



Engaging Students with Primary Sources

Lesson Plan

Grade Levels: Elementary/Middle School

National Social Studies Themes: Culture, Time, Continuity and Change

Pennsylvania Standards: PA Academic Standards for History: 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4

PA Academic Standards for ELA: 1.5

Big Idea: A source provides information about a topic of study or interest. Sources are categorized into two groups, primary and secondary.

Essential Question: What can we learn about history by using primary sources?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to explain the difference between a primary or secondary source, by giving examples of each.
- Students will analyze a primary source, using an analysis tool.

Time Frame: 1-2 class periods, based on individual school schedules and learning objectives.

Materials Needed:

- [Examples of primary and secondary sources PowerPoint](#)
- Pencils
- Analysis worksheet – one/student or one/group - links to worksheet options are in the Lesson Plan
- Magnifying glasses – optional – one/student or one/group
- Copies of primary source photographs – one/student or one/group
 - [1910 Hershey Press advertisement](#)
 - [Chocolate Factory, 1905](#)
 - [First Hershey Bar Wrapper](#)
 - [Hershey Bears, 1936-37](#)
 - [Hershey Park, early 1900s](#)

- [High Point Mansion](#)
- [Hershey's Kiss Wrapping](#)
- [MSH Postage Stamp](#)
- [MSH Birthday Party Invitation](#)
- [MSH Passport](#)
- [MSH with students](#)
- [White Star Line cancelled check](#)

Lesson:

Part 1: Introduction

A selection of examples of primary and secondary sources could be made available, as examples in addition to the examples in the Power Point. Examples of primary sources might include a driver's license, family photos, a journal, an artifact. Secondary sources might include a few books, a magazine, a podcast.

Use slides 1-6 to introduce primary and secondary sources.

Background for teacher:

What is a source? A source provides information about a topic being studied or that one might be curious about. Sources allow you to explore and understand more about people, places, things and events. Sources can be written, such as letters and books or non-written, such as artifacts or objects and photographs. Sources are categorized into two types, primary and secondary.

A primary source is anything that was created during the time an event took place. Primary sources give direct or first-hand evidence about people and events. Examples of primary sources are letters, diaries, photographs, speeches and artifacts.

A secondary source is written by someone after an event took place. Secondary sources are one step removed from the event and describe facts and present information about the event. Secondary sources evaluate, interpret, or analyze primary sources and other secondary sources. Examples of secondary sources are books, journal articles, textbooks, websites and podcasts.

Part 2: Activity/Lesson

Project slide 7, (Analyze a primary source) which is an example of a primary source. Let students sit with the image for a few minutes, to observe the details, without discussing anything. Lead an analysis, using the questions on the side of the slide. As an alternative, the slide might be copied and students could work in pairs to analyze the photograph. Adding magnifying glasses, if available, so they can really look at details, is helpful. Pairs can turn and talk with another group, to share their thinking.

“The first few times you ask students to work with primary sources, and whenever you have not worked with primary sources recently, model careful document analysis using the worksheets. Point out that the steps are the same each time, for every type of primary source:” *

1. **Meet the document.**
2. **Observe its parts.**
3. **Try to make sense of it.**
4. **Use it as historical evidence.**

[*National Archives - Educators Resources](#)

Lesson Day 2:

Review the difference between primary and secondary sources. Have students give examples of each, to check their understanding.

Students will use a primary source analysis tool to analyze a source either independently or working with a partner.

Links to Primary Source Analysis tools:

*These tools are created by the National Archives and are reproducible.

[Analyze a photo - Elementary Students](#)

[Analyze a photo - Middle Grade Students](#)

[Analyze a document - Elementary Students](#)

[Analyze a document -Middle Grade Students](#)

[Analyze an artifact - Elementary Students](#)

[Analyze an artifact - Middle Grade Students](#)

[Analyzing Primary Sources - Library of Congress analysis tool](#)

To extend thinking for middle grade students:

[Understanding perspective in primary sources](#)

From the Library of Congress:

<https://www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/>

“Inquiry into primary sources encourages students to wrestle with contradictions and compare multiple sources that represent differing points of view, confronting the complexity of the past.

Encourage students to speculate about each source, its creator, and its context.

- What was happening during this time period?
- What was the creator’s purpose in making this primary source?
- What does the creator do to get his or her point across?
- What was this primary source’s audience?
- What biases or stereotypes do you see?

Ask if this source agrees with other primary sources, or with what the students already know.”

Lesson Conclusion:

After the students complete their analysis sheets, they will share their thinking. This might be done as a whole class, or groups that had the same primary source might share their thinking first, and then each of these larger groups will report out about their analysis.

Part 3: Assessment

Teacher will observe student conversations as they analyze their primary source, to check for understanding about the importance of using primary sources to extend our thinking about historical events and artifacts.