

**WHAT TYPES OF SOURCES DO
HISTORIANS USE?**

Grade 7, Unit 1, Lesson 4

Types of Sources

- **When Historians study an event, they use sources related to the event**
- **Historians classify the sources they use in two categories called:**
 - Primary Sources
 - Secondary Sources

Primary Sources

Characteristics

- **Firsthand information about an event**
- **Includes words, images, or objects created by persons *directly involved* in an event**
- **Do not include historian's analysis or interpretation of the sources**

Examples:

- **Physical/Material remains:** buildings, roads, tools, weapons, coins, tapestries, pottery, battle sites, clothing
- **Geographic records:** maps, charts, place names
- **Visual records:** drawings/paintings, photographs
- **Written records:** letters, diaries, memos, laws, books, reports, trials, public meetings, inscriptions on buildings, receipts, email

Checking Your Understanding

Imagine you are a historian who wants to know what American Middle School students learned in school from 1950-2000. Which of the following would be considered **Primary Sources**?

- Interviews with people who went to middle schools or taught middle school in the 1980s
- State laws about education requirements in the 1970s
- A report written by a historian in 2010
- Textbooks used in schools in the 1960s

Secondary Sources

Characteristics

- **Contain second hand information**
- **Created by people who were not eyewitnesses to the event**
- **Descriptions of events that include analysis or interpretation of primary sources to describe a past event**

Examples:

- A written analysis of old firsthand interviews about an event
- A book that describes an event written many years after the event

Checking Your Understanding

Imagine you are a historian who wants to know what American Middle School students learned in school from 1950-2000. Which of the following would be considered **Secondary Sources**?

- An interview with the neighbor of a person who was a middle school teacher in the 1950s
- An article written in 2010 about middle school in 1960s
- A final exam from a social studies class in 1980
- A textbook about the history of middle school education

Look At the Usage of the Source

The difference between a Primary Source and Secondary Source is **how the historian uses the source.**

- For example, when studying what students learned in middle school from 1950 to 2000 a textbook used in that time period is a Primary Source—it's firsthand material.
- A textbook is also a Secondary Source about the events written about in the textbook—it explains events long after they happened.

Comparing Sources Activity

What are the differences between these two sources?

- If you were studying factory life in Britain between 1800 and 1851, would these both be “primary sources?” One? None? Briefly explain.
- Which of these two accounts makes factory working conditions seem more real to you? Why?
- Which of the accounts is probably more reliable? Why?
 - Do you think that Edward Cheyney used testimony like Elizabeth Bentley’s to write his account? Why or why not?
- Historians do not include everything in their accounts. How do you think Mr. Cheyney decided what to include? What do you think made something important enough to include in Cheyney’s account?

Which Source Are Best?

- **A primary source is not necessarily better than a secondary source because not all primary sources are of equal value in helping a historian study an event.**
- **How does a historian decided which sources are the most accurate when studying an event?**
- **A Historian does three things when examining a source:**
 1. Distinguishes between Facts and Opinions
 2. Checks for Internal Consistency or Contradictions
 3. Checks for External Consistency or Contradictions
 - Corroboration

Fact or Opinion

- A fact is something that is true about a subject and can be tested or proven
 - Look for clues such as: *" 56% of.... "*, or *"The President attended... "*
- An opinion is what someone thinks about that subject.
 - Look for clues such as: *"I believe..."*, *"It's obvious..."*, or *"They should..."*
- Which part of the following statement is fact? Which part is opinion? How do you know?
 - **Records show that most middle schools require students to take social studies; however, they should also require foreign languages.**

Internal Inconsistencies or Contradictions

- **Internal** - Within a single document
- **Contradiction** - the facts presented cannot all be true; they clash with each other
- **Inconsistency** - the facts are presented differently, which may raise questions about the source's accuracy
- **Which might be less accurate? Why?**
 - A diary entry states that John went to school on Monday, and then later says that John and Mary went to school on Monday.
 - A diary says that John went to school on Monday, and then later states that John never went to school.

External Inconsistencies or Contradictions

- **External** - When comparing multiple documents
- **Contradictions** – facts in the two sources are at odds with each other and both cannot be true
- **Inconsistency** – factual details are presented differently, which may raise questions about each sources' accuracy
- **Which is less accurate?**
 1. A diary entry states that John went to school on Monday. An interview with another student indicates that John and Mary went to school on Monday.
 2. A diary says that John went to school on Monday, but school attendance records show that John never went to school.