

Signals and Decisions

Separate disputed events from contested motives in historical accounts.

12.T.T.2.b "Analyze and evaluate texts with conflicting information or opposing viewpoints and determine where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretations. (I)"

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle claims about what happened, underline evidence or source details, and write I beside statements that interpret motives or judgments. These marks will help you separate factual disputes from competing interpretations.

The Gulf of Tonkin Reports

- ① On August 2, 1964, the U.S. destroyer Maddox exchanged fire with North Vietnamese torpedo boats in the Gulf of Tonkin. Two days later, Maddox and Turner Joy reported radar and sonar contacts during a night patrol. President Lyndon B. Johnson told the public that North Vietnam had carried out a second, open attack. Congress then passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which authorized the president to use military force in Southeast Asia. Johnson's account treated the August 4 reports as evidence of a completed attack, not merely as warnings that required further checking.
- ② A later National Security Agency historical study reached a different factual conclusion about August 4. After reviewing intercepts, ship logs, and later statements, its author concluded that no North Vietnamese attack occurred that night. The study noted that the crews faced bad weather, confusing signals, and uncertainty aboard both ships. It does not deny the August 2 clash. Instead, it argues that officials mistook ambiguous observations for hostile action on August 4. Its conclusion depends on reassessing records produced during and after a confusing patrol, rather than treating the first reports as final.
- ③ Scholars also interpret Johnson's response differently. One group argues that the administration presented uncertain battlefield reports too confidently in order to win congressional approval for broader action. They point to the speed of the resolution and to officials' private doubts about the reports. Other historians caution that private doubt is not proof of a planned deception. They argue that leaders had to decide quickly with incomplete information and that later evidence can make earlier uncertainty look more obvious than it was. Their dispute turns on how much weight to give the timing of the resolution, officials' private doubts, and the constraints of rapid decision making.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What specific factual claim about August 4 separates Johnson's public account from the NSA historical study?

2 Which details does the NSA study use to support its conclusion, and how do those details challenge the first reports?

3 What evidence leads one group of scholars to infer that the administration wanted broader action, and what limit do other historians place on that evidence?

4 Identify one fact that both the Johnson account and the NSA study accept. Explain why that agreement does not settle the question about August 4.

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write a 90 to 120 word historian's note that distinguishes one factual conflict from one interpretive conflict in the passage. Evaluate which cited evidence is more useful for investigating each conflict, then end with one question that additional evidence could answer.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Circle claims about what happened, underline evidence or source details, and write I beside statements that interpret motives or judgments. These marks will help you separate factual disputes from competing interpretations. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What specific factual claim about August 4 separates Johnson's public account from the NSA historical study?	Johnson said North Vietnam carried out a second attack on August 4. The NSA study concluded that no North Vietnamese attack occurred that night.
2	Which details does the NSA study use to support its conclusion, and how do those details challenge the first reports?	It reviews intercepts, ship logs, and later statements, and notes bad weather, confusing signals, and uncertainty. These details suggest that ambiguous observations may have been mistaken for hostile action.
3	What evidence leads one group of scholars to infer that the administration wanted broader action, and what limit do other historians place on that evidence?	The first group cites the resolution's speed and officials' private doubts. Other historians argue that private doubt alone does not prove planned deception because leaders were deciding quickly with incomplete information.
4	Identify one fact that both the Johnson account and the NSA study accept. Explain why that agreement does not settle the question about August 4.	Both accept that an August 2 clash occurred. That shared fact does not determine whether a separate North Vietnamese attack occurred on August 4.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The central factual conflict is whether North Vietnamese forces attacked the ships on August 4. The NSA study is more useful for investigating that event because it draws on intercepts, ship logs, and later statements, although those records still require interpretation. The interpretive conflict concerns Johnson's purpose in presenting the reports. Officials' private doubts and the resolution's timing are useful evidence, but they cannot alone prove deception, since leaders may have acted under pressure. What did Johnson know about the reports' reliability before he addressed the public? A complete inquiry would compare contemporaneous briefings with public statements.

Accept equivalent distinctions between the disputed August 4 event and the disagreement about Johnson's motives or judgment. In the open response, accept defensible evaluations that use passage evidence, stay within the word range, and end with an evidence-seeking question.