



**Using Primary Sources from the Library of Congress**  
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Presented by Linda L. Mills, Library Media Specialist  
Greensburg Elementary School  
900 N. Big Blue  
Greensburg, IN 47240  
[lmills@greensburg.k12.in.us](mailto:lmills@greensburg.k12.in.us) or [linmills@frontier.com](mailto:linmills@frontier.com)

My Website: [www.greensburg.k12.in.us/ges/Library/index.htm](http://www.greensburg.k12.in.us/ges/Library/index.htm) Click on Presentations

**Websites to use:**

- Library of Congress main page: [www.loc.gov/](http://www.loc.gov/)
- Library of Congress Teacher page: [www.loc.gov/teachers](http://www.loc.gov/teachers)
- Library of Congress Teacher resources:  
[www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources)
- Teaching with Primary Sources: [www.loc.gov/teachers/tps](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps)
- American Memory: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>

*handouts +  
apps -*

This is the institute that I attended! It was great! Watch for the application for next year.

**2013 Summer Teacher Institute Application is Now Closed**

The application for the 2013 Summer Teacher Institute is now closed. Applicants will be notified about their acceptance in late February/early March.

Each year the Library of Congress offers Summer Teacher Institutes for K-12 educators. During the five-day institutes in Washington, DC, participants work with Library of Congress education specialists to learn best practices for using primary sources in the K-12 classroom, while exploring some of the millions of digitized primary sources available on the Library's Web site. Be sure to subscribe to our updates to receive information about teaching resources and future professional development opportunities.

[https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USLOC/subscriber/new?topic\\_id=USLOC\\_16](https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USLOC/subscriber/new?topic_id=USLOC_16)





## Why Use Primary Sources?

Primary sources provide a window into the past—unfiltered access to the record of artistic, social, scientific and political thought and achievement during the specific period under study, produced by people who lived during that period.

Bringing young people into close contact with these unique, often profoundly personal, documents and objects can give them a very real sense of what it was like to be alive during a long-past era.

### 1. Engage students

- Primary sources help students relate in a personal way to events of the past and promote a deeper understanding of history as a series of human events.
- Because primary sources are snippets of history, they encourage students to seek additional evidence through research.
- First-person accounts of events helps make them more real, fostering active reading and response.

### 2. Develop critical thinking skills

- Many state standards support teaching with primary sources, which require students to be both critical and analytical as they read and examine documents and objects.
- Primary sources are often incomplete and have little context. Students must use prior knowledge and work with multiple primary sources to find patterns.
- In analyzing primary sources, students move from concrete observations and facts to questioning and making inferences about the materials.
- Questions of creator bias, purpose, and point of view may challenge students' assumptions.

### 3. Construct knowledge

- Inquiry into primary sources encourages students to wrestle with contradictions and compare multiple sources that represent differing points of view, confronting the complexity of the past.
- Students construct knowledge as they form reasoned conclusions, base their conclusions on evidence, and connect primary sources to the context in which they were created, synthesizing information from multiple sources.
- Integrating what they glean from comparing primary sources with what they already know, and what they learn from research, allows students to construct content knowledge and deepen understanding.

## Using Primary Sources

Primary sources are the raw materials of history — original documents and objects which were created at the time under study. They are different from secondary sources, accounts or interpretations of events created by someone without firsthand experience. Examining primary sources gives students a powerful sense of history and the complexity of the past. Helping students analyze primary sources can guide them toward higher-order thinking and critical thinking and analysis skills.

### Before you begin:

- Choose at least two or three primary sources that support the learning objectives and are accessible to students.
- Consider how students can compare these items to other primary and secondary sources.
- Identify guiding questions that students will use to analyze the primary sources

### 1. Engage students with primary sources.

- Draw on students' prior knowledge of the topic.
- Ask students to closely observe each primary source. Who created this primary source? When was it created? Where does your eye go first?
- Help students see key details. What do you see that you didn't expect? What powerful words and ideas are expressed?
- Encourage students to think about their personal response to the source. What feelings and thoughts does it trigger? What questions does it raise?

### 2. Promote student inquiry.

- Encourage students to speculate about each source, its creator, and its context. What was happening during this time period? What was the purpose? What does the creator do to get his or her point across? Who was the audience? What biases or stereotypes do you see?
- Ask if this source agrees with other primary sources, or with what the students know.
- Ask students to test their assumptions about the past.
- Ask students to find other primary or secondary sources that offer support or contradiction.

### 3. Assess how students apply critical thinking and analysis skills to primary sources.

- Have students summarize what they've learned.
- Ask for reasons and specific evidence to support their conclusions.
- Help students identify questions for further investigation, and develop strategies for how