

Primary and Secondary Sources

You will look at many types of sources for your History Day project. Historians put sources into two categories: **Primary Sources** and **Secondary Sources**. Think about the author of the source to figure out if a source is primary or secondary.

What is a Primary Source?

Primary sources are connected to your topic by time or participation. Primary sources were:

- Created during the time of the event, or
- Involved someone who participated in the event first-hand.

Examples of Primary Sources:

- Historic objects
- Manuscript collections
- Interviews with participants
- Autobiographies
- Music from the time period
- Government records
- Newspapers from the era
- Letters
- Photographs
- Original film footage

What is a Secondary Source?

Secondary sources are created after an historical event. The author of a secondary source was not an eyewitness to, or a participant in, the historic event.

Examples of Secondary Sources:

- Biographies
- History textbooks
- Books about the topic
- Articles about the topic
- Encyclopedias
- Media documentaries
- Interviews with scholars/experts
- Websites

Don't Make These Common Mistakes!

- **A primary source doesn't mean it was your most important source.** Think about how the author is connected to the topic and when the source was made.
- **It doesn't matter if you are looking at the original or a copy of a source.** Think about how the author is connected to the topic and when the source was made.
- **Yes—primary sources can be created after your topic took place.** If the author took part in the topic, it is still a primary source, even if she or he wrote it later.
- **An interview is not always a primary source.** If the person you are interviewing did NOT experience the topic first-hand, it's not a primary source. An interview with a professor or historian is probably NOT a primary source.
- **Go beyond just photos for your primary sources.** You can probably learn more from looking at newspapers, letters, diaries, or documents than a photo.
- **Short quotes are not primary sources.** Unless you read the whole source, or a long passage from the source, you should not list it as a primary source. Quotes are edited versions of primary sources. You should list quotes as secondary sources.

Primary and Secondary Source Brainstorm

1. What are some important words, dates, or people related to your topic? These words will help you to search for sources. Remember to check spelling!

2. What types of secondary sources might exist about your topic? Circle the types of sources you think you could find about your topic.

- | | | | |
|------------------|-------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| Book | Video Documentary | Encyclopedia | Interview with Scholar |
| History Textbook | Biography | Website | |

3. What types of primary sources might exist about your topic? Circle the types of sources you think you could find about your topic.

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Diary | Manuscript Collection | Government Records | Letters |
| Interview with Participant | Autobiography | Photographs | Historic Objects or Site |
| Original Film Footage | Music of the Period | Newspaper from the Time Period | |

4. Where can you go to find this information? Answer the following questions and think about the places you could look for sources.

Tried It! Doesn't work for my topic.

	Tried It!	Doesn't work for my topic.
School Library —Name:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public Library —Name:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
College/University Library —Name:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
History Textbook —Title:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Electronic Library of Minnesota (www.elm4you.org)		
Encyclopedia Britannica	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Academic Search Premier	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ProQuest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student Resources in Context	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Minnesota Historical Society		
MNopedia (www.mnopedia.org)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Library Guides (http://libguides.mnhs.org)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Minnesota History Magazine (www.mnhs.org/market/mhspress/minnesotahistory/)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Google		
Google Search	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Targeted Search: "Primary Sources" or "History" plus your topic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Google Books (www.books.google.com)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Idea:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Idea:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>