

Primary Sources

What is a Primary Source?

Primary sources are sources of information—the raw materials of history—created by people who actually participated in or witnessed events of the past.

First person accounts. . .

- oral histories
- diaries
- memoirs

Documents. . .

- maps
- old school attendance records
- treaties
- immigration/citizenship papers
- laws, legal documents
- yearbooks
- military service records
- award certificates, diplomas
- birth, death records
- minutes of meetings
- tax records
- report cards
- wills
- blueprints
- letters
- driver's license

Physical artifacts which reflect the period in which they were made and used. . .

- furniture
- clothing
- buildings
- household items
- tools

Scientific Data which has been collected but NOT interpreted. . .

- census data
- population statistics
- weather records
- production/manufacturing systems data

- air quality measures
- animal migration patterns

Using primary sources, you will learn to. . .

- interpret, clarify, analyze, and evaluate various types of documents and artifacts
- recognize bias and points of view
- separate fact and fiction and learn how it relates to establishing a historical record
- formulate opinions, draw conclusions, and understand the possibility of multiple interpretations
- show cause and effect
- analyze and interpret raw data
- apply generalizations and theories in books, television and other media while recognizing and weighing the limitations of those media
- recognize your own personal biases and prejudices and how these can influence your interpretations of primary sources
- develop and gain confidence in your ability to acquire information and knowledge