

# Primary Sources: Preserving the Past

## A WINDOW TO THE PAST

What is a **primary source**? It is any direct evidence produced during a specific period under study. They vary widely from objects like photographs, diaries, and maps, to movies, songs, and eyewitness accounts. The key is that they were created when the time period being studied actually happened.

A primary source is different from a **secondary source**, which is an analysis of the history. History text books are typically secondary sources because the authors were not present at the time in history they are writing about, but are interpreting what they have learned about the event.

This is what makes learning with primary sources so bountiful -- students get to hold a real piece of history in their hands and come up with their own conclusions about its significance. The answers are not always provided by the primary sources, encouraging students to seek the answers through additional research.

In this lesson, students will use copies of the **Primary Source Analysis** sheet to investigate the provided primary sources, using the following four steps. Look at the first primary source together as a class, then, do the second set with a partner or small group.



## INVESTIGATING

1. Students first simply observe the primary source to make note of its details.

It is made out of ...  
It has the date ...

2. Next, students draw on their prior knowledge.

This looks like ...  
I remember seeing a similar ...

3. From this, students need to make speculations about the primary source.

Its purpose might have been to ...  
I bet it was made by ...

4. Students ask questions about the primary source in order to direct further exploration.

Who was ...  
Why does this ...

## FURTHER RESEARCH

If time and resources permit, students can apply the following steps:

5. Next, students begin testing their speculations with research and analysis skills. In order to do this, they use other sources of information (internet, experts, etc.) to find answers based on the clues provided by the primary source.

6. Finally, students summarize and share what they have learned about the past through the primary source.