

# Teaching Primary and Secondary Sources

## Guiding Question for Students

*How can I tell the difference between a primary and a secondary source?*



## Overview

In *Primary and Secondary Sources*, students will learn how to identify and differentiate between primary and secondary sources.

## Objectives

Through completion of this lesson, students will:

- be introduced to the concept of “primary” and “secondary” sources
- brainstorm examples of primary and secondary sources
- analyze scenarios and records to demonstrate their ability to differentiate between primary and secondary sources
- define, in their own words, the terms “primary” and “secondary” sources

## Important Terms

- Primary Source
- Secondary Source

### A Note on the Grade Level:

This lesson can be modified to address the TEKS for grades 6-12. Relevant TEKS have been included at the end of the lesson plan.

## Lesson Plan Steps:

1. Review “Fact Sheet: Primary Sources”
2. Write the Guiding Question across the top of the board
3. Teach students about primary and secondary sources through completion of “What it Really Means” and Primary Source web diagram worksheets
4. Complete the “Source Scenarios” activity with students
5. **Optional:** Give students a copy of the “Fact Sheet: Primary Sources”
6. Have students complete one of the Exit Ticket; if you choose, have them share their answers with the class
7. Ask if students have any remaining questions about the difference between primary and secondary sources

## For Your Information

For additional information and examples of primary and secondary sources, please reference the following Web sites:

- <http://www.archives.gov/education/research/history-in-the-raw.html>
- <http://www.archives.gov/nae/education/tool-box.html>
- <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/>
- <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/sections/history/resources/pubs/usingprimarysources/index.cfm>
- <http://www.primarysource.org/what-is-a-primary-source>
- <http://www.knowledgecenter.unr.edu/help/using/primary.aspx>

# Fact Sheet: Primary Sources



## What is a Primary Source?

Primary sources are original records of the political, economic, artistic, scientific, social, and intellectual thoughts and achievements of specific historical periods. Produced by the people who participated in and witnessed the past, primary sources offer a variety of points of view and perspectives of events, issues, people, and places. These records can be found anywhere—in a home, a government archive, etc.—the important thing to remember is they were used or created by someone with firsthand experience of an event.

## Examples of Primary Sources:

Primary sources are not just documents and written records. There are many different kinds of primary sources, including: first-person accounts, documents, physical artifacts, scientific data that has been collected but not interpreted, and face-to-face mentors with specific knowledge or expertise. Primary sources also take a variety of formats—examples of these are listed below.

- **Audio**—oral histories or memoirs, interviews, music
- **Images**—photographs, videos, film, fine art
- **Objects**—clothing (fashion or uniforms), tools, pottery, gravestones, inventions, weapons, memorabilia
- **Statistics**—census data, population statistics, weather records
- **Text**—letters, diaries, original documents, legal agreements, treaties, maps, laws, advertisements, recipes, genealogical information, sermons/lectures

## How do Primary and Secondary Sources differ?

While primary sources are the original records created by firsthand witnesses of an event, secondary sources are documents, texts, images, and objects about an event created by someone who typically referenced the primary sources for their information. Textbooks are excellent examples of secondary sources.

## Why is it important for students to use Primary Sources?

1. Direct engagement with artifacts and records of the past encourages deeper content exploration, active analysis, and thoughtful response.
2. Analysis of primary sources helps students develop critical thinking skills by examining meaning, context, bias, purpose, point of view, etc.
3. Primary source analysis fosters learner-led inquiry as students construct knowledge by interacting with a variety of sources that represent different accounts of the past.
4. Students realize that history exists through interpretation that reflects the view points and biases of those doing the interpreting.

### Sources:

National Archives and Records Administration, [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)

Library of Congress, [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)

*Teaching with Primary Sources: Educational Materials for Teachers.* The Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library & Museum.

# Instructions: What It Really Means and Primary Source Web Diagram

1. Give each student a double-sided copy of the “What It Really Means” and Primary Source Web Diagram worksheets.
2. Starting with the word “source,” use the supplied definition and the “Fact Sheet: Primary Sources” information to teach students the meaning of the vocabulary words they will be defining. Be sure to ask them to provide one or two concrete examples of each in your instruction.
3. After each word has been taught, have students work on their own or with a partner to define the vocabulary term in their own words. Ask student volunteers to share their definitions with the class and discuss.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 for “primary,” “firsthand,” “secondary” and “secondhand.” Ask students if they need clarification on any of the words before moving on.
5. Have students work with a partner to brainstorm examples of documents, objects, etc. that are Primary Sources. Instruct them use a pencil to write each example in a bubble on the worksheet.
6. As a class, have students share their brainstormed ideas. Write these on the board and discuss. Ask students to:
  - Find similarities and differences in their answers
  - Identify any suggestions that they think are not primary sources
  - Add shared ideas to their brainstorm to complete their notes
  - Discuss any patterns they see in the shared answers
7. Before moving on, ask students if they have any questions about the meaning of the vocabulary terms.

# What It Really Means

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Rewrite the definitions below in your own words.

**Primary**—not made or coming from something else; original

**Firsthand**—coming directly from the original source

**Source**—a person, publication, or object that gives information

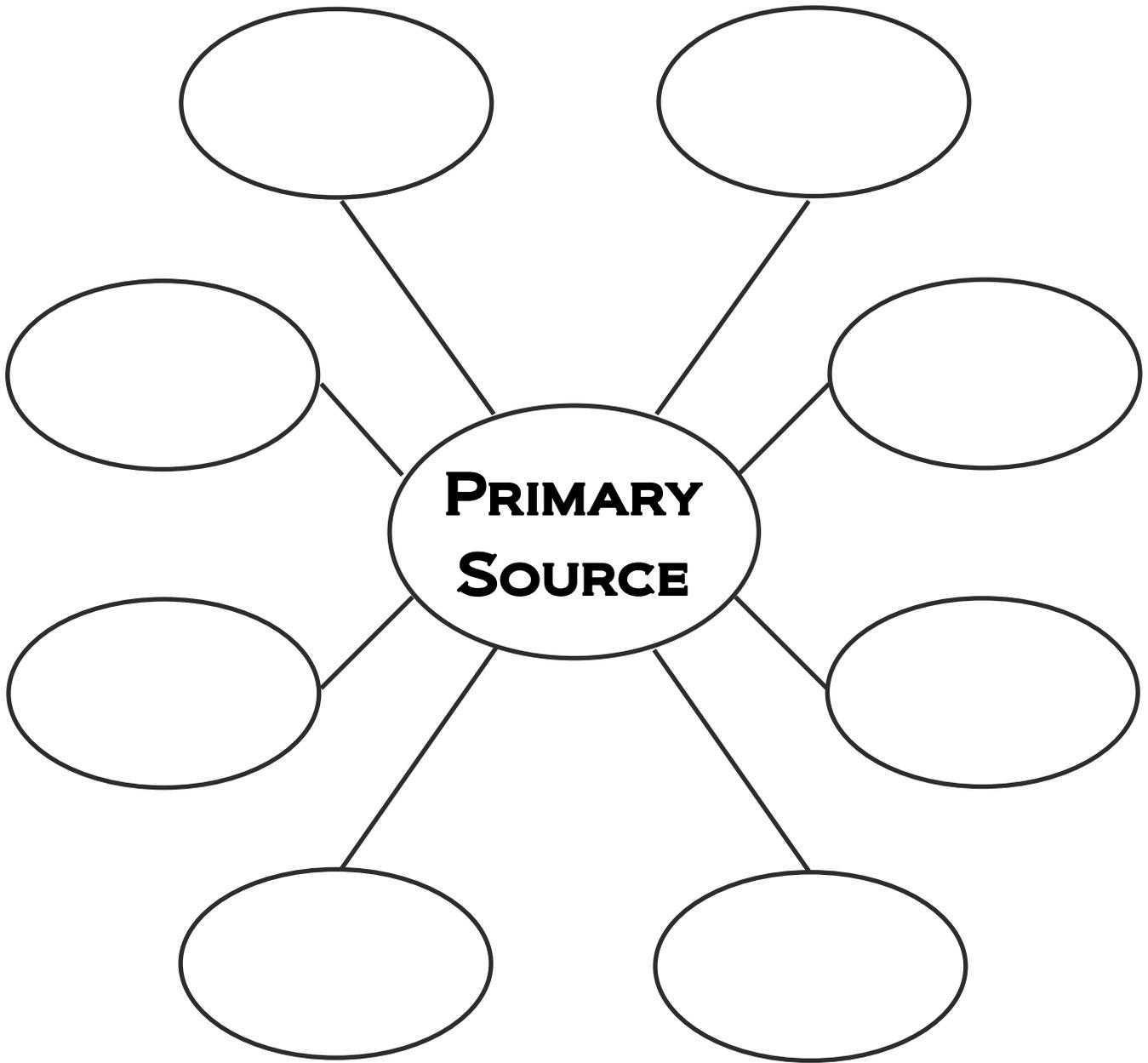
**Secondary**—coming from or created using an original source

**Secondhand**—not original; taken from someone or something else



Definitions compiled from *Webster's for Kids* online dictionary

**Directions:** Using your definitions, brainstorm examples of Primary Sources in the web diagram below. Draw more circles if you need to.



# Source Scenarios

**Directions:** Give student volunteers copies of the cards below. Have each student read their card and ask the class if they are discussing a primary or a secondary source. After each card, allow students to ask questions to further clarify. To conclude the activity, have students identify examples of primary and secondary sources in the classroom or in their homes.

**KEY:** The gray boxes are primary sources; the red boxes are secondary sources.

I was watching ESPN and one of the reporters said **he had heard good reviews** about a new sports movie. When he talks about the movie, what is he?

I found a **letter** to one of my friends in the locker room after school the other day. I know it's private, but I want to read it! What is the letter?

My friends and I found an old **wedding dress** in our attic. My father said it belonged to my grandmother. What is the dress?

At school we use **textbooks** to learn about the history of the United States. When we use textbooks, what are we using?

I like to read People magazine. I really like the **articles** written by others about Hollywood actors. When I read these stories, what am I reading?

My mom has CDs of my grandparents telling **stories** about when they were kids. We love to listen to these at family gatherings. What are we listening to?

When I am doing homework for U.S. Government and I read the commentaries by Supreme Court Justices on landmark cases, what am I reading?

My friend Tim **said I should read a book** that he really liked. He told me about it—it sounds really good! When Tim talks about the book, what is he?

When I was at summer camp a few years ago, I found an **arrowhead**; I did research and found out it has been made by the Cherokee Indians. What is my arrowhead?

I am writing an essay on George Washington for my U.S. History class. I used articles from **Wikipedia** and another **encyclopedia**. What am I using?

**Exit Ticket Directions:** Have students complete one or both of the following cards. Ask for volunteers to summarize and share their responses as a concluding activity to this lesson.

**A primary source is:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
What is an example of a primary source that you have used or you have created?

**A secondary source is:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
What is an example of a secondary source that you have used or you have created?

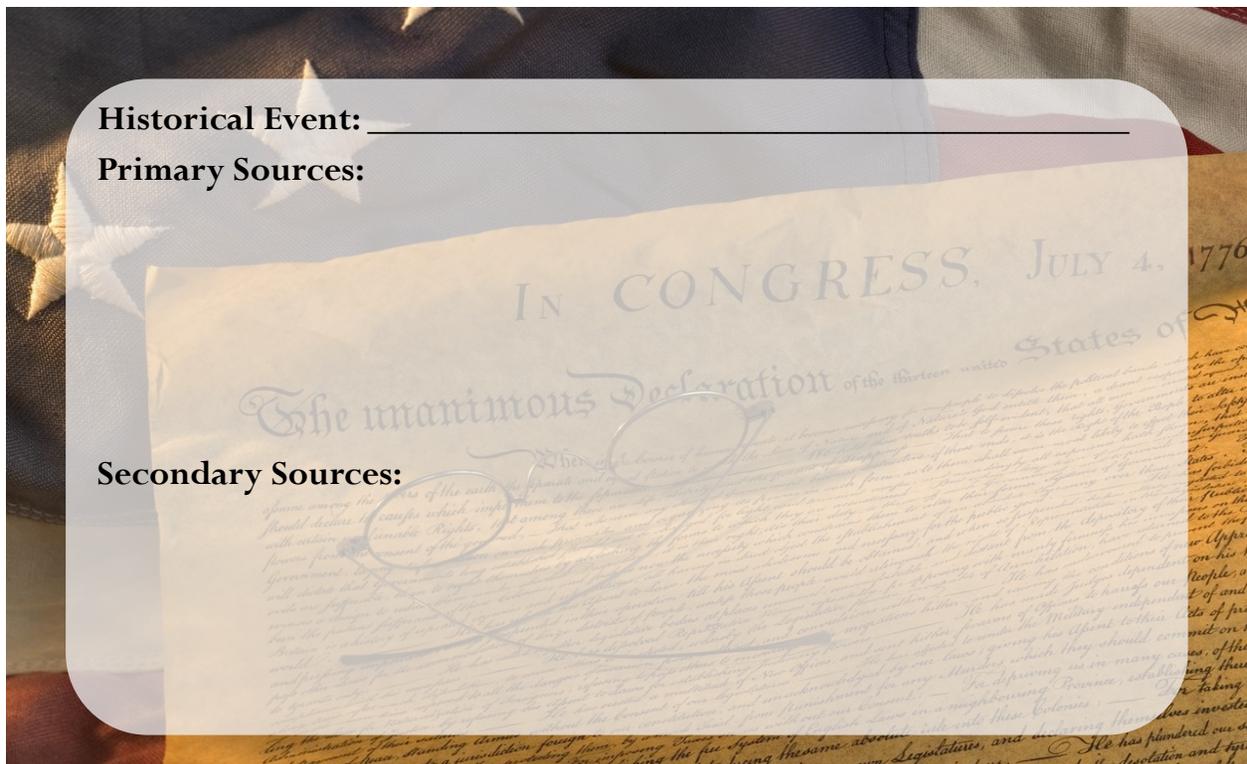
# Exit Ticket: Option 2

## Objective:

Students will use what they have learned to identify primary and secondary sources that tell the story of a specific event in history.

## Process:

1. Assign students a specific well-known historical event.
2. Using the resources in the classroom and library as well as those available on the Web sites of the National Archives and the Library of Congress, have students identify primary and secondary sources that would accurately depict the significance of their historical event.
3. An exit ticket has been provided below.
4. To make the assignment more challenging:
  - Consider having students use a separate sheet of paper and require them to document how each resource would be beneficial to someone studying their event
  - Have students identify any biases that the sources they select may contain
  - Request that students identify a type of source they could not find that would be helpful



# TEKS Standards

## Sixth

(21) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology.

The student is expected to:

(A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software; interviews; biographies; oral, print, and visual material; and artifacts to acquire information about various world cultures;

(D) identify different points of view about an issue or current topic;

(22) Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:

(A) use social studies terminology correctly;

(23) Social studies skills. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings. The student is expected to:

(A) use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution;

## Seventh

(21) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology.

The student is expected to:

(A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software; interviews; biographies; oral, print, and visual material; and artifacts to acquire information about various world cultures;

(D) identify different points of view about an issue or current topic;

(22) Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:

(A) use social studies terminology correctly;

(23) Social studies skills. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings. The student is expected to:

(A) use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution

# TEKS Standards

## **Eighth**

(21) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology.

The student is expected to:

(A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software, databases, media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about Texas;

(D) identify points of view from the historical context surrounding an event and the frame of reference that influenced the participants;

(22) Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:

(A) use social studies terminology correctly;

(23) Social studies skills. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings. The student is expected to:

(A) use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution

## **US History**

(29) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

(A) use a variety of both primary and secondary valid sources to acquire information and to analyze and answer historical questions;

(D) use the process of historical inquiry to research, interpret, and use multiple types of sources of evidence;

(30) Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:

(B) use correct social studies terminology to explain historical concepts;

(32) Social studies skills. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings. The student is expected to:

(A) use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution

# TEKS Standards

## World History

(29) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

(B) explain how historians, when examining sources, analyze frame of reference, historical context, and point of view to interpret historical events;

(C) explain the differences between primary and secondary sources and examine those sources to analyze frame of reference, historical context, and point of view;

(30) Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:

(A) use social studies terminology correctly;

(32) Social studies skills. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings. The student is expected to:

(A) use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution

## World Geography

(21) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

(A) analyze and evaluate the validity and utility of multiple sources of geographic information such as primary and secondary sources, aerial photographs, and maps;

## U.S. Government

(20) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

(D) analyze and evaluate the validity of information, arguments, and counterarguments from primary and secondary sources for bias, propaganda, point of view, and frame of reference;

(21) Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:

(A) use social studies terminology correctly;

(22) Social studies skills. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings. The student is expected to:

(A) use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution;