



The St. George's Foundation "Bringing History to Life"

RIP It with New Media and Digital History

Primary Source Documents

Materials directly related to a topic by time or participation. Primary sources might take the forms of letters or diaries, manuscript collections, photographs or drawings and other works of art, songs, maps, government records, newspapers, magazines, oral history interviews or artifacts.

Three popular primary sources for students to work with are images, newspapers and personal accounts.

Images

Images are depictions we learn to recognize through the filter of cultural experience. Our cultural values give meaning to both the content of images and their physical form. These values change over time and place and they vary according to the position of the viewer within society. As a result, the same image can be perceived in alternate ways by people at the same time and can also be valued differently over time.

Exercise-

Either show a picture in class or post a picture on your blogspot and ask students to write down what the "see" in the picture; what story the picture tells.

Have students place the image in proper historical context (what was going on locally and internationally when the picture was taken).

Newspapers

Historians generally use newspapers for three purposes: learning facts about specific events, looking for long-term trends; and searching for details or the "texture" surrounding an event.

Newspapers from the past offer factual accounts of events such as hurricanes and elections as well as contextual information like advertisements and features that provide a more complete picture of the world in which the event took place.

Exercise-

Examine the Royal Gazette for long-term trends: look for changes in the prices of apartment rentals over time, how eating habits changed by studying supermarket ads over a period, and what issues people considered problems. Post your findings in a digital timeline.

Personal Accounts

Personal accounts, including memoirs, journals, diaries, oral histories and autobiographies are important historical sources that help us understand the human condition.

What we know about the past is what certain individuals have decided should be preserved.

Personal accounts and oral histories allow scholars to delve more deeply into the complexities of human experience. These kinds of sources can bring forth the voices of people whose personal stories have long been ignored.

Exercise-

When researching the history of your school, have students interview a former student and write down their personal account of the school; their record will serve as a historical record for future students. Ask students to provide genealogical information, a description of formal education, names of teachers, books and subjects studied, writing samples, and dates to verify and provide context.



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Introducing Students to **Primary Source Documents** can turn them on to history like little else can.

Primary Documents are useful in the classroom because:

1. They prompt students to ask questions.
2. They encouraged students to acknowledge various points of view.
3. They help establish context for historical events.
4. They allow students to discover evidence.
5. They help students see cause-and effect relationships.
6. They encourage students to compare and contrast evidence.
7. They help students understand continuity and change over time.
8. They force students to consider and recognize bias.
9. They make students question where the information comes from.
10. They drive students to determine validity and reliability of sources.
11. They enable students to realize the importance of referencing multiple resources for information.