**What if you found a journal entry you wrote when you were ten? What do you think it might say? How have you changed since then?**

**Religion impacts society, people, and the economy in very deep ways. Turn to a partner and try to pick out one or two ways that religion impacts America.**

**From excusing churches from taxation, to rationalizing policy around issues like gay marriage and birth control, to how people view candidates, religious thought plays a central role in our lives, even if we ourselves aren’t religious.**

**16th Century Europe: The Reformation.** In 1517, Europe was uniformly Catholic. There were different types of Christianity in Africa and Asia, but not so much in Europe. By 1545 large parts of Europe were Protestant, and many different branches of Protestantism grew throughout time, and my guess is that many of you have experiences with one or more Protestant religions—the Baptist Church, Episcopalian, Methodist, Amish, Presbyterian, etc. churches all were made possible by the Reformation begun by Luther and his writing of the *95 Theses* in 1517.

**The Selling of Indulgences:** Before 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. Through this practice and others—for example, the Church owned 1/3 of all land in Europe, and the Pope claimed power over kings and queens in Europe by virtue of his office—the Church remained very wealthy.

**Luther’s Ideas:** Martin Luther was a Catholic monk who was troubled by the practice of selling indulgences, and he wrote a letter to the Archbishop of Mainz to explain his position. The Pope considered Luther’s position to be heretical, and the Pope excommunicated Luther from the Catholic Church. Luther gained support from a group of German princes who protected him and helped spread his ideas.

**Luther’s Different Accounts:** Often, historians find two opposing accounts of the same event. (Remember our study of the Dark Ages?) Sometimes, these two different accounts 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, historians 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’re going to explore two documents attributed to Luther that illustrate different motivations for separating from the Catholic Church. As we go through the Documents, please pay close attention to the time and place each document was written, as well as the similarities and differences of each document. On what details do they agree? On what details do they differ?

**Central historical question:** Through reading these 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?