
The State Historical Society of Missouri

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*The Curriculum
Standards for
Missouri,
Illinois, and the
National
Council for the
Social Studies
are listed at the
end of each
lesson plan.*

Lesson One: Introduction to Primary Sources

Rationale:

It is important for students to understand what primary sources are, how they differentiate from secondary sources and how to use them in research because they provide unique and often otherwise unattainable information and perspectives on historical events in history.

Grade/Subject:

This lesson could be used for any Social Studies class grades 6-12, just be sure to apply this lesson to material the students have been or will be learning.

Duration:

This lesson could take between 3-5 class periods depending on amount of time given to discuss.

Objectives:

1. The students will be able to recognize what primary sources are and the differences between primary and secondary sources.
2. The students will be able to examine historical documents and provide an analysis based on the materials.

Assessing Prior Knowledge:

1. Write "Primary Resources" on one side of the board and "Secondary Resources" on the other side of the board. Have a variety of sources laying out including things like Anne Frank's Diary, a newspaper clipping, an interview, a documentary, and a text book.
2. For each source, ask the students which category they think it falls under. Once finished with the sorting, explain to them what primary resources are, then ask if they would like to change any of the source's positions.
3. Go through each source and discuss with the class the characteristics that make it a primary or a secondary source.



It's not just a day...it's an experience

National History Day in Missouri is an educational outreach program of The State Historical Society of Missouri and the University of Missouri Western Historical Manuscript-Columbia.

Instructional Activities:

Activity One:

1. Ask the class why they think primary sources are important and discuss.
2. Divide the class into four or five straight lines and give the last person in each line an envelope (the story inside will be the same for all lines) and the first person in each line will have a pen and paper.
3. Inform the class that the last person in the line will be reading the story and then telling it to the person in front of them (tell them to speak softly, but it does not have to be a whisper). Then that person will proceed to tell it to the person in front of them (the sheet is not passed on) and so on. Finally, the first person in the row will write it down.
4. Make sure to try to distract the lines by talking to them while they are trying to learn the story.
5. Have each of the first people in the row read what they have written down, and then have someone read the original.
6. Discuss the discrepancies in the stories and talk about how it relates to primary and secondary sources.

Activity Two:

1. Now that students have an understanding of what primary sources are, how they are different from secondary sources, and their importance, it is time to give them a primary source to analyze.
2. Give everyone a copy of the same primary source for them to read. Ask them to circle anything they cannot read or understand and underline any important information the document may contain.
3. As a class, go through the document piece by piece, analyzing important information and addressing any difficult jargon or comprehension problems. This will help students become more comfortable with primary sources.
4. Now divide them into groups and give each group a different primary source (everyone in the group gets a copy). These primary sources, however, should be about the same event. For example, the Boston Massacre, the Emancipation Proclamation, the Industrial Revolution, Irish Potato Famine, etc. It is important to use an event that pertains to what they are learning in class.
5. Using butcher paper, have the students create a graphic organizer that shows who wrote their document, the message of the document, and any bias they found in the document.
6. Have the students present their document and visual to the class.
7. Ask the class to discuss why the articles differed and different ways the documents could be interpreted.

Assessment:

1. Ask the students to write a reflection by answering the following questions:
 - a. What did you learn about primary sources? Give two examples.
 - b. What are at least two pros and two cons of using primary sources?
 - c. Why is bias important to keep in mind when using primary sources?
 - d. What concerns do you still have using primary sources?

Missouri Show-Me Standards addressed:

Performance Goal 1:

#1: Develop questions and ideas to initiate and refine research.

#7: Evaluate the accuracy of information and the reliability of its sources.

Illinois State Learning Standards addressed:

16.A.4a (Early High School): Analyze and report historical events to determine cause-and-effect relationships.

16.A.5a (Late High School): Analyze historical and contemporary developments using methods of historical inquiry.

16.A.2c (Late Elementary): Ask questions and seek answers by collecting and analyzing data from historic documents, images and other literary and non-literary sources.

National Council for the Social Studies Thematic Strands Addressed:

Theme II: Time, Continuity, and Change