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Researching with Primary Sources



NATIONAL HISTORY DAY IN MISSOURI

Steps

- Getting Organized for Research
- Selecting a Topic
- Background reading for context
- Narrowing your topic
- **Gathering and Recording information**
- **Analyzing and Interpreting Sources**
- Developing a thesis
- Creating and refining a History Day project

Primary and Secondary Sources

- Encyclopedias, children's books, magazines, newspaper articles, textbooks, history books, historical journal articles, newspapers
- Local or state historical societies, local museums or historic sites, local libraries, local history books, history books on a specific topic
- Google and Wikipedia?
- Online research databases
- People (eye-witnesses)



Primary sources

- Written: diaries, letters, books, articles, certificates, journals, newspapers, government documents
- Artifacts: physical remains, maps, photographs, art, tools, everyday objects, museum artifacts, buildings, historic sites
- Recordings: Video, film, audio
- Personal Interviews: In-person, over the phone, email

Primary sources

Ask your sources questions

- **Meet the document.**
 - **Observe its parts.**
 - **Try to make sense of it.**
 - **Use it as historical evidence.**
-
- <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets>
 - <https://www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/>



Analyze a Written Document



Meet the document.

Are there any special markings on the document? Circle all that apply.



STAMP



POSTMARK



HANDWRITTEN
NOTE



OFFICIAL
SEAL



SPECIAL
LETTERHEAD



OTHER

Is it handwritten or typed?



Write down any words that you don't know.
Then look up the definitions.



Try to make sense of it.

What is the main idea of the document?

List two quotes (words from the document)
that help support the main idea.

Why do you think this document was written?

Observe its parts.

Who wrote this document?

What is the date of the document?

Who read or received this document?



Use it as historical evidence.

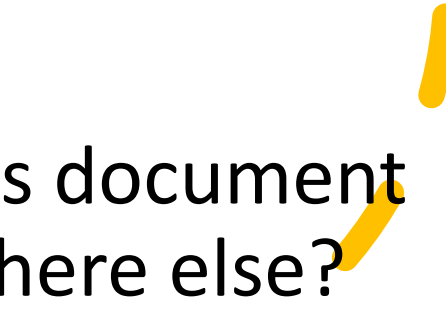
Where do you think you could find out more information about
the persons who wrote or received this document?

Where do you think you could find out more information about this event?

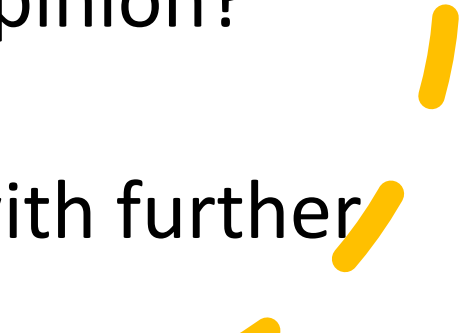



Analyze

Primary sources

- What is it talking about?
 - Write one sentence summarizing this document
 - Why did the author write it?
 - What was happening at the time in history this document was created?
 - What did you find out from this document that you might not learn anywhere else?
- 

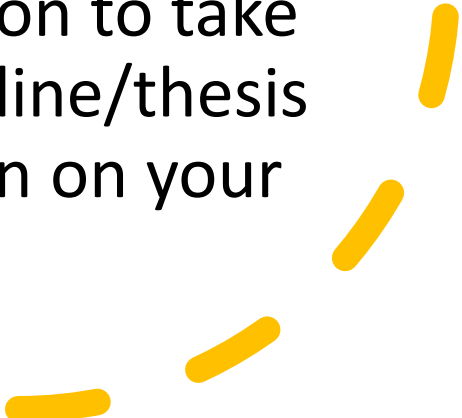
Primary sources


- What other documents or historical evidence are you going to use to help you understand this event or topic?
 - If you could ask the author questions about this document, what would they be?
 - Whose side was the author on? Can you find a source showing a different opinion?
 - Is it true? Verify information with further research
- 

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Keep track of your research

- Notes
 - Google docs
 - Noodle tools


 - On the sources you have gathered, use the table of contents, index, headings, subheadings, charts, graphs, maps, etc. in order to guide your research.
 - Along the way, use this information to take notes. If needed, adjust your outline/thesis as you figure out new information on your topic.
- 
- A decorative yellow dashed line in the bottom right corner, consisting of several curved segments.



Keep track of your research

- Read and take notes until you have enough information from your sources. Create note cards for every source you read by summarizing or paraphrasing useful information.
 - Create an annotated bibliography for every source you gather information from and created a note card.
- 

Where to find Primary sources

- UMKC and MU System Libraries
 - KC Public Library (<https://kclibrary.org/digital>) (<https://kchistory.org/>)
 - Mid-Continent Public Library
 - The State Historical Society of Missouri
 - Check your local library
 - Local colleges and universities
 - Local historical societies, museums, historic sites
 - Kansas Memory
 - Research databases
 - Truman Library (trumanlibrary.gov)
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US Government Organizations

- [Library of Congress](#) Access to the catalog and numerous online resources including historic documents, online exhibits, and legislative documents.
- [American Memory Project](#) Library of Congress. Primary source materials relating to the history and culture of the United States.
- [Chronicling America](#) Library of Congress. Digital collection of historic American newspapers from 23 states, from 1860-1922.
- [National Archives](#) Online exhibits and searchable databases.
- [DocsTeach Documents](#), National Archives. Documents from 1754 to the present.
- [Our Documents](#) Online access to 100 milestone documents of American history.

 **Return to “Start Your Research”**

US History, Topic-Specific

- [The African American Registry](#). Secondary accounts of African-American history.
- [American Journeys](#) Eyewitness accounts of North American exploration.
- [The American Presidency Project](#). Documents related to the study of the presidency.
- [Army Heritage Center Foundation](#). Interactive teaching tools that tell soldier stories using collections.
- [The Avalon Project](#), Yale Law School. Documents in law, history and diplomacy, ranging from 4000 BCE to the present.
- [Digital Public Library of America](#). Over 7 million resources from libraries, archives, and museums.
- [Famous Trials](#). 60 famous trials from national and world history.
- [The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History](#). Collections on American History, including over 60,000 primary sources.
- [HarpWeek: Explore History](#) Harper's Weekly. Collection of political cartoons dating from the 1860s.
- [The Living Room Candidate](#) Museum of the Moving Image. Television commercials from presidential elections, 1952-2012.
- [Harvard Digital Collections](#) Harvard University Library. Extensive collections of primary sources in different categories: Islamic Heritage Project, Expeditions and Discoveries, Immigration to the United States 1789-1930, and Women Working 1800-1930.
- [Umbra](#) Search over 400,000 resources available on African American history.

World History

- [The Avalon Project](#) Yale Law School. Documents in law, history and diplomacy, ranging from 4000 BCE to the present.
- [Internet History Sourcebook](#), Fordham University. Links to a wide variety of historical texts from around the world broken.
- [World Digital Library](#). Includes world history topics, timelines, maps, and more interactives.
- [Famous Trials](#). 60 famous trials from national and world history.
- [International Encyclopedia of the First World War](#)
- [Medieval Digital Resources](#) Resources and digital collections of resources from the Middle Ages.
- [Harvard Digital Collections](#) Harvard University Library. Extensive collections of primary sources in different categories: Islamic Heritage Project, Expeditions and Discoveries, Immigration to the United States 1789-1930, and Women Working 1800-1930.

Remember: You'll have to search *within* any site or database. The sources on your topic won't just be listed on the main page!

Don't see anything that's obviously about your topic?

1. Try searching **Google** for your topic and “primary sources.”
2. Look at the **Wikipedia** page for your topic. Scroll to the bottom and look at External Links. Do they list any sites that have documents or research on your topic?
3. Ask for help! Talk to your local librarian, use the [AskMN Chat](#) on eLibraryMN.



Research guides and questions

- Minnesota Research Guide
- https://www.mnhs.org/sites/default/files/historyday/teachers/curriculum-and-timeline/student_research_workbook_2022.pdf
- Research questions
- https://www.mnhs.org/sites/default/files/historyday/teachers/curriculum-and-timeline/research_questions.pdf
- NHD – student resources page
<https://www.nhd.org/student-resources>
- NHD-California
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/e/2PACX-1vS_u8UU7dRvjnVBVRNCdnU8520rLjz-9p6JyI9hGqWsxVXHzg4vrf82ehD3hUllpZRR2spS9dBnbC3n/pub?start=false&loop=false&delayms=3000&slide=id.p3
- https://padlet.com/johanna_bringhurst/zx6nfqyqncqhxdnk

Reliability

- A photograph shows a particular moment, but it can be staged or deliberately taken from a specific angle in order to create an impression.
- The origins of a source (who produced it and when) can give some clues about whether the source is likely to contain accurate information.
- The purpose of a source can give clues about whether the author might want to hide some information, or might be afraid to be critical, or might want to be rewarded.

Reliability

- It is always important that students think about each individual source and don't make assumptions based on generalities. For example, not all newspapers sensationalize and not all bankers are rich.
- It is wrong to say that a source is reliable just because it comes from the time of the event. If that were true, then everything written in every newspaper would be true.
- It is wrong to say that a source is reliable because it was written by someone who was involved in the event. Someone could be involved in a car accident and tell lies rather than admit that they caused it.

Reliability

- It is wrong to say that a source from an historian cannot be accurate because the historian wasn't there at the time. The historian would have researched a wide range of sources and evaluated them for reliability before putting the evidence together and reaching a conclusion.
- Make use of your own knowledge of the author/situation/events mentioned in order to consider whether the source is reliable.
- Verify and compare a wide range of sources
- How reliable is it? Whose perspective does it represent?

How does my topic connect to “debate”?

- What was the central issue, problem, or concern?
- How did different sides view the issue?
- How did different sides express their opinions and challenge each other?

How does my topic connect to “diplomacy”?

- Did two or more sides try to resolve their differences through peaceful decision making?
- What groups were left out of decision-making processes?
- Did opposing sides reach an agreement?

What are the “successes, failures, consequences” of my topic?

- What impact did diplomacy, or a lack of diplomacy, have on the debate?
- What intended and unintended consequences happened as a result?
- Was the debate resolved, does it continue, or did new debates arise?
- What impact did decisions have on groups that were excluded from the process?



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Questions?

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