

An Engaged Citizenry: Using Primary Sources in Civics and Government

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Primary sources

- A **primary source** is an original object or document -- the raw material or first-hand information

Secondary sources

- A **secondary source** is something written about a primary source.

Some examples of primary sources include:

1. Books, magazine and newspaper articles published at the time
2. Hand-written documents like diaries and journals
3. Maps
4. Laws & court cases
5. Speeches, interviews, letters
6. Memoirs and autobiographies
7. literary manuscripts
8. Records of government agencies
9. Records of organizations
10. Public opinion polls
11. Fiction from a particular time and place
12. Research data
13. Religious or philosophical texts
14. Artifacts of all kinds: physical objects, furniture, tools, clothing, etc.
15. Photographs, audio recordings, movies and videos
16. Art, including paintings, prints and other media

See also:

<http://www.tennessee.gov/tsla/educationoutreach/PrimarySourceLessons1.pdf>

Why Use Primary Sources?

- 1. Engage students**
- 2. Develop critical thinking skills**
- 3. Construct knowledge**

When trying to gather evidence from a primary source:

first try to answer these basic questions.

1. What is it?
2. Who wrote or made it?
3. When was it written or made?
4. Where was it written or made?
5. How was it written or made?
6. What evidence does this source contribute to my research?

then ask, what is the meaning of this primary source?

1. Why was this document/object written or made?
2. Who was the intended audience/user?
3. What questions does this source raise? What don't we know about this source?
4. What other information do we have about this document or object?
5. What other sources are like this one?
6. What other sources might help answer our questions about this one?
7. What else do we need to know in order to understand the evidence in this source?
8. What have others said about this or similar sources?
9. How does this source help me to answer my research question?
10. How does evidence from this source alter or fit into existing interpretations of the past?

Suggested Methods for Integrating Primary Sources

1. Focus Activity
2. Brainstorming Activity
3. Visualization Exercise
4. Project Inspiration
5. Dramatic Presentation Activity
6. Writing Activity
7. Listening Activity
8. Creating a Documentary
9. Cross-Curricular Activity
10. Current Events Activity (What is Past is Prologue)
11. Drawing Connections Activity
12. Integrating Geography Activity
13. Small Group Hypothesis Activity
14. Self-reflective Exercise

Recommended resources

On Primary Sources

<http://www.tennessee.gov/tsla/educationoutreach/PrimarySourceLessons1.pdf>

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/>

<http://www.archives.gov/education/research/>

<http://www.archives.gov/nae/education/pdf/resources-from-national-archives.pdf>

<http://www.ala.org/rusa/sections/history/resources/pubs/usingprimarysources/>

Multiple Intelligences

<http://literacynet.org/mi/assessment/findyourstrengths.html>

Authentic Assessment

<http://jfmuller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/index.htm>

Smithsonian Folkways

www.folkways.si.edu

Life in a jar: The Irena Sendler Project

www.irenasendler.org/new-gallery/index.asp

Holocaust Survivors and Their Testimonies

<http://www.ushmm.org/research/collections/resourcecenter/testimony/>