19th century by Rosanne Lichatin. Topics include The Pullman Company Town and the Pullman Strike. http://www.historynow.org/12_2006/lp2b.html

Resources

<http://www.chicagohs.org/history/pullman/pul2.html>. A good source for background information. Excellent photographs from the time period.

http://www.historynow.org/12_2006/lp2b.html Strong source of information with many extension activities and primary source documents.

The Illinois Labor Historical Society <http://www.kentlaw.edu/ilhs/pullpar.htm> Information about the Pullman company and the railroad strikes.

Pullman Historic District "A Perfect Town" <http://members.aol.com/PullmanIL/index.html> Current information about the city, now part of Chicago. Includes list of homes for sale or rent.

The Pullman Strike <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/INCORP/pullman/pullman1.html> Many primary source documents from "ordinary" people

OVERHEAD MASTER ONE



(CHS G1982.157 #P63316)

1. Compare this town to the city images you saw in the video. How is it different?
2. Which area would you prefer to live in? Why?
3. Do you think that the people who lived here liked their town? Why or why not?

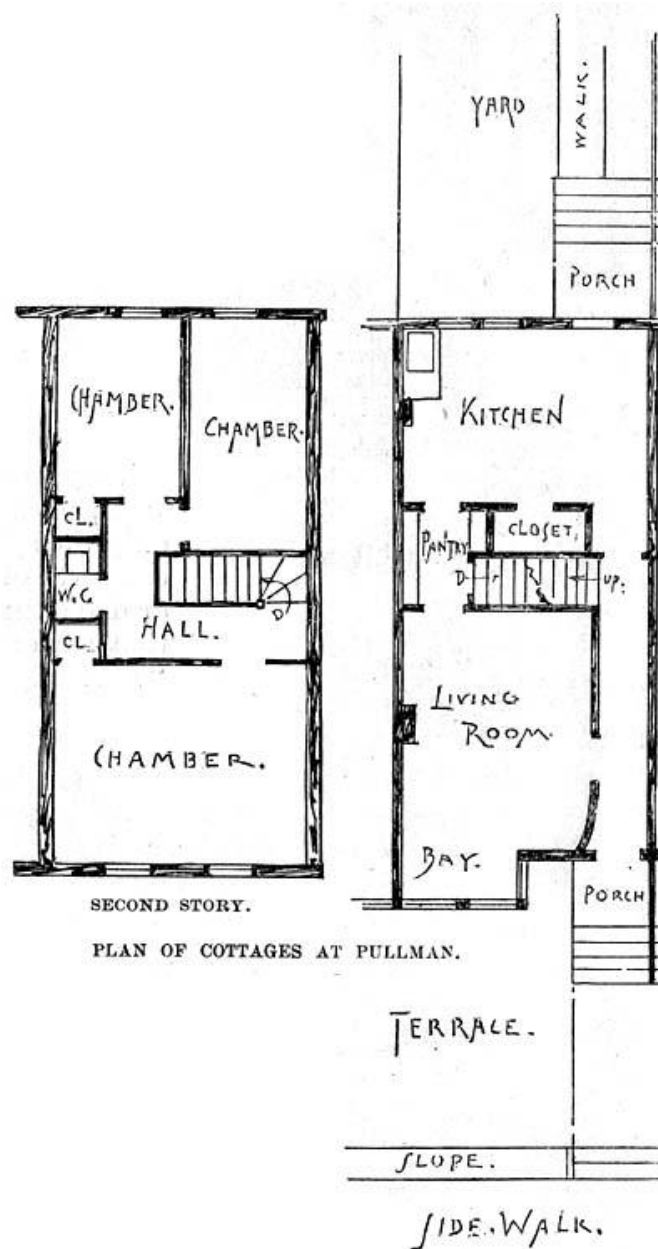
OVERHEAD MASTER TWO



(CHS ICHi-21906)

1. Compare these working-class people to the people you saw in the street scene on the video.
2. How many different homes does this show?
3. How many people do you think are living in each section of these homes?
4. Does this appear to be a nice place to live? Why or why not?

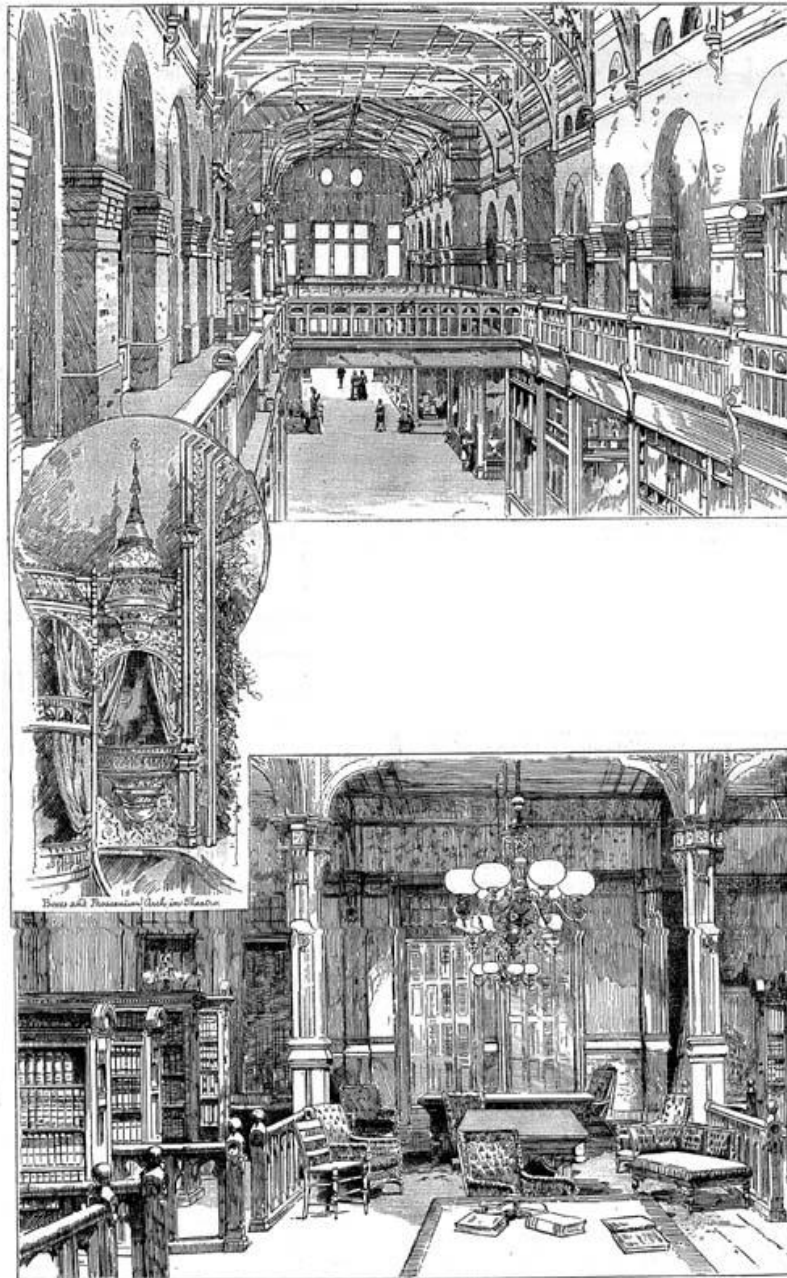
OVERHEAD MASTER THREE



Ely, Richard T. "Pullman: A Social Study." *Harper's Magazine* 70 (February 1885): 452-466.

1. How does the layout of this house compare to your own home?
2. Do you notice anything that the house is missing?
3. How many people could comfortably live in a house like this?

OVERHEAD MASTER FOUR



INTERIOR OF ARCADE—THE LIBRARY.

Ely, Richard T. "Pullman: A Social Study." *Harper's Magazine* 70 (February 1885): 452-466.

1. Compare this library to your own library. How is it different? How is it similar?
2. What types of books do you think are not allowed in this library? Why do you think that?
3. Would you be willing to pay to use a library as nice as this?

HANDOUT ONE

All of the following quotes are taken from <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/INCORP/pullman/pullman1.html>

1. "In the town of Pullman all the land, elaborate buildings, and humble homes were owned by the company. Everything, even the church, was rented out at prices so high that no one could afford to pay them. Richard T. Ely wrote in 1885 that rents in Pullman were three-fifths what they were in Chicago. Mr. Pullman stated that the average rental was \$3.00 per room. However, the average of actual rents paid and the true number of houses rented was much higher than \$3.00. Adding water and gas to the bill, a seven-room Pullman cottage rented for \$28.96; the same house in Chicago was \$18.00 to \$20.00."

Discuss: What would you feel like if you moved to a new apartment then found out that the actual rent would cost much more than you originally thought?

2. "Mr. Pullman began cutting wages and laying off workers in response to a general depression of trade. The average cut in wages was 33 percent. In many cases, however, it was 40 to 50 percent. Workers' wages were reduced without subsequent reductions in rents. In many cases, workers could not even work full-time at the reduced wages, but were still expected to pay rent in full and on time."

Discuss: Is it fair to ask for a reduction in rent because you have a reduction in your wages? Does it make a difference if your landlord is also your boss?

3. "There were no wage cuts for managers or personnel and there were no reductions in stockholder dividends. There was a rent reduction--for shopkeepers only. Yet as Rev. Carwardine stated, the Pullman Palace Car Company at the time of the strike had a \$27,000,000 surplus, capitalization of \$30,000,000 and a quarterly dividend of \$600,000 in three months."

Discuss: How would you feel if your wages were cut at the same time the company you were working for was making a huge profit?

4. One woman told a reporter in 1886:

"One fine morning a number of men...will knock at your door and tell you that they have come to whitewash your house. They will not bother you with questions...but they just go in and do it...all charges for repairs....will be DEDUCTED FROM YOUR WAGES

next pay day. You would have liked to wait another week...because you wanted to buy a pair of shoes for your boy. The company can't care about that!"

Discuss: The town of Pullman was beautiful and well maintained. How would you feel if you were charged for the maintenance of your building but you had no ownership of the building and no say in the changes that were made?

5. Another resident put it this way:

"Pullman was all very well as an employer, but to live and breathe and have one's being in Pullman was a bit too much. Residents paid rent to the Pullman Company, they bought gas of the Pullman Company, they walked on streets owned in fee simple by the Pullman Company, they paid water-tax to the Pullman Company...They sent their children to Pullman's school, attended Pullman's church, looked at but dared not enter Pullman's hotel with its private bar, for that was the limit. Pullman did not sell them their grog...The lives of the working men were bounded on all sides by the Pullman Company; Pullman was the horizon in every direction."

Discuss: Compare life in Pullman to life in Celebration, Disney's model town. Would you like to live surrounded by your employer at all times? Why or why not?

6. Jennie Curtiss, a Pullman worker for five years wrote:

"My father worked for the Pullman Company for ten years. Last summer he was sick for three months, and in September he died. At the time of his death we owed the Pullman Company about sixty dollars for rent. I was working at the time and they told me I would have to pay that rent, give what I could every pay-day, until it was paid. I did not say I would not pay, but thought rather than be thrown out of work I would pay it. Many a time I have drawn nine and ten dollars for two weeks' work, paid seven dollars for my board and given the Company my remaining two or three dollars on the rents, and I still owe them fifteen dollars. Sometimes when I could not possibly give them anything [because her wage was cut from \$.90 to \$.20 per section of carpet], I would received slurs and insults from the clerks in the bank, because Mr. Pullman would not give me enough in return for my hard labor to pay the rent for one of his houses and live. "

Discuss: If this family owed money at the time of their father's death, should they still be expected to pay off that debt to remain in the company rental? Would this be handled differently if she didn't rent from the company that she worked for?

United States History
Document Based Question
Pullman – An Ideal Company Town?

Directions: The following question requires you to construct a coherent essay that integrates your interpretation of Documents A – H and your knowledge of the period referred to in the question. You may also assess the reliability of the documents as historical sources where relevant to your answer.

It has been said that George Pullman “hoped to improve the relationship between capital and labor by creating a safe, clean, culturally enriching environment for his workers, who would pay him back with loyalty, honesty, and commitment to hard work.”¹ To what extent do you believe that Pullman succeeded in creating his vision of an ideal town?

¹George Pullman: Social Reformer, <http://www.shicagohs.org/history/pullman/pul2.html>

Document A

One gentleman, whose position ought to have exempted him from it, was "warned" in coming to Pullman to be careful in what he said openly about the town. It required recourse to some ingenuity to ascertain the real opinion of the people about their own city. While the writer does not feel at liberty to narrate his own experience, it can do no harm to mention a strange coincidence. While in the city the buttons on his wife's boots kept tearing off in the most remarkable manner, and it was necessary to try different shoemakers, and no one could avoid free discussion with a man who came on so harmless an errand as to have the buttons sewed on his wife's boots. This was only one of the devices employed. The men believe they are watched by the "company's spotter," and to let one of them know that information was desired about Pullman for publication was to close his lips to the honest expression of opinion. The women were inclined to be more outspoken.

Source: Ely, Richard T. "Pullman: A Social Study." *Harper's Magazine* 70 (February 1885): 452-466.

Document B

The people of Pullman are not happy and grumble at their situation even more than the inhabitants of towns not model are accustomed to do. They say that all this perfection of order costs them too much money and imposes upon them an intolerable constraint...They want to run the municipal government themselves, according to the ordinary American fashion. They secretly rebel because the Pullman Company continues its watch and authority over them after working hours. They declare they are bound hand and foot by a philanthropic monopoly.

Source: Article in the New York Sun, October 11, 1885, quoted in Almont Lindsay, The Pullman Strike.

Document C

"What amount of land is owned by the Pullman Association," asked the reporter. "Very nearly 4,000 acres." "Is any of it for sale?" "No sir, we will not sell an acre under any circumstances, and we will only lease to parties whom we are well satisfied will conform with our ideas in developing the place. We will not allow any saloons or drinking resorts in the town. We shall do all we can to cultivate the better natures of our workmen. .. My idea has always been that it was to the employers' interest to see that his men are clean, contented, sober 31 educated and happy. They make better workmen, and they develop the employers' industries more. I shall try to benefit humanity where it is in my power to do so. Here we shall have every attribute of a town exemplified, and I hope to be able to provide each and every attraction that can be desired - churches, schools, gymnasiums., reading rooms, etc."

Source: Interview with George Pullman, The Chicago Tribune, August 16, 1881.

Document D

One of the most striking peculiarities of this place is the all-pervading air of thrift and providence. The most pleasing impression of general well-being is at once produced. Contrary to what is seen ordinarily in laborers' quarters, not a dilapidated door-step nor a broken window, stuffed perhaps with old clothing, is to be found in the city. The streets of Pullman, always kept in perfect condition, are wide and finely macadamized, and young shade trees on each side now ornament the town, and will in a few years afford refreshing protection from the rays of the summer sun.

Source: Ely, Richard T. "Pullman: A Social Study." *Harper's Magazine* 70 (February 1885): 452-466.

Document E

There are over fifteen hundred buildings at Pullman, and the entire cost of the town, including all the manufacturing establishments, is estimated at eight millions of dollars. The rents of the dwellings vary from \$4 50 per month for the cheapest Rats of two rooms to \$100 a month for the largest private house in the place. The rent usually paid varies from \$14 to \$25 a month, exclusive of the water charge, which is generally not far from eighty cents. A five-roomed cottage, such as is seen in the illustration, rents for \$17 a month, and its cost is estimated at \$1700, including a charge of \$300 for the lot. But it must be understood that the estimated value of \$1700 includes profits on brick and carpenter work and everything furnished by the company, for each industry at Pullman stands on its own feet, and keeps its own separate account. The company's brickyards charge the company a profit on the brick the latter buys, and the other establishments do the same; consequently the estimated cost of the buildings includes profits which flowed after all into the company's coffers.

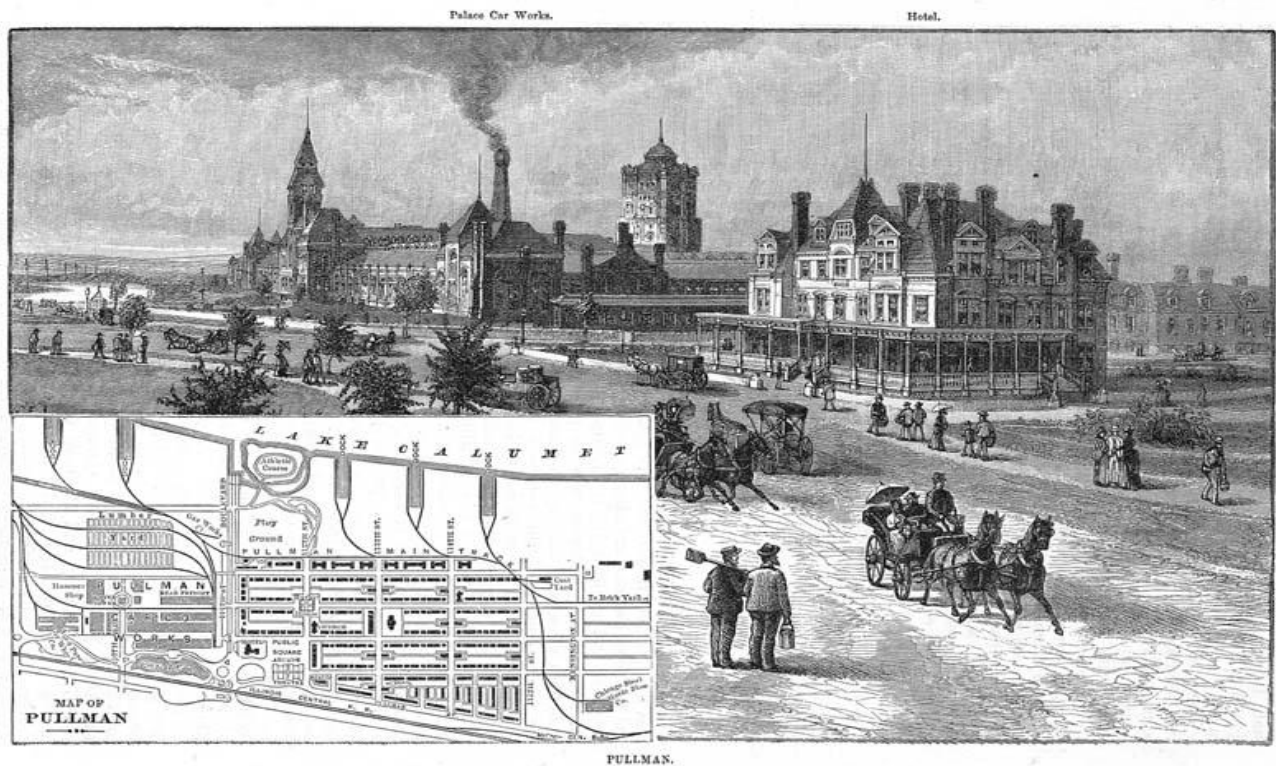
Source: Ely, Richard T. "Pullman: A Social Study." *Harper's Magazine* 70 (February 1885): 452-466.

Document F

In looking over all the facts of the case the conclusion is unavoidable that the idea of Pullman is un-American. It is a nearer approach than anything the writer has seen to what appears to be the ideal of the great German Chancellor. It is not the American ideal. It is benevolent, well wishing feudalism, which desires the happiness of the people, but in such way as shall please the authorities. One can not avoid thinking of the late Czar of Russia, Alexander II., to whom the welfare of his subjects was truly a matter of concern. He wanted them to be happy, but desired their happiness to proceed from him, in whom everything should centre. Serfs were freed, the knout abolished, and no insuperable objection raised to reforms, until his people showed a decided determination to take matters in their own hands, to govern themselves, and to seek their own happiness in their own way. Then he stopped the work of reform, and considered himself deeply aggrieved. The loss of authority and distrust of the people is the fatal weakness of many systems of reform and well-intentioned projects of benevolence.

Source: Ely, Richard T. "Pullman: A Social Study." *Harper's Magazine* 70 (February 1885): 452-466.

Document G



Source: Ely, Richard T. "Pullman: A Social Study." *Harper's Magazine* 70 (February 1885): 452-466.

Document H

Note for a few moments the library. It is a gem. It is one of the most complete of its kind in the United States. It is small and cozy, but very convenient for those who have the privilege of using it. It was the gift of Mr. Pullman to his town...

Still it is not producing the practical results demanded of such an institution. The complaint of employees is that they are expected to pay 25 cents a month or three dollars a year for the use of books, and one dollar per year for every child. This is all right, but with the immense wealth of the Pullman Company they feel that they ought to have an absolutely free library and reading room. The reading room is an adjunct of the library, is very small, and very few of the men...use it. It is too luxurious for the average working man...

Source: William Carwardine, The Pullman Strike, 1894.

U.S. History Rubric Check Sheet

Scoring Rubric Prepared By Jim Tomlin

- **Thesis**
 - Well developed and clearly focused (8-9)
 - Clear and adequate (5-7)
 - Confused, limited, or missing (2-4)
 - No thesis, provides an inappropriate response (0-1)
- **Document Usage**
 - Sophisticated use of a substantial number of documents (8-9)
 - Several documents used, may be more descriptive than analytical (5-7)
 - Few documents used, significant errors in document interpretation (2-4)
 - No document used, obvious misunderstanding of documents (0-1)
- **Critical Thought**
 - Strong interpretation and analysis (8-9)
 - Limited or superficial analysis, mostly descriptive (5-7)
 - Limited or no understanding of the question (2-4)
 - Shows a complete lack of understanding (0-1)
- **Evidence**
 - Abundant, appropriate, dealing with all aspects of question (8-9)
 - Uses some factual information (5-7)
 - Superficial or missing supporting information (2-4)
 - Little or no evidence (0-1)
- **Writing Style**
 - Well organized and well written (8-9)
 - Acceptable organization and writing (5-7)
 - Weak organization and/or poorly written (2-4)
 - May be incomprehensible (0-1)
- **Error Level**
 - No errors or errors are insignificant (8-9)
 - May contain minor errors (5-7)
 - May contain major errors (2-4)
 - Has substantial factual errors (0-1)