The Leipzig Debate
Who Won? John Eck or Martin Luther

New Jersey Core Content Standards:
6.2.12.B.2.b: Relate the division of European regions during this time period into those that remained Catholic and those that became Protestant to the practice of religion in the New World.

6.2.12.D.2.b: Determine the factors that led to the Reformation and the impact on European politics.

6.2.12.D.2.e: Assess the impact of the printing press and other technologies developed on the dissemination of ideas.

NY Global Studies Learning Standards:
G2: 2. Martin Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses: the challenge to the power and authority of the Roman Catholic Church

Common Core Standards:
Reading in History 9-10:1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of information.

Reading in History 9-10:2 Determine the central ideas of information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

Reading in History 9-10:8 Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author’s claims.

Reading in History 11-12:1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

Reading in History 11-12:2 Determine the central ideas of information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationship among key details and ideas.

Writing in History 11-12:8 Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
Background to The Leipzig Debate
June-July 1519

The year 1519 might be considered a “turning point” year in European history with the death of Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor for the past 59 years, the Spanish victory over the Aztecs at the Battle of Tenochtitlan, and the decision of Pope Leo X regarding the possible excommunication of German priest and University of Wittenberg professor, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther.

The Roman Catholic Church was in need of reforms in the 16th century. Erasmus, Thomas More, Thomas Wosley, Jan Hus, Jon Wycliffe, and Martin Luther were the most popular critics who called for changes. Each of them desired to reform the church from within and respected the authority of the pope and church councils. The issue in the Ninety-five Theses addressed some of the strategies for selling letters of indulgences in the German towns.

Letters of Indulgences were not necessarily expensive but the economic impact over several years is that an estimated 144,000 ducati left the Holy Roman Empire each year to build St. Peter’s basilica in Rome! The annual expenses of Pope Leo X was more than 600,000 ducati – leaving a significant deficit. The income of a middle class worker in Germany was about 200 ducati a year.

The theological impact was that Martin Luther interpreted the passage of Romans 3:28 - *For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.* Luther’s idea of “justification of faith” is based on God’s love for a person and that good works or payments to the Treasury of God are not necessary for eternal life. Additional statements of Martin Luther that might be considered heresy or a false teaching were on the Roman Catholic teachings of the infallibility of the pope and the immortality of the soul.

Luther posted the Ninety-five Theses on October 31, 1517 along with his “Explanations” of proof for each of the 95 statements. In April 1518, he successfully defended all of them before a committee of Augustinian monks (Luther’s monastic order), with some disagreement by the older and conservative monks. The Ninety-five Theses were published and circulated throughout Europe. Luther gained national recognition and popularity as a result of his statements.

Pope Leo X summoned Luther to Rome to recant and ask forgiveness for his teachings or face excommunication from the Catholic Church. Through a series of letters to German princes and Georg Spalatan, an advisor to the new emperor, Charles V (formerly Charles I of Spain), the hearing was moved to Leipzig in Germany. The Leipzig Debate would also be conducted in Luther’s native language of German.
Document 1: The Value of a Ducat – The Cost of a Letter of Indulgence:

It is said that Leo spent a million ducati on the ‘war’ of Urbino, and it is useful to recall what a ducat was worth in his time. Reuchlin paid one ducat an hour in Rome for tutoring in Hebrew. Fifty or 100 ducati could buy a painting by Botticelli. A man could live moderately well for a year on 200 ducati. Leo’s average expenditures in the course of a year amounted to nearly 600,000 ducati.

Balanced against these expenditures was an income of some 420,000 ducati a year, which produced a lamentable deficit which Leo worried about from time to time. Leo’s budget can be contrasted with that of Sixtus IV, whose income during his reign from 1471 to 1484 was about 290,000 ducati. Both popes had to rely for income on alum mine concessions, the salt monopoly, grain export licenses, rents, tithes, and tributes from the papal states, and the datary, money from the sale of venal offices and indulgences. In Sixtus’ day, the datary contributed only 40,000 ducati to the treasury. But in order to make up for his increased expenses, Leo required 144,000 ducati from the datary—three and a half times what Sixtus thought he could squeeze out. Like most Europeans, Leo had come to rely far too much on indulgences.1

http://scholarship.rollins.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=mls - Appendix E.

Document 2: History of Indulgences:

“In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, indulgences were not originally fundraising instruments intended for building churches. They were and are a part of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, one of seven sacraments, or rites, of the Church. They are still included in the 1983 Code of Canon Law

According to the Code of Canon Law: "An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment for sins the guilt of which has already been forgiven, which a properly disposed member of the Christian faithful obtains under certain and definite conditions with the help of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies authoritatively the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints." 3

Indulgences were offered beginning around the fourth century in exchange for works or money, including almsgiving, and the practice was widely accepted by a public that was more than willing to pay money as a way of serving their penance. Since these alms provided much of the revenue needed for crusades, and later the costs to build New St. Peter’s, the exchange of indulgences for alms, later deemed “sales,” rose in the years prior to the Reformation. It would take a ruling by the Council of Trent in December 1563 to denounce the formal sale of indulgences. 4 In the “Decree against Indulgences,” the Council states that, “all evil traffic in them (indulgences), which has been a most prolific source of abuses among the Christian people, be absolutely abolished.”5

3 Libreria Editrice Vaticana, “Code of Canon Law,” Vatican Library,
http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/__P3I.HTM

4 William Kent, “Indulgences,” In The Catholic Encyclopedia, New Advent,
http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07783a.htm

Sermon of Tetzel:
“What are you thinking about? Why do you hesitate to convert yourself? Why don't you have fears about your sins? Why don't you confess now to the vicars of our Most Holy Pope? Don't you have the example of Lawrence, who, compelled by the love of God, gave away his inheritance and suffered his body to be burned? Why do you not take the example of Bartholomew, Stephen, and of other saints who gladly suffered the most gruesome deaths for the sake and salvation of their souls? You, however, do not give up great treasures; indeed you give not even a moderate alms. They gave their bodies to be martyred, but you delight in living well and joyfully.

You priest, nobleman, merchant, wife, virgin, you married people, young person, old man, enter into your church which is for you, as I have said, St. Peter's, and visit the most holy Cross. It has been placed there for you, and it always cries and calls for you. Are you perhaps ashamed to visit the Cross with a candle and yet not ashamed to visit a tavern? Are you ashamed to go to the apostolic confessors, but not ashamed to go to a dance? Behold, you are on the raging sea of the world in storm and danger, not knowing if you will safely reach the harbor of salvation. Do you not know that everything which man has hangs on a thin thread and that all of life is but a struggle on earth? Let us then fight, as did Lawrence and the other saints, for the day it is well, but ill tomorrow. Today alive and tomorrow dead.

You should know that all who confess and in penance put alms into the coffer according to the counsel of the confessor, will obtain complete remission of all their sins. If they visit, after confession and after the Jubilee, the Cross and the altar every day they will receive that indulgence which would be theirs upon visiting in St. Peter's the seven altars, where complete indulgence is offered. Why are you then standing there? Run for the salvation of your souls! Be as careful and concerned for the salvation of your souls as you are for your temporal goods, which you seek both day and night. Seek the Lord while he may be found and while he is near. Work, as St. John says, while it it yet day, for the night comes when no man can work.”

The Sale of Indulgences in Germany

“Albert of Brandenburg (Hohenzollern) Germany (1490 -1545) became bishop of Magdeburg in 1513 and Archbishop of Mainz in 1514. In doing so, Albert unknowingly laid the groundwork for the Reformation. Albert at the time was only 24 years of age, way below the prescribed age for a bishop. A papal dispensation was required, along with a large payment, to acquire the high ecclesiastical offices. (This practice of selling a church office is called simony, and originates from Acts 8:18-24.) Needing 24,000 ducats to pay Pope Leo X in exchange for the title of Archbishop of Mainz, Albert borrowed the money from a south German banking house (The Fuggers), and then set about to pay back the loan. To raise the necessary funds, Archbishop Albert promoted the sale of indulgences for the rebuilding of St. Peter's in Rome. Half the collected funds went to Rome for the building of St. Peter's and half went into Albert's pocket. Johann Tetzel, a Dominican monk employed by Albert, sold these indulgences in Germany, prompting Martin Luther to write his disputation in 95 thesis which he posted to the door of Wittenberg Castle Church (a copy of which he also sent to Archbishop Albert), on the 31st of October 1517, thus sparking the Reformation.

Also of note, Leo X on his election as pope spent 100,000 ducats on his inauguration festival (1/7th of the Vatican treasury) and soon depleted the rest of the church's money on various forms of entertainment and parties. He was such a big spender that he was soon forced to borrow money from bankers at a 40% rate of interest. To help remedy the situation he also sold indulgences and church offices, even creating 30 new cardinals in 1517, which alone yielded some 500,000 ducats for the coffers. So Archbishop Albert was clearly following the lead of the pontiff in offering forgiveness for a price.
Among the more famous indulgences for the building of German churches were those for the construction of a tower in Vienna, 1514, for the rebuilding of the Cathedral of Constance, which had suffered great damage from fire, 1511, the building of the Dominican church in Augsburg, 1514, the restoration of the Cathedral of Treves, 1515, and the building of St. Annaberg church, 1517, in which Duke George of Saxony was much interested. One-half of the moneys received for these constructions went to Rome. In most of these cases, the Fuggers acted as agents to hold the keys of the chest and transmit the moneys to the papal exchequer. The sees of Constance, Chur, Augsburg and Strassburg were assigned as the territory in which indulgences might be sold for the cathedral in Constance. No less than four bulls of indulgence were issued in 1515 for the benefit of Treves, including one for those who visited the holy coat which was found 1512 and was to be exhibited every 7 years.

Among the noted hospitals to which indulgences were issued—that is, the right to secure funds by their sale—were hospitals in Nürnberg, 1515, Strassburg, 1518 and S. Spirito, Rome, 1516.

Both of the churches in Wittenberg were granted indulgences and a special indulgence was issued for the reliquary-museum which the elector Frederick had collected. An indulgence of 100 days was attached to each of the 5,005 specimens and another 100 to each of the 8 passages between the cases that held them. With the 8,133 relics at Halle and the 42 entire bodies, millions and billions of days of indulgence were associated, a sort of anticipation of the geologic periods moderns demand. To be more accurate, these relics were good for pardons covering 39,245,120 years and 220 days and the still further period of 6,540,000 quarantines, each of 40 days."

Document 5: Luther’s Refutation of John Eck’s Theses (Book of Concord)

10] No sins are forgiven, unless when the priest forgives, the person believes that they are forgiven him; aye, sin would remain unless he would believe that it is forgiven; for the remission of sins and the bestowal of grace are insufficient, but one must believe that sin is forgiven.

11] Trust in no way that you are absolved because of your contrition, but because of the word of Christ: "Whatsoever ye shall loose," etc. So I say, trust, if you have obtained absolution of a priest, and believe firmly that you have been absolved; and without regard to contrition, you will be truly absolved.

12] If it were possible for a person not contrite to confess, or for a priest to absolve not seriously, but in jest, and if one should, nevertheless, believe that he were absolved, he would be absolved.

13] In the sacrament of penance, or remission of guilt, the Pope or Bishop does no more than the lowest priest; aye, when there is no priest, any Christian, even a woman or a boy, would do equally well.

14] No one should answer the priest that he is contrite, neither should the priest ask it of any one.

15] Great is the error of those who come to the sacrament of the Eucharist, relying upon the fact that they have confessed; that they are not conscious of any mortal sins; that they have said their prayers and made their preparations. All these eat and drink judgment to themselves: but if they believe and trust that they will receive grace, this faith alone makes them pure and worthy.

16] It would be well for the Church, in a general council, to resolve that the laity should commune under both forms; and the Bohemians communing under both forms, are not heretics, but schismatics.

17] The treasures of the Church, from which the Pope gives indulgences, are not the merits of Christ and the saints.
Indulgences are pious frauds upon believers, and hindrances to good works, and belong to the number of those things that are lawful, and not to the number of those that are expedient. 

Indulgences do not avail, where truly received, to remit the punishment which eternal justice demands for actual sins. 

They are deceived who believe that indulgences bring salvation, and a spiritual benefit. 

Indulgences are necessary only for public crimes, and are granted properly only to the hardened and impatient. 

For six classes of men indulgences are not necessary or useful: viz., the dead, or dying, the sick, those hindered for sufficient reasons, those who have not committed crimes, those who have committed crimes, but such as are not public, and those who have reformed. 

Excommunications are only outward punishments, and do not deprive a man of the common spiritual prayers of the Church. 

Christians should be taught to love rather than fear excommunication. 

The Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter, is not the vicar of Christ, appointed by Christ himself in St. Peter's, over all the churches of the world. 

The word of Christ to Peter: "Whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth," extends only to those things which Peter himself has bound. 

It is certain that it is within the power neither of the Church nor of the Pope to frame articles of faith or commands concerning morals and good works. 

Even though the Pope, with the great part of the Church, should think so and so, and in thus doing should not err, it is still not a sin or heresy to think the contrary, especially in a matter unnecessary for salvation, until the one were rejected and the other approved by a General Council. 

**Document 6: The Debate at Leipzig – July 4, 1519**

“On the one side appeared Eck, the champion of the established religion. . . . On the other side advanced Luther, who seemed destined to reap persecution and ignominy from this struggle, but who still presented himself with a good conscience, a firm resolution to sacrifice everything in the cause of truth, and an assurance grounded in faith in God, and in the deliverance He grants to all who trust in Him. New convictions had sunk deep into his soul; they were not as yet arranged into a system; but in the heat of the combat they flashed forth like lightning. Serious and daring, he showed a resolution that made light of every obstacle. On his features might be seen the traces of the storms his soul had encountered, and the courage with which he was prepared to meet fresh tempests. These combatants, both sons of peasants, and the representatives of the two tendencies that still divide Christendom, were about to enter upon a contest on which depended, in great measure the future prospects of the State and of the Church.”
July 4, 1517 – Debate on the Pope

**Luther:** “The head of the Church militant is Christ himself, and not a man. I believe this on the testimony of God’s Word. He must reign, says Scripture, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. Let us not listen to those who banish Christ to the Church triumphant in heaven. His kingdom is a kingdom of faith. We cannot see our Head, and yet we have one.”

**Eck:** “It is from Rome, according to Saint Cyprian, that sacerdotal unity has proceeded.”

**Luther:** “For the Western Church, I grant it. But is not this same Roman Church the offspring of that of Jerusalem? It is the latter, properly speaking, that is the nursing-mother of all the churches.”

**Eck:** “Saint Jerome declares that if an extraordinary power, superior to all others, were not given to the pope, there would be in the churches as many sects as there were pontiffs.”

**Luther:** “Given, that is to say, if all the rest of believers consent to it, this power might be conceded to the chief pontiff by human right. And I will not deny, that if all the believers in the world agree in recognizing as first and supreme pontiff either the Bishop of Rome, or of Paris, or of Magdeburg, we should acknowledge him as such from the respect due to this general agreement of the Church; but that has never been seen yet, and never will be seen. Even in our own days, does not the Greek Church refuse its assent to Rome?”

**Eck:** “Well then, I will come to the point. The worthy doctor calls upon me to prove that the primacy of the Church of Rome is of Divine right. I will prove it by this expression of Christ: Thou art Peter, and on this rock will I build my Church. Saint Augustine, in one of his epistles, has thus explained the meaning of this passage ‘Thou art Peter, and on this rock (that is to say, on Peter) I will build my Church.’ It is true that in another place the same father has explained that by this rock we should understand Christ himself, but he has not retracted his former exposition.”

**Luther:** “If the reverend doctor desires to attack me, let him first reconcile these contradictions in Saint Augustine. For it is most certain that Augustine has said many times that the rock was Christ, and perhaps not more than once that it was Peter himself. But even should Saint Augustine and all the Fathers say that the Apostle is the rock of which Christ speaks, I would resist them, single-handed, in reliance upon the Holy Scriptures, that is, on Divine right; for it is written: Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Peter himself terms Christ the chief corner-stone, and a living stone on which we are built up a spiritual house.”

**Eck:** “I am surprised at the humility and modesty with which the reverend doctor undertakes to oppose, alone, so many illustrious Fathers, and pretends to know more than the sovereign pontiffs, the councils, the doctors, and the universities! . . . It would be surprising, no doubt, if God had hidden the truth from so many saints and martyrs — until the advent of the reverend father!”

**Luther:** “The Fathers are not against me. Saint Augustine and Saint Ambrose, both most excellent doctors, teach as I teach. **Super isto articulo fidei, fundata est Ecclesia**, says saint Ambrose, when explaining what is meant by the rock on which the Church is built. Let my opponent then set a curb upon his tongue. To express himself as he does, will only serve to excite contention, and not be to discuss like a true doctor.”

**Eck:** “The reverend doctor,” said he, “has come well armed into the lists. I beg your lordships to excuse me, if I do not exhibit such accuracy of research. I came here to discuss, and not to make a book.”

**Luther:** “I do not like and I never shall like a schism. Since on their own authority the Bohemians have separated from our unity, they have done wrong, even if the Divine right had pronounced in favor of their doctrines; for the supreme Divine right is charity and oneness of mind.”
**July 5, 1519  On the Authority of Church Councils or Scripture**

**Luther:** “Among the articles of faith held by John Huss and the Bohemians, there are some that are most Christian. This is a positive certainty. Here, for instance, is one: ‘That there is but one universal Church,’ and here is another: ‘It is not necessary for salvation to believe the Roman Church superior to all others.’ It is of little consequence to me whether these things were said by Wickliffe or by Huss . . . they are truth.”

**Luther:** “What! are not Gregory of Nazianzum, Basil the Great, Epiphanius, Chrysostom, and an immense number besides of Greek bishops — are they not saved? and yet they did not believe that the Church of Rome was above the other Churches! . . . It is not in the power of the Roman pontiffs to make new articles of faith. The Christian believer acknowledges no other authority than Holy Scripture. This alone is the right Divine. I beg the worthy doctor to concede that the Roman pontiffs were men, and that he will not make them gods.”

**Eck:** “The revered father is a very poor cook,” said he; “he has made a terrible hodge-podge of Greek saints and heretics; so that the odor of sanctity in the one prevents us from smelling the poison of the others.”

**Luther:** “The worthy doctor is becoming abusive. In my opinion, there can be no communion between Christ and Belial.”

**Eck:** “Reverend father, if you believe that a council, regularly assembled, can err, you are in my eyes nothing better than a heathen and a publican!”

**July 11, 1519 – On Letters of Indulgence**

**Luther:** “It was a mere joke, the dispute was ridiculous. The indulgences fell outright, and Eck was nearly of my opinion.”

**Eck:** “If I had not disputed with Doctor Martin on the papal supremacy, I should almost have agreed with him.”

**Eck:** “The reverend doctor flees from the Scriptures, as the devil from before the cross.
As for me, with all due respect to the Fathers, I prefer the authority of Holy Writ, and this test I would recommend to our judges.”

Here ended the dispute between Eck and Luther. Carlstadt and the Ingolstadt doctor kept up the discussion two days longer on human merits in good works. On the 16th of July the business was concluded, after having lasted twenty days, by a speech from the rector of the university.

**Document 8 - Martin Luther to Georg Spalatin** (advisor to Charles V):
“...In March this year, I was engaged in a discussion with my esteemed friend and fellow cleric, the learned John Eck, on the nature of the Roman Catholic Church. We debated whether the Roman pontiff possessed the power to issue indulgences, and whether these indulgences were actually efficacious in securing salvation. I was convinced that the Church's authority was derived from Scripture alone, and that any human decree could not make it binding. I am sending you some letters between me and Eck in which he boasts of having won the Olympic. I am studying the papal decretals for my debate. I whisper this in your ear, ‘I do not know whether the pope is Antichrist or his apostle, so does he in his decretals corrupt and crucify Christ, that is, the truth.’”

**Document 9: From Luther – Roland Bainton. Here I Stand. p. 83  June 1519**

“Let it be understood that even when I say the authority of the Roman pontiff rests on a human decree I am not counseling disobedience. But we cannot admit that all the sheep of Christ were committed to Peter. What, then, was given to Paul? When Christ said to Peter, ‘Feed my sheep.’ He did not mean, did he, that no one else can feed them without Peter’s permission? Nor can I agree that the Roman...”
pontiffs cannot err or that they alone can interpret Scripture. The papal decretal by a new grammar turns the words of Christ, ‘Thou art Peter into Thou art the primate.’ By the decretals the gospel is extinguished. I can hardly restrain myself against the most impious and perverse blasphemy of this decretal.”

**Document 10: Eyewitness Account Roland Bainton. *Here I Stand.* p. 87 July 1519**

“Martin is of middle height, emaciated from care and study, so that you can almost count his bones through his skin. He is in the vigor of manhood and has a clear, penetrating voice. He is learned and has the Scripture at his fingers’ ends. He knows Greek and Hebrew sufficiently to judge of the interpretations. A perfect forest of words and ideas stands at his command. He is affable and friendly, in no sense sour or arrogant. He is equal to anything. In company he is vivacious, jocose, always cheerful and gay no matter how hard his adversaries press him. Everyone chides him for the fault of being a little too insolent in his reproaches and more caustic than prudent for an innovator”

**Activities:**

**Debate:** Role play *Document 10 (Transcript of the Leipzig Debate).* In cooperative groups, ask your students to identify the most important argument on the authority of the pope by both John Eck and Martin Luther. Identify the possible consequences of a church structure that allowed for individuals to interpret the Holy Bible instead of highly educated clergy through a church council or through the pope.

Write a decision as to who won the debate and the reason for your decision.

**DBQ:**

**Critical Analysis:**

**Multiple Perspectives:**

**Assessment:**

"Luther had made the discovery that the biblical text from the Latin Vulgate, used to support the sacrament of penance, was a mistranslation. The Latin for Matthew 4:17 read penitentiam agite, ‘do penance,’ but from the Greek New Testament of Erasmus, Luther had learned that the original meant simply ‘be penitent.’ The literal sense was ‘change your mind.’ ” (Roland Bainton. *Here I Stand.* P. 67)

Matthew 4:17 – “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

**NYS Learning**

G. Reformation and Counter Reformation
1. Human and physical geography
2. Martin Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses: the challenge to the power and authority of the Roman Catholic Church
3. Anti-Semitic laws and policies
4. Henry VIII and the English Reformation
5. Calvin and other reformers
6. Counter Reformation (Ignatius Loyola, Council of Trent)
7. Roles of men and women within the Christian churches
8. Religious wars in Europe: causes and impacts

Dinner with Charles V

Erasmus
Thomas More
Martin Luther
Ulrich Zwingli
Ulrich von Hutten
John Calvin
Pope Leo X
John Eck
Cardinal Cajetan
Henry VIII