

Creating a Secondary Source

GRADES 6-12



Overview

This activity is geared toward participants in grades 6-12. The estimated amount of time to deliver this lesson is 60 minutes.

A secondary source of information is a source created by someone who did not experience or participate in the events being researched. These sources are generally created by extracting information from primary sources with the purpose of interpreting a historical event or period. In this lesson, participants will look through multiple sources of information, including oral histories, written documents and photographs. Participants will then create a secondary source focusing on a particular research question using information from multiple sources.



Objective

Participants will be able to identify considerations one should take when extracting information from primary sources to create a secondary source.



Materials

- Large photograph for introduction
- Packets of primary sources grouped together by theme - may want up to three copies of each packet of materials
- Analyzing Multiple Sources Worksheet (1 per participant)
- Sets of highlighters/colored pencils for students



Set Up

Identify a large image to show the whole group for the initial activity. When choosing an image, it is best to select one participants are not familiar with or a lesser known photograph associated with a famous event. Each participant should have a packet of primary sources to look through during the group activity and highlighters or colored pencils. Primary source packets could be identified by the facilitator or generated by participants in advance.

 **Inquiry**

Present a large image in front of the whole group and ask participants to write down as much as possible about the image within the time allotted (two to three minutes). After participants have had time to collect details about the image, remove it from sight. Ask three participants to then share exactly what they wrote, even if the participant before said something similar. Ask the rest of the group to identify commonalities and differences in these three descriptions. Then, ask them why these descriptions or accounts may have differed.

 **Investigation**

Ask participants:

- Why might the accounts from different people vary?

Discuss the idea of bias and perspective to the group and the role of historians in analyzing primary sources. Separate participants into groups of three or four. Have them identify a set of primary sources they would like to explore. Share packets of materials with groups. These sources can be distributed via packet. Provide time for participants to skim through the documents and begin to determine themes.

 **Activity**

Have participants develop the questions they have into research questions. Examples include: “What were public attitudes around ___?” “How did ___ feel about ___?” Encourage participants to use the Analyzing Multiple Sources worksheet and “Steps for Analyzing Multiple Sources” to find evidence that might answer their question while identifying potential bias.

Steps for analyzing multiple sources

1. Identify what events occurred according to the oral history account. (Use the 5 W's as a guideline: Who, What, When, Where and Why)
2. Look through other sources and highlight (or underline in colored pencil) similar information or information that may provide context for information from another source.
3. Repeat with all other accounts on the same topic, highlighting again.
4. Refer to background/biographical information of subjects. Determine how their background could lead to a different description or recollection of the event.
5. Write a summary of the event based on what information is common and the most reputable.

Now tell participants that since they collected information, it is now their job as historians to let people know what happened during these events. Have participants develop and present their findings through an essay, slide show presentation, website, exhibition, timeline, or fictional journal.

- What information did you include in your secondary sources? Why?
- What information did you NOT include in your secondary sources? Why?
- What is challenging about this process?
- What could potential next steps be as a historian?



Lesson Connection

See our lesson, **Analyzing Oral Histories**, for content on how historians can use oral history interviews to learn about the past.



Background

Although two or more people may experience or witness the same event, their accounts may differ based on their backgrounds, point of view, knowledge on the topic, memory and many

other factors. For example, one participant may not like an element of a photograph, so they may respond to the picture in a different way from another with a more positive take.

One's experiences can lead to both implicit and explicit bias in their interpretations of an event. Bias is a way of thinking in which only one side of a story is told, which may lead to false impressions. Bias can also be interpreted as prejudice in favor of or against a person, group, or idea. Bias can be found in all primary sources since the people that create them all have different backgrounds and experiences that shape how they view the world. As we analyze a primary source, our own perspectives impact how we interpret information from it.

One of many factors that historians have to consider as they review and analyze different primary sources is any perceived bias and determine the facts based on these accounts. Having several accounts on the same topic makes this easier, but this involves finding common information. If any information stated as fact differs, historians must determine what information is reliable or not.



Additional Resources/References

For access to primary source documents:

<http://docsteach.org/>

<https://www.fold3.com/>

<http://dp.la/>



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Documents and Images

STEPS FOR ANALYZING MULTIPLE SOURCES

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3. Repeat with all other accounts on the same topic, highlighting again.
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ACTIVITY: ANALYZING MULTIPLE SOURCES

Directions: Fill in the chart as you look through three different primary sources on the same topic. Identify any information similar to the other accounts, any information unique to that account and any potential bias.

Source	Unique Information	How might author's perspective impact content	Similar information