

Primary Source Analysis

In order to fully understand a primary source, you will want to identify it, contextualize it, explore it, analyze it, and evaluate it. You will not have to answer *every* question; this is just a guide to help you define your research.

1. Identify the source.

- How might the answer to these questions affect the source's validity?
 - What is the type of the source?
 - Newspaper, oral history account, photograph, letter, government document, etc.
 - Who created this source, and what do I know about him/her/them?
 - Could this source be biased; if so, how?
 - When was the source produced?
 - Where was the source produced?

2. Contextualize the source.

- What do you know about the *historical context* for this source?
- What do I know about how the creator of this source fits into that historical context?
- Why did the person who created the source do so?
 - Was this a private document? Were others intended to view it? Who was the audience? Was the author attempting to persuade? Does it seem as if the author "bent the truth" at all? Etc.

3. Explore the source.

- What factual information is displayed in this source?
- What opinions are related in this source?
- What is conveyed or implied unintentionally in the source?
 - You may be able to infer certain unstated beliefs from *criticism* of a particular policy, group, person, etc.
- What is not said in this source?
 - Are there any glaringly obvious points of view, perspectives, or factual information that were left out of this source? Why might that be?
- What is surprising or interesting about the source?
- What do I not understand in this source?

4. Analyze the source.

- How does the creator of the source convey information and make his/her point?
 - Was there any sarcasm used? Logical arguments? Guilt or other emotional manipulation?
- How is the world described in the source different from my world?
- How might others at the time have reacted to this source?

5. Evaluate the source.

- How does this source compare to other primary sources?
- How does this source compare to other secondary sources?
- What do you believe and disbelieve from this source?
- What do you still not know -- and where can you find that information?

My notes:

What collections might I use for this project?

What questions do I still have?