



## Introduction to Primary and Secondary Sources for Elementary and Middle School Students

**Objectives:** This is a skill-based lesson that is intended to introduce a wide range of students to the world of primary sources and how to work and think critically like a historian. Students will work individually and in groups to learn about the difference between primary and secondary sources, apply their knowledge with an interactive group component, and practice analyzing and extracting information from a primary source. Unlike other history/social studies lessons, this particular lesson was developed to teach and hone skills rather than content area knowledge.

**Introduction for Teachers and Students:** When people study history they learn about events using books, documents, and even listening to TV or hearing about it from people that witnessed the event. All of these are known as *sources*. Every source provides information about a historic event. There are two kinds of sources; primary and secondary.

A primary source is an original record of an event, produced by the person or people that participated or witnessed the event. Most primary sources are produced during or immediately after a historic event, such as photographs, letters or newspaper articles. But, other primary sources were produced much later, such as an oral history interview, or an autobiography. Some primary sources tell their story with written words, some with sounds, and other visually. Each of these primary sources has the potential to tell a story, or at least part of a story. It is up to historians and students to interpret these sources to better understand an event.

A secondary source is also a record of an event, but with one key difference: Secondary sources are summaries of information taken from primary sources, such as the information found in school text books. The information in history text books was created after those events occurred, and it uses information gathered from other sources (both primary and secondary) to tell you about an event.

Does this mean that secondary sources are bad? No! Secondary sources can provide lots of information about an event, but primary sources are best for learning detailed information about that same event. It is the difference between reading a text book paragraph about the Boston Tea Party, and reading a letter written by someone that helped throw the tea overboard. In fact, many historians and researchers will use secondary sources to learn about a topic before they start using primary sources to learn even more.

Why should we use primary sources when secondary sources already tell us the answers? Because learning how to use primary sources makes better students! Primary sources require students to think critically, ask more questions, form their own answers, and learn more about the people that were directly involved with historic events. Instead of just learning the *what* and *when*, primary sources allow us to learn more about *why* and *how* historic events occurred.

### **Required Materials and Resources:**

Computer and Printer

Glue sticks or tape

**Time Required:** This lesson is designed to be delivered over two one hour classes.

**Part I:** Introduction, group reading, discussion, group activity, presentations – 40 minutes.

**Part II:** Introduction and discussion, primary source worksheet and analysis of Raincross patent – 40 minutes.

### **Direct Instruction:**

#### **Part I:**

1. Review and familiarize yourself with the introduction for students and teachers.
2. Engage your class with questions to determine what they already know about sources of information, learn vocabulary and key terms/phrases, and provoke thought about *how* history works. Some suggested guiding questions:
  - a. If you wanted to learn about history, where would you go? Would you read something? Watch a movie or TV show? Go online? Ask your parents or grandparents?
  - b. What is a historian? What do they do?
  - c. Does anybody know how historians write history books? Where do you think they get their information from?
  - d. What is a “source?” Can you use the word in a sentence?
  - e. Who can define “primary?” Who can define “secondary?”
  - f. What do you know about the Mission Inn, its history, and famous/historic visitors?  
*Briefly discuss the founder of the hotel, Frank A. Miller and his connections to Riverside. More information about Miller can be found through the Mission Inn Museum website [here](#).*
3. Distribute copies of the Student Introduction to Primary Sources and select students to read the text out loud. The document can be downloaded [here](#).
4. After the class reading, divide the class into groups of 2-4 students and distribute page one of the Primary Source Worksheet to each group. The worksheet (with instructions) can be downloaded [here](#).
  - a. Read and review the Amelia Earhart worksheet and historic context with students.
  - b. Cut out the primary/secondary source examples on page 2 of the worksheet, and give each group one primary and one secondary source example. *Multiple copies may need to be printed depending on class size.*
    - i. **Alternate activity for high achieving/GATE classes:** Print additional source samples and remove the source designators from the. Give each group multiple, random sources (i.e., they may have 3 primary sources and 1 secondary, instead of 1 of each).
  - c. Ask groups to discuss their sources, determine which is primary and which is secondary, and glue/tape their examples to the correct position on the worksheet.
  - d. After all examples have been attached, have groups report out and defend their choices. What sources did they receive? Which one is primary and which one is secondary? Why did they choose to define a particular source as secondary or primary?

## Part II:

1. As an anticipatory set, explain to students that today they will be doing work just like professional historians. Historians often have to solve mysteries that they encounter during their research, and this document is one that was discovered in the Mission Inn Museum archives several years ago. It is a very important piece of Riverside history! Students will be working individually with a copy of the Raincross patent, an iconic symbol of the City of Riverside and the Mission Inn that most Riverside students will recognize.
2. Distribute one copy of the Mission Inn Museum Primary Source Analysis Guide, available [here](#), and one copy of Raincross patent, available [here](#), to each student.
3. Guide students through the worksheet and analysis process and provide assistance as needed:
  - a. **Column 1** asks students to glance at their primary source, and to extract and gather familiar information. Assist students by providing hints: *Does the top of the document look like money? What names (people or places) do you see? Any names that you heard during yesterday's assignment?*
  - b. **Column 2** asks students to summarize and analyze their document. Some of the language can be tricky, so students may need extra guidance in understanding portions of the source: *If this was a letter that you received, what is it telling you? Why do you think this was made, and what was its purpose?*
  - c. **Column 3** asks students to think about where they could go to get answers they can't solve on their own.
4. **Digital enhancement opportunity:** If students have access to the internet via laptops or tablets, they can research key terms, phrases, and names discovered during the lesson.

### Optional Academic Tools:

1. Word Bank:

#### Tier II

Primary	Secondary
Source	Summary
Oral History	Autobiography
Historian	Researcher

### Standards

#### California Common Core Standards for English Language Arts, Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, Grades K-5

- **Grade 4**
  - **Reading Standards for Informational Text: Key Ideas and Details #1:** *Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text. Key Ideas and Details #3:* *Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text. Craft and Structure #4:* *Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text relevant to a grade 4 topic or subject area.*
  - **Speaking and Listening Standards: Comprehension and Collaboration #1:** *Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-*

led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. **Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas #4:** Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

- **Grade 5**

- **Reading Standards for Informational Text: Key Ideas and Details #2:** Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text. **Craft and Structure #4:** Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 5 topic or subject area.
- **Speaking and Listening Standards: Comprehension and Collaboration #1:** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. **Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas #4:** Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

#### **Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects 6–12**

- **Grade 6-8 Students**

- **Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies: Key Ideas and Details #1:** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources. **Key Ideas and Details #2:** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions. **Craft and Structure #4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- **College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration #1:** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. **Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas #4:** Present claims and findings (e.g., argument, narrative, informative, response to literature presentations), sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details and nonverbal elements to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation. **Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas #6:** Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate. (See grade 6 Language standards 1 and 3 for specific expectations.)