

Primary Source Investigation

Educator Guide

The following guide offers a structure for investigating the primary sources featured in this lesson. The steps do not need to be followed in this order, and we encourage you to adjust them based on the interests and needs of your students. The companion worksheet can be printed and distributed in your classroom.

Step 1: Investigating Visual Elements

Display the primary source document on a projector or interactive whiteboard, or invite students to walk around a printed copy of the source. The goal of this first step is not for students to closely investigate the source, but for them to offer their visual impressions.

Without having students read any words on the source, ask them the following.

- What is the first thing you noticed about this primary source document?
- Who do you think created this?
- When do you think this was created?
- Is this a letter, journal entry, official court document, or something else?
- What else do you want to know?

Step 2: Looking Closer

Pass out a printed copy of the primary source to students individually or in small groups, or have them access it online on The New York Public Library Digital Collections. Then, invite them to study the document in greater detail using the questions below. This work can be done in small groups or as a class.

- As you look closer, what else are you learning about the document?
- Are you able to recognize any key words, like the date or year? Do you see any names?
- Can you read some, or all, of the document?
Invite students to read the entire document or sections of it aloud.
- What else do you want to know?

Step 3: Reading for Understanding

Distribute the transcript of the primary source and allow students to read it to understand the document in its entirety. Ask students the questions below to facilitate their comprehension.

- What else have you learned from reading the transcript?
- What else do you want to know?

Additional Scaffolding

Based on how comfortable your students are with the source, determine if they are ready to move onto discussion questions or if it would be helpful to spend more time with the source.

For additional exploration, have them work on the following 3-2-1 prompt independently or in small groups.

- List *three* things that you learned from the primary source.
- Identify *two* questions that you still have.
- Name *one* aspect of the primary source that you found interesting, surprising, or upsetting.

Primary Source Investigation

Student Worksheet

Name: _____

Step 1: Investigating Visual Elements

Without reading any words on the primary source, share your first visual impressions.

What is the first thing you noticed about this primary source document? Who do you think created this? When do you think this was created? Is this a letter, journal entry, official court document, or something else? What else do you want to know?

Step 2: Looking Closer

In small groups or as a class, study the document in greater detail.

As you look closer, what else are you learning about the document? Are you able to recognize any key words, like the date or year? Do you see any names? Can you read some, or all, of the document? What else do you want to know?

Step 3: Reading for Understanding

Read the transcript to check for understanding.

What else have you learned from reading the transcript? What else do you want to know?
