DBQ: How Great Was Alexander the Great?

Overview: Alexander III of Macedonia streaked like a meteor across the ancient world. When he was only 20, he inherited an empire that included the kingdom of Macedonia and the city-states of Greece. Almost immediately, Alexander set out to conquer the Persian Empire, which stretched from Egypt to India. He achieved his dream by the time he was 30, but he died just a few years later. In recent times, historians have debated Alexander's character and accomplishments. This Mini-DBQ asks you to decide whether he deserves to be called "Alexander the Great."

Introduction: How Great Was Alexander the Great?

When we study the life of Alexander of Macedonia, we begin with a truth and a problem. The truth is that Alexander is one of the most famous people in history. The problem is that what we know about him is a mixture of fact and legend. We do know that he was born in 356 BCE, more than 300 years before Jesus of Nazareth, in a kingdom on the edge of northern Greece called Macedonia. His father, King Philip of Macedonia, and his mother, Olympia, prepared Alexander for kingship by hiring the philosopher Aristotle to teach him academic subjects, politics, sports, and warfare. With standard like this, Alexander developed a rather high opinion of himself, including the growing belief that he himself was a god.

During Alexander's boyhood, his father built the Macedonian army into a deadly fighting machine. First, Philip used his army and the frightening Macedonian phalanx to conquer nearby Greek city-states. Next, Philip planned to attack the huge Persian Empire.

Alexander was eager to lead the attack himself. He would soon get his chance. Philip was assassinated in 336 BCE and, at the age of 20,Alexander inherited his father's kingdom and set out with the army to conquer Persia. At the time, Persia was probably the most powerful kingdom in the world. This mattered little to Alexander. Using his disciplined cavalry and infantry in bold ways, Alexander fought his way through lands controlled by Persia – across Asia Minor, down the Mediterranean coast into Egypt and then east to Mesopotamia. There he defeated a huge Persian army at Gaugamela ("go-ga- millfa"). The Persian King, Darius was killed in the aftermath and Alexander replaced him on the throne.

Instead, of being satisfied with his expanded empire, Alexander pushed further eastward into lands no Greek had ever seen. He led his troops across Central Asia, fighting battles and establishing along the way. More than once, Alexander was at the front of an attack. Finally, at the Indus River in western India, Alexander was stopped - not by any enemy, but by his own army, which refused to go further. After eight years of combat and conquest Alexander reluctantly turned back. Alexander returned to the Persian city of Susa, where he tried to unify his huge empire by taking Darius's daughter as his second wife and ordering his officers to marry Persian women. Many Macedonians resented Alexander's attempts to join the two races. Alexander's push to expand his empire took its toll. Over the years, he had suffered severe wounds that weakened his health. In June of 323 BCE, after a bout of heavy feasting and celebrating, Alexander became ill; ten days later, he was dead. For reasons that are unclear, he had not named an heir. After much fighting, Alexander's generals split up the land. More quickly than it took to build the empire, it began to fall into pieces. Flash forward three centuries. A Roman military commander named Julius Caesar is on campaign in Spain. There he encounters a statue of Alexander and is said to have wept. Caesar was reportedly overcome by the thought that Alexander had achieved so much at such a young age. But did Alexander deserve Caesar's tears and respect?

Task:
Examine the following documents and answer the question: How great was Alexander the Great?

Introduction Questions
1. How old was Alexander when he launched his invasion of the Persian Empire?

2. Why was the death of Darius important lo Alexander's conquest of Persia?

3. After eight years on the march, what caused Alexander to turn back?

4. What is the problem of a king not leaving an heir?

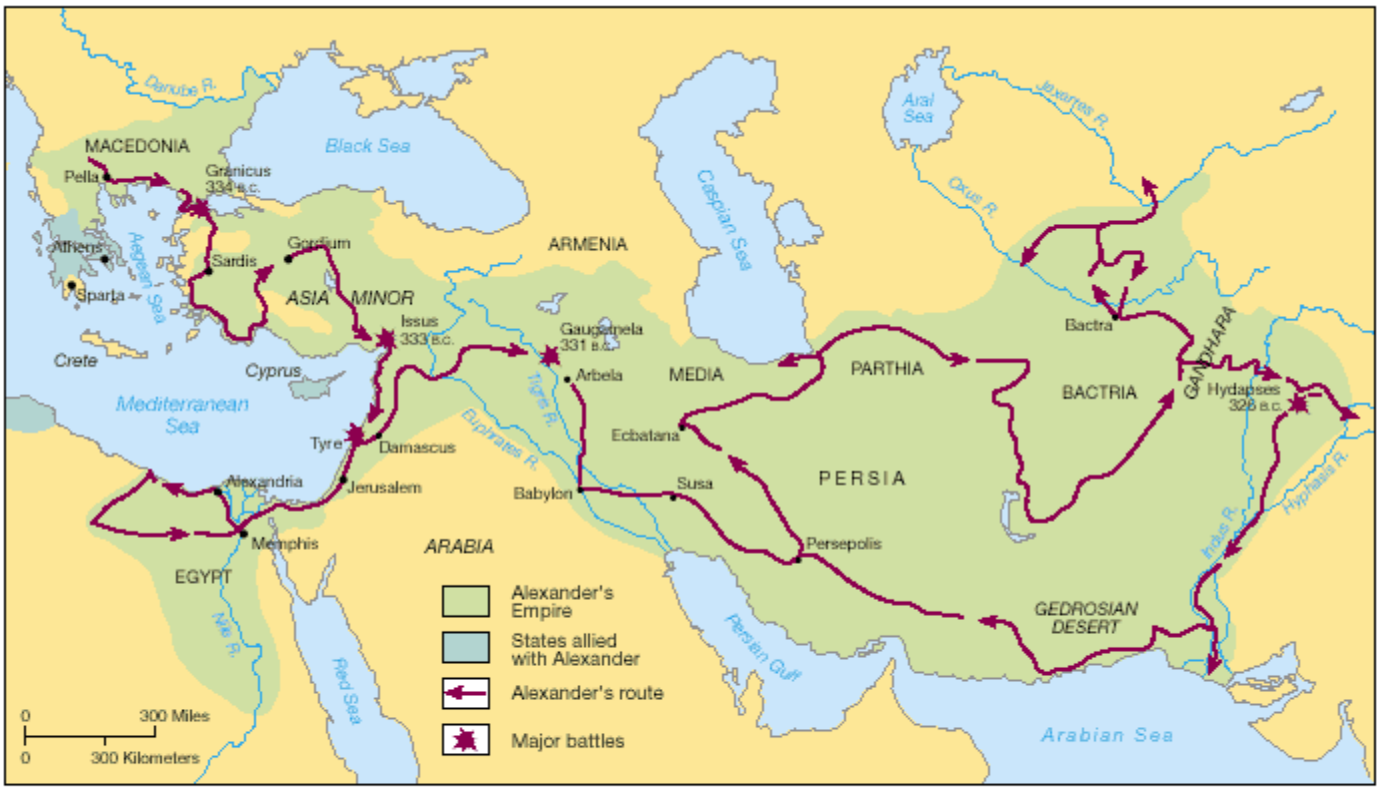
5. Why, 300 years after Alexander’s death, was Julius Caesar in tears?

Timeline:
449 BCE - A 43-year war between Persia and the Greek city-states ends.
359 BCE - Philip II becomes king of Macedonia.
336 BCE - Philip [I of Macedonia is assassinated. His son Alexander inherits the throne.
336 BCE - Darius' III becomes Great King of Persia.
331 BCE - Alexander defeats the Persian army at Gaugamela.
329 BCE - Alexander and his army reach western India.
323 BCE - Alexander dies in Babylon.
301 BCE - At the Battle of Ipsus, Alexander’s generals fight to divide his empire.

Discussion Questions: How Great Was Alexander the Great?
Understanding the Question

1. What is the analytical question asked by this Mini-DBQ?

Document A – Geography



The Empire of Alexander the Great. Alexander's conquests united Eurasia from Greece to India into a cultural and, briefly, a political unity.

Document Analysis

1. Where does the city name “Alexandria” appear on the map?

2. What conclusions can you draw from this?

3. How can you use the map to argue that Alexander was great?

4. How can you use the map to argue that Alexander was not great?

Document B – Historian's Account

(Note: Lucius Flavius Arrianus, the historian of the next document was known as Arrian, and was a Greek philosopher and historian who lived some 400 years after the time of Alexander. His book is considered the best account of Alexander's reign)

Alexander pitched camp on the bank of the Hydaspes (hay-das-pees) and Porus** was to be seen on the other bank with his whole army and his forces of elephants. He realized that he could not cross at the point where Porus was encamped—his elephants were too numerous. . . When Alexander saw this, he decided to move his troops in all different directions so that Porus would keep puzzled. . . At night he would take most of his cavalry to various points along the river bank where he would create a clamour, raise the war cry and produce all other such noises as would come from men preparing to cross the river. Porus would actually parallel his movements on the other side, leading his elephants toward the shouting, and Alexander got him into the habit of making these corresponding movements. This actually went on for quite a long time until Porus no longer reacted.

***Porus: an Indian ruler who fought against Alexander the Great*

Editor's Note: Arrian then writes that Alexander, leaving 5,000 armed men in full view opposite Porus's camp, led a force exceeding 10,000 foot soldiers, archers, and cavalry and crossed the river about ten miles upstream. Rafts for ferrying the men were made from hides wrapped around hay and sewn watertight. The crossing was further hidden by a midnight thunderstorm. Too late to stop the crossing, Porus arranged his army on a nearby plain and prepared for battle. The narrative continues:

The engagement was. Unlike any other previous battle, Porus's elephants were now boxed in, and the damage inflicted by them fell on friend no less than foe, with men trampled under as the beasts twisted and turned. Most of the drivers of the elephants, too, had been brought down by spears. Eventually the animals grew tired and their charges lost vigor. Alexander then threw his cavalry in a circle around the entire force, and ordered the infantry to lock shields, to group tightly and to advance as a phalanx. At this juncture, the Indians broke and ran.

Document Analysis

1. Where is the Hydaspes River?

2. Explain how Alexander's army was able to cross before Porus was able to react:

3. How was Alexander able to turn Porus's elephants into a kind of war weapon?

4. How can you use this document to argue that Alexander was great?

5. How can you use this document to argue that he was not great?

Document C

(Note: During Alexander's march down the Mediterranean coast, many cities surrendered without a fight "Some were happy to have the Persians removed. Alexander treated these cities rather kindly. Tyre ("tire") was another matter. Its citizens refused to surrender. They believed their city was unconquerable because it was built on an island and protected by high walls. Alexander proceeded to build a causeway, or land bridge of timber and rubble, so his soldiers could cross from the mainland to the island. The city held out for seven months and Tyrian counterattacks caused Alexander to lose many men. In the end, however, the causeway was completed and Alexander's army smashed into the city.)

When the last organized resistance was broken, Alexander's. [soldiers] ranged through the city on a ferocious manhunt .... Alexander had ordered that all [except] those who ; sought sanctuary [safety in the temple] were to be slain, and his commands were executed with savage relish. The air grew thick with smoke from burning buildings. Seven thousand Tyrians died and the number would have been far higher had it not been for the men of Sidon, who entered the city alongside Alexander's troops. Even though Tyre had been Sidon's rival for centuries, these neighbors of the victims, horrified by what they now witnessed, managed to smuggle some 15,000 of them to safety. The great city was now utterly destroyed. Her king, Azimilikt and various other notables, including envoys from Carthage, had taken refuge in the temple of Melkart, and Alexander spared their lives. The remaining survivors, some 30,000 in number, he sold into slavery. Two thousand men of military age were crucified.

Document Analysis

1. How did Alexander feel about Tyre's ability to hold him off for seven months?. Ho do you know?

2. How might you explain Alexander's decision not to kill anyone who took sanctuary in the temple?

3. What do you learn about Alexander from his decision to crucify 2,000 men?

4. Can you think of military reasons for the severe treatment of Tyrian survivors'?

5. How can you use this document to argue that Alexander was great?

6. How can you use this document to argue that Alexander was not great?

Document D

(Note: Ancient biographers of Alexander told these stories. They are retold here by Arrian and a modern-day historian. True or not in their detail, the stories reveal two sides of Alexander that were probably accurate.)

The Legend of the Helmet

The army was crossing a desert of sand; the sun was already blazing down upon them, but they were struggling on under the necessity of reaching water, which was still far away. Alexander, like everyone else, was tormented by thirst, but he was nonetheless marching on foot at the head of his men. It was all he could do to keep going, but he did so, and the result (as always) was that the men were the better able to endure their misery when they saw that it was equally shared. As they toiled on, a company of light infantry, which had gone off looking for water found some-just a wretched little trickle, collected in a shallow gully. They scooped up with difficulty what they could and hurried back to Alexander; then, just before they reached him, they tipped the water into a helmet and gave it to him. Alexander, with a word of thanks for the gift, took the helmet and, in full view of his troops, poured the water on the ground. So extraordinary was the effect of this action that the water wasted by Alexander was as good as a drink for every man in the army.

The Legend of the Hat Band

Alexander was himself steering the trireme [a warship with oars], when a strong gust of wind fell on his broad-brimmed Macedonian hat, and the band that encircled it. The hat, being rather heavy, fell into the water. However, the band was carried along by the wind, and was caught by one of the reeds growing near the tomb of one of the ancient kings .... One of the sailors swam off towards the band and snatched it from the reed. But he did not carry it in his hands because it would get wet while he was swimming. He therefore put it around his own head and brought it to the king. Most of the biographers of Alexander say that the king gave him a talent as a reward for his zeal. Then he ordered his head to be cut off [because] the prophets had explained that he should not allow the head that had worn the royal head band to be safe. '* More than $10,000

Document Analysis:

1. In the first story, why did Alexander pour the water on the ground?

2. In the second story, why did Alexander give the soldier who saved the hat band a reward?

3. Why did he then order the man’s head cut off?

4. How can you use these legends to argue that Alexander was great?

5. How can you use these legends to argue that Alexander was not great?

Document E

(Note: "Hellenes" is what ancient Greeks called themselves. The term "Hellenistic" was first used in the 19th century by historians to describe the period following Alexander when Greek ideas and culture spread.)

Alexander's Legacy:

Size of Alexander's empire at his death (sq. miles)	2,000,000
Size of Roman Empire at its greatest (sq.' miles)	2,200,000
Years that it took Alexander to build his empire	11 years
Years that Alexander's empire held together after his death	10 years
Length of Hellenistic period in Middle East and western Asia	300 years
Number of cities founded by Alexander	70
Estimated enemy soldiers and civilians killed in four major battles	100,000
Religion most directly influenced by Greek art and ritual	Buddhism
Number of years after Alexander that Roman Emperor Marcus Macrinus had images of Alexander sewn into his clothing	540
A Number of years after Alexander that Greek literature and theater remained strong cultural influences in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East	900
Number of years Greek remained official language of Jordan	1,000

Document Analysis

1. What is the meaning of the term "Hellenistic Age"?

2. When we ask, "What was Alexander's legacy?," what are we asking?

3. How can this document be used to argue that Alexander's legacy extended from Italy to India? Explain, using two specific examples.

4. How can you use this document to argue that Alexander was great?

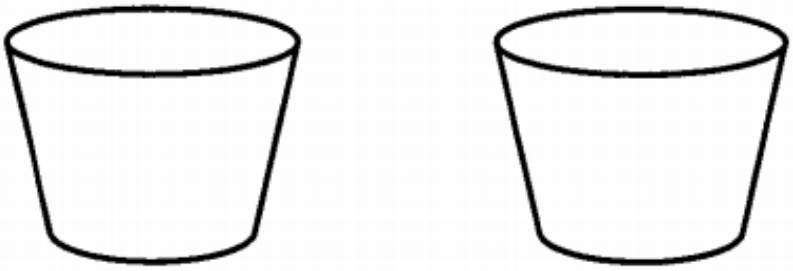
5. How can you use this document to argue that Alexander was not great?

Part II: Writing the Essay

Directions: Write an essay that includes an introduction, body paragraphs which use all the documents, as well as relevant outside information to support your claims.

Pre-Bucketing

Directions: We suggest a two-step bucketing process. First, create two starter buckets that identify the opposing positions on the question. Then, pick the position you feel contains the strongest evidence and create three "reason" buckets for that position.



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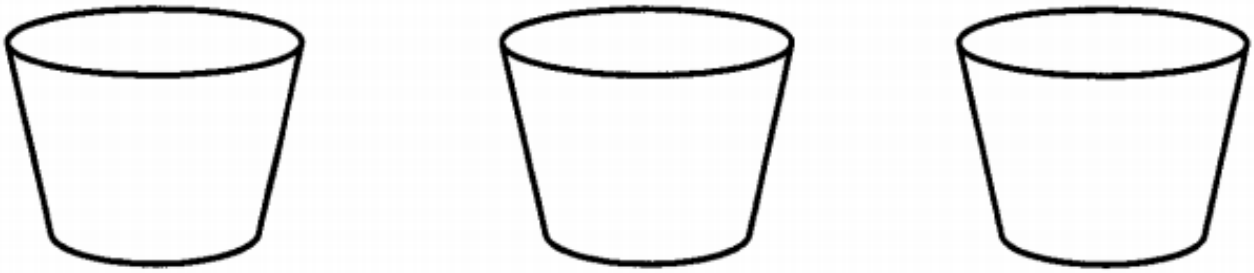

Guided Essay: How great was Alexander the Great?

1. Introduction
    a. Background information: Include time (dates), place (location), and story:

    b. Restate the key issues or question with key terms defined:

    c. Thesis: Alexander (is / is not) deserving of the title “the great” because

        i.

        ii.

        iii.

2. Body Paragraph #1 (Reason 1)

    a. One reason that Alexander (was / was not) great was:

Evidence: Cite documents and outside knowledge			
Argument: This evidence helps explain why Alexander was/was not great because			

3. Body Paragraph #2 (Reason 2)

    a. One reason that Alexander (was / was not) great was:

Evidence: Cite documents and outside knowledge			
Argument: This evidence helps explain why Alexander was/was not great because			

4. Body Paragraph #3 (Reason 3)

    a. One reason that Alexander (was / was not) great was:

Evidence: Cite documents and outside knowledge			
Argument: This evidence helps explain why Alexander was/was not great because			

5. Conclusion

    a. Topic Sentence: Restate the main idea of your essay, or your thesis statement.

        i. Finish rephrasing of thesis statement.

    b. Supporting sentences: Summarize the three subpoints of your essay.

        i. Summarize or wrap up the main points in the body of the essay.

        ii. Explain how ideas fit together.

    c. Closing sentence: Leave the reader with an interesting final impression.

        i. Final words.

        ii. Connects back to the introduction.

        iii. Provides a sense of closure.

What is a conclusion?

- A conclusion is what you will leave with your reader
- It “wraps up” your essay
- It demonstrates to the reader that you accomplished what you set out to do
- It shows how you have proved your thesis
- It provides the reader with a sense of closure on the topic

Structure

- A conclusion is the opposite of the introduction
- Remember that the introduction begins general and ends specific
- The conclusion begins specific and moves to the general

From Thesis to Essay Writing: Mini-Q Essay Outline Guide

Working Title – Create your own title for the essay

Paragraph #1 – Introduction Paragraph
Grabber – “Hook” (something to get the reader’s attention)
Background – Background information about the topic (lectures, notes, books, etc.)
Stating the question with key terms defined
Thesis and road map – Thesis statement

Paragraph #2
Baby Thesis for bucket one
Evidence: supporting detail documents with document citation
Argument: connecting evidence to the thesis

Paragraph #3
Baby Thesis for bucket two
Evidence: supporting detail documents with document citation
Argument: connecting evidence to the thesis

Paragraph #4
Baby Thesis for bucket three
Evidence: supporting detail documents with document citation
Argument: connecting evidence to the thesis

Paragraph #5
Conclusion: restatement of main idea along with possible insight or wrinkle
Restate your thesis and add in any additional information (evidence)