

Reformation Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question: *Why did Luther challenge the Catholic Church?*

Materials:

- Reformation PowerPoint
- Copies of Documents A and B
- Copies of Reformation: Guiding Questions
- Copies of Corroboration Table

Plan of Instruction:

1. Use PowerPoint to establish background knowledge on Catholicism and indulgences and introduce the inquiry:

Establish that:

- Slide 3—16th Century Europe: The Reformation. *In 1517, Europe was uniformly Catholic, but by 1545 large sections of Europe were Protestant. The shift was part of the Reformation, spurred by the writings of Martin Luther's 95 Theses, drafted in 1517.*
- Slide 4—The Selling of Indulgences. *Prior to 1517, the Catholic Church had begun selling indulgences. Indulgences allowed people to “buy their way into heaven.” Given the right amount of money, the Church would forgive a person’s sins.*
- Slide 5—Luther’s Ideas. *Martin Luther, a Catholic monk, was troubled by the practice of indulgences and wrote a letter to the Archbishop of Mainz to explain his position. The Pope considered Luther’s position to be heretical and excommunicated Luther from the Catholic Church. Luther gained support from a group of German Princes who protected Luther and helped him spread his ideas.*

Introduce Inquiry:

- Slide 6—Luther’s Different Accounts
 - *Often, historians find two opposing accounts of the same event, and sometimes, they are even written by the same person. During his life, Luther gave different accounts of his break with the Catholic Church.*
 - *To figure out what really happened, they use the skill of sourcing to determine when, where, and why a document was written. They also use corroboration to compare accounts and look for similarities and differences.*
 - *Today, we are going to explore two documents attributed to Luther than illustrate different motivations for separating from the Catholic Church. As we go through the documents pay close attention to the time and place each document was written as well as to the*

similarities and differences between the two accounts. On what details do they agree? On what details do they differ?

- Slide 7—Central Historical Question. *Through reading the two documents, we will try to explain the differences between the documents and decide which one is a more reliable answer to our question: Why did Martin Luther challenge the Catholic Church?*

2. Hand out Document A and Guiding Questions.

- Students read documents and answer Guiding Questions
- Share out responses

3. Hand out Document B and Guiding Questions.

- Students read documents and answer Guiding Questions
- Share out responses

4. Corroboration: Students fill out chart of differences based on their answers to the Guiding Questions:

	1517	1535
Tone	<i>Luther has a submissive tone.</i>	<i>Luther has a more aggressive tone.</i>
Place in life	<i>He was a young monk writing at the beginning of his career.</i>	<i>At this time, he was nearly twenty years older and the leader of a revolutionary religious movement.</i>
Disagreement with the Church	<i>His disagreement over the church seems to be over a small matter of religious doctrine. Luther wants a clarification and doesn't seem to be trying to start a revolution</i>	<i>His disagreement with the church seems to be about much broader, political issues that cut to the center of what Catholicism and Christianity are all about.</i>

5. Discussion:

- What were the similarities and differences between these documents? Which one did you find more trustworthy?
- Why do you think Luther challenged the Catholic Church?
- What evidence did you find to support your claim?

- What other sources would you investigate in order to further answer this question?

Citations

Document A

Martin Luther's Letter to the Archbishop of Mainz, 1517. From, *The Works of Martin Luther*. Ed. and trans. Adolph Spaeth, L.D. Reed, Henry Eyster Jacobs, et al. Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1915, Vol. 1, pp. 25-28. Retrieved from:
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/lutherltr-indulgences.asp>

Document B

Oliver J. Thatcher, ed., *The Library of Original Sources* (Milwaukee: University Research Extension Co., 1907), Vol. V: 9th to 16th Centuries, pp.119-127.
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1535luther.asp>

Reformation Timeline

- 1517** Johann Tetzel travels in Germany preaching on indulgences.
- Oct. 31, 1517** Martin Luther sends his *95 Theses* with a letter to the Archbishop of Mainz (Doc A).
- 1518** Pope Leo calls on Luther to take back the *95 Theses*, but Luther refuses.
- June 15, 1520** The Pope excommunicates Martin Luther from the Catholic Church.
- 1521** The Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, declares Luther a criminal and attempts to arrest him.
- 1521** Frederick, a German prince, pledges his support to Luther and grants him protection at his castle.
- 1521-1545** Luther's ideas spread throughout Europe and gain more and more support. Over the next twenty years, it becomes clear that an irreversible break has occurred between the Catholic Church and the Protestant movement.

Document A: The Introduction to the 95 Theses (Modified)

As a young man, Martin Luther became increasingly bothered by the practice of granting sinners indulgences to buy their way out of punishment for their sins. In 1517, Luther decided to write up his criticisms of indulgences and to send them to the Archbishop of Mainz. Luther's criticisms, known as The 95 Theses Against Indulgences, eventually made their way to the Pope, who responded by attacking Luther and eventually excommunicating him from the Catholic Church. The passage below is an excerpt from the letter Luther sent to the Archbishop of Mainz with the 95 Theses.

The grace of God be with you in all its fullness and power!

Spare me, Most Reverend Father in Christ and Most **Illustrious** Prince, that I, the **dregs** of humanity, have so much boldness that I have dared to think of [writing] a letter to someone of your **Sublimity**. . . .

Papal indulgences for the building of St. Peter's are circulating under your most **distinguished** name. I do not bring accusation against the outcries of the preachers, which I have not heard, so much as I grieve over the wholly false impressions which the people have conceived from [the indulgences]. The unhappy souls believe that if they have purchased letters of indulgence they are sure of their salvation.

Source: *Martin Luther's letter to the Archbishop of Mainz, 1517.*

Vocabulary

illustrious: respected and admired

dregs: a worthless part of something

sublimity: something of pure beauty or grandeur

distinguished: successful and well-respected

Document B: Against Catholicism (Modified)

As Luther gained popularity, some of his followers began to write down things that Luther said in private. These notes were known as Luther's Table Talk and were collected and published in the 1560s. The following is presumed to be from Luther's Table Talk in 1535.

The main reason I fell out with the pope was this: the pope boasted that he was the head of the Church, and condemned all that would not be under his power and authority. He said, although Christ is the head of the Church, there must be a physical head of the Church upon earth. With this I could have been content, if he had taught the gospel pure and clear, and not introduced human inventions and lies. Further, he took power, rule, and authority over the Christian Church, and over the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God. No man can explain the Scriptures. The pope did and he made himself lord over the Church, proclaiming [the Church] at the same time a powerful mother, and empress over the Scriptures. This could not be tolerated. Those who, against God's Word, boast of the Church's authority, are mere idiots. The pope gives more power to the Church, which is begotten and born, than to the Word [the Bible], which has conceived, and born the Church.

Source: *From Luther's Table Talk, 1535.*

Reformation: Guiding Questions

Document A: Luther in 1517

- 1) (Sourcing) When was this document written? What was Luther's purpose in writing it?
- 2) (Close reading) How would you describe Luther's tone in this document?
- 3) (Close reading) According to this document, why did Luther challenge the Catholic Church?

Document B: Luther in 1535

- 1) (Sourcing) When was this document written? What was its purpose?
- 2) (Close reading) How would you describe Luther's tone in this document?
- 3) (Close reading) According to this document, why did Luther challenge the Catholic Church?

Corroboration

What are the differences between Luther's account from 1517 and his account of 1535?

Difference in:	1517	1535
Tone		
Place in Life		
Disagreement with the Church		

Hypothesis: After reading Documents A and B, and discussing the Guiding Questions, create a hypothesis regarding the question: *Why did Martin Luther's account of his break with the Church change between 1517 and 1535? Is one account more reliable than the other?*

Explain your answer with specific evidence from the documents: