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Introduction

What Are Primary Sources?

Every day, people create and use items that leave clues about their lives and about the workings of governments or businesses. These items include personal papers, letters, notes, oral accounts, diaries, maps, recipes, photographs, reports, novels, poetry, stories (written and spoken), artifacts, coins, stamps, drawings, handiwork, newspapers, books, government documents, business documents, and many others.



Figure 1.1

The contents of Abraham Lincoln's pockets on the night of his assassination, April 14, 1865
Source: The Library of Congress

The Historical Record

Historians call this evidence the historical record. Though it is great in scope, the historical record gives us but a tiny glimpse into the past. Much evidence was never documented or has been lost or destroyed. However, the people who have been interested in history have purposefully left resources such as journals, diaries, autobiographies, recorded family trees, personal letters, and business papers. Historians use all possible resources available, which include both primary and secondary sources, to answer questions about the past.



What Is a Primary Source?

Primary sources are part of direct personal experiences of a time or event. They are original items or records that have survived from the past, such as clothing, letters, photographs, and manuscripts. The photograph above (Figure 1.1) shows a primary source from the night of President Abraham Lincoln's assassination in 1865.

What Is a Secondary Source?

Secondary sources may have been created immediately after or long after an event took place. These sources document or analyze someone else's experience. They provide a perspective or a description of past events. The resources students use in a typical school environment, such as history textbooks or encyclopedias, are secondary sources written long after the historical events they describe took place. The newspaper to the left (Figure 1.2) is an example of a secondary source from the Civil War Era.

Figure 1.2

*The Daily Citizen—Vicksburg, Mississippi,
Thursday, July 2, 1863*
Source: The Library of Congress

Overview

The old cliché that “a picture is worth a thousand words” certainly applies to using prints, photographs, paintings, illustrations, and engravings as primary sources in the classroom. Students are drawn to pictures and the stories they reveal. Certain historical pictures stay in the public mind. Little John Kennedy saluting his father’s casket as it passed by is a photograph that captures the emotions of a nation. Old photographs remind us of where we have been.

This photograph of Flagstaff, Arizona, (Figure 2.1) in the late 1800s is a reminder of a very different lifestyle—one totally foreign to residents of that city today.

Below (Figure 2.2) is the portrait of a proud immigrant couple dressed in their finest clothing. This links us to people who left one world behind them to discover a new world of opportunity.



Figure 2.1

Flagstaff, Arizona

Source: The National Archives

Prints, drawings, photographs, paintings, and illustrations are some of the first primary sources that young children study. Children have early experiences with picture books that require them to respond to different pages full of images. Parents and teachers ask children questions about what they see. How many fish are in this picture? Why is that little boy crying? Therefore, it naturally follows that even young children can study and appreciate primary source images. In a similar, yet more sophisticated fashion, middle school through university students can also be engaged in examining “picture” primary sources.

This chapter discusses teaching strategies for using photos, paintings, and prints in the classroom. The chapter lists some generic ideas, provides more detailed examples and strategies as the chapter progresses, and ends with three model lessons. The chapter divides the picture primary sources into subsets. Paintings are divided into two categories: general paintings and painted portraits. Photographs are also divided into categories: strong focal-point photographs; photographs with multiple elements; landscapes and waterscapes; photographs of architectural structures; photographic portraits; and photographs of artifacts. The chapter also discusses prints.



Figure 2.2

Mediterranean immigrants

Source: The Burton Family

Locating Paintings, Photographs, and Prints

Family, school, and newspaper photos are quick and easy choices to use in the classroom. Students can analyze the different parts of photos and draw conclusions. Students can study prints and paintings in art books and in other secondary sources. To use a variety of historical photographs, paintings, and prints, teachers need to gain access to collections in museums, county or state archives, national institutions, and presidential libraries. Online resources at the National Archives, the Library of Congress, numerous historic museums, state archives, and presidential libraries offer so many options that a teacher's most difficult task will be wading through all the possibilities to make selections. (See pages 171–172 for further information about online options.)

Getting Started

Exposing students to historical photos and prints at an early age and on a regular basis prepares them to handle these items appropriately on future tests and to understand how to examine clues from the past. Primary sources become interesting and even fun to use and examine. They are not just something confusing to study a few weeks before an exam. To begin the process of studying primary source images, use examples from the everyday lives of students:

1. Ask younger children to bring in a few photos to share and post. Explain to them that the photos they brought are primary sources and that some day their children and grandchildren will be interested in how the people in those pictures lived, dressed, and acted. Share some photos you have brought from your childhood, and let the students discuss ways your photos may be different from theirs. Have students imagine what their grandchildren might ask about these photos.
2. Hold up examples of students' artwork and share with them that they have created primary sources—original works that could become part of an archive collection. As students peruse portfolios of their own work, explain that they are really viewing a collection of original work that would be of interest to them or their families in the future.
3. Share a book of artistic prints with the class and let students discuss the pictures. Tell the class that they are looking at primary source prints that were reproduced (copied) and made into books for sale. The artists made original sketches and/or prints, which are the original primary sources, just as the students' pictures are original.
4. Choose a vivid historic picture to share with your students, and let them discuss what they see in the photograph. For example, ask them how the picture of the American Indian family (Figure 2.3) on the following page is similar to their family and how it is different from their family. Ask them why they think the photograph was taken.

Locating Paintings, Photographs, and Prints *(cont.)*

General Questions and Activities

In these pages, many strategies for using photographs, prints, or paintings will be described, illustrated, and detailed. However, to begin teaching with primary sources, select from this set of generic prompts. Choose the prompts that suit the images and ages of your students.

- What type of picture is this? (photograph, painting, print, portrait, engraving)
- What is the style of the picture? (landscape, group picture, historical scene, portrait, graphic design, still life)
- Describe the people or objects in the picture.
- Describe the setting.
- Describe the activity (action) in the picture.
- What things in this picture are familiar to you—things you already know about?
- What things in this picture are unfamiliar to you—things you do not know about or understand?
- What questions do you have about this picture?
- How could you find the answers to your questions?
- What are two inferences you could make about this picture?
- Why was this photograph taken, picture painted, or print designed?
- What is the point of view of the photographer or artist?
- Why is this image historically important?



Figure 2.3

American Indian family

Source: Denver Public Library, Charles Nast

Locating Paintings, Photographs, and Prints *(cont.)*

General Questions and Activities *(cont.)*

Here are some general activities to use when students study photographs, prints, or paintings. Choose the activities that fit the images and ages of your students.

- **Divided Image**

This is an activity that will be suggested often in this book. First, divide the picture into four sections or two parts to make it easier to examine. Then, have students list everything they see in their assigned sections of the picture.

- **Column List**

Make a three-column list of the people, objects, and activities in the picture.

- **Point of View**

Write about the picture from the point of view of one of the people or objects in the picture.

- **Caption Writing**

Write a detailed caption for the picture.

- **Prequel/Sequel Writing**

Write what you think happened before or after the picture.

- **Dialogue**

Write a conversation between two people or objects in the picture.

- **News Writing**

Write a newspaper story about the picture.

- **Compare and Contrast**

Design a two-column chart for students to compare or contrast elements in the picture or to compare or contrast two whole pictures.

Model Lessons and Activities

In the final pages of this chapter, three model lessons are provided for using paintings, photographs, and prints. The first lesson is for grades K–3, the second lesson is for grades 4–8, and the final lesson is for grades 9–12. Each lesson provides an image, teaching strategies, and student activity sheet or graphic organizer.

Photograph Model Lesson for Grades K–3



Figure 2.26

Home sewing business

Source: The Library of Congress

Model Lessons and Activities *(cont.)*

Photograph Model Lesson for Grades K–3 *(cont.)*

The photo of the home sewing business (Figure 2.26) is an appropriate photo for this age of students to study because it focuses on the everyday life of another generation—a topic of interest to students in these grade levels. This photo also has a portrait-like quality.

Objectives

- Students will develop an understanding that children 100 years ago frequently spent much of their time involved in work that helped their family survive.
- Students will compare and contrast the lifestyles of this family with their own families.

Teaching Strategies

1. Provide groups of students a copy of the photo on page 35 (Figure 2.26). This photograph is also provided on the CD for your use (filename: sewing.jpg). Let the groups talk for three to five minutes about the photo and share ideas about what they think is happening. Ask each group to share their ideas about the photo with the class.
2. Explain to the students the background of this photo. This is photo of a family-based sewing business 100 years ago. All four members of this family are working on pieces of material. A company that manufactures clothing gave them these piece goods. These pieces of material were different parts of clothing—sleeves, ruffles, pockets, trim, and cording. When they finished sewing their parts for the clothing, they sent those pieces back to the factory to be made into clothes.
3. Ask the students questions about the people, setting, and activity in the photograph. Here are some examples of types of questions to use with this photograph and other photographs of children from the past.
 - What kind of clothes are the children wearing?
 - Do the clothes look like work clothing or their best clothing?
 - Why do you think they got all dressed up for this photo?
 - How are their clothes different from your clothes?
 - Why did someone take this picture?
 - What do you think each child is doing?
 - Describe the apartment.
4. Give students the graphic organizer (page 37). This graphic organizer can be adjusted to any primary source lesson that requires students to compare living conditions or clothing in a photo with their own living conditions or clothing. Younger students will need someone to help them write what they want to say, while second and third graders should be able to fill in each section of the graphic organizer. Discuss in class what the students have written. Help them understand that children long ago were frequently expected to work to help the family survive and had few toys and no electrical gadgets.

Model Lessons and Activities *(cont.)*

Photograph Model Lesson for Grades K–3 *(cont.)*

Name _____

Comparing My Life with the Lives of Children 100 Years Ago

Their Life	My Life
Their clothes	My clothes
Their living room	My living room/family room
Their chores	My chores
How they spent their day	How I spend my day