

# Teaching Primary and Secondary Sources

## Guiding Question for Students

*How can I tell the difference between a primary and a secondary source?*



## Overview

In *Primary and Secondary Sources*, students will learn how to identify and differentiate between primary and secondary sources.

## Objectives

Through completion of this lesson, students will:

- be introduced to the concept of “primary” and “secondary” sources
- brainstorm examples of primary and secondary sources
- analyze scenarios and records to demonstrate their ability to differentiate between primary and secondary sources
- define, in their own words, the terms “primary” and “secondary” sources

### A Note on the Grade Level:

This lesson can be modified to address the TEKS for grades K-6. Relevant TEKS have been included at the end of the lesson plan.

## Important Terms

- Primary Source
- Secondary Source

## Lesson Plan Steps:

1. Review “Fact Sheet: Primary Sources”
2. Write the Guiding Question across the top of the board
3. Teach students about primary and secondary sources through completion of “What it Really Means” and Primary Source web diagram worksheets
4. Complete the “Source Scenarios” activity with students
5. Have students complete the Exit Ticket(s) and share their answers with the class
6. Ask if students have any remaining questions about the difference between primary and secondary sources

## For Your Information

For additional information and examples of primary and secondary sources, please reference the following Web sites:

- <http://www.archives.gov/education/research/history-in-the-raw.html>
- <http://www.archives.gov/nae/education/tool-box.html>
- <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/>
- <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/sections/history/resources/pubs/usingprimarysources/index.cfm>
- <http://www.primarysource.org/what-is-a-primary-source>
- <http://www.knowledgecenter.unr.edu/help/using/primary.aspx>

# Fact Sheet: Primary Sources



## What is a Primary Source?

Primary sources are original records of the political, economic, artistic, scientific, social, and intellectual thoughts and achievements of specific historical periods. Produced by the people who participated in and witnessed the past, primary sources offer a variety of points of view and perspectives of events, issues, people, and places. These records can be found anywhere—in a home, a government archive, etc.—the important thing to remember is they were used or created by someone with firsthand experience of an event.

## Examples of Primary Sources:

Primary sources are not just documents and written records. There are many different kinds of primary sources, including: first-person accounts, documents, physical artifacts, scientific data that has been collected but not interpreted, and face-to-face mentors with specific knowledge or expertise. Primary sources also take a variety of formats—examples of these are listed below.

- **Audio**—oral histories or memoirs, interviews, music
- **Images**—photographs, videos, film, fine art
- **Objects**—clothing (fashion or uniforms), tools, pottery, gravestones, inventions, weapons, memorabilia
- **Statistics**—census data, population statistics, weather records
- **Text**—letters, diaries, original documents, legal agreements, treaties, maps, laws, advertisements, recipes, genealogical information, sermons/lectures

## How do Primary and Secondary Sources differ?

While primary sources are the original records created by firsthand witnesses of an event, secondary sources are documents, texts, images, and objects about an event created by someone who typically referenced the primary sources for their information. Textbooks are excellent examples of secondary sources.

## Why is it important for students to use Primary Sources?

1. Direct engagement with artifacts and records of the past encourages deeper content exploration, active analysis, and thoughtful response.
2. Analysis of primary sources helps students develop critical thinking skills by examining meaning, context, bias, purpose, point of view, etc.
3. Primary source analysis fosters learner-led inquiry as students construct knowledge by interacting with a variety of sources that represent different accounts of the past.
4. Students realize that history exists through interpretation that reflects the view points and biases of those doing the interpreting.

### Sources:

National Archives and Records Administration, [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)

Library of Congress, [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)

*Teaching with Primary Sources: Educational Materials for Teachers.* The Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library & Museum.

# Instructions: What It Really Means and Primary Source Web Diagram

1. Give each student a double-sided copy of the “What It Really Means” and Primary Source Web Diagram worksheets.
2. Starting with the word “source,” use the supplied definition and the “Fact Sheet: Primary Sources” information to teach students the meaning of the vocabulary words they will be defining. Be sure to ask them to provide one or two concrete examples of each in your instruction.
3. After each word has been taught, have students work on their own or with a partner to define the vocabulary term in their own words. Ask student volunteers to share their definitions with the class and discuss.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 for “primary,” “firsthand,” “secondary” and “secondhand.” Ask students if they need clarification on any of the words before moving on.
5. Have students work with a partner to brainstorm examples of documents, objects, etc. that are Primary Sources. Instruct them use a pencil to write each example in a bubble on the worksheet.
6. As a class, have students share their brainstormed ideas. Write these on the board and discuss. Ask students to:
  - Find similarities and differences in their answers
  - Identify any suggestions that they think are not primary sources
  - Add shared ideas to their brainstorm to complete their notes
  - Discuss any patterns they see in the shared answers
7. Before moving on, ask students if they have any questions about the meaning of the vocabulary terms.

# What It Really Means

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Rewrite the definitions below in your own words.

**Primary**—not made or coming from something else; original

**Firsthand**—coming directly from the original source

**Source**—a person, publication, or object that gives information

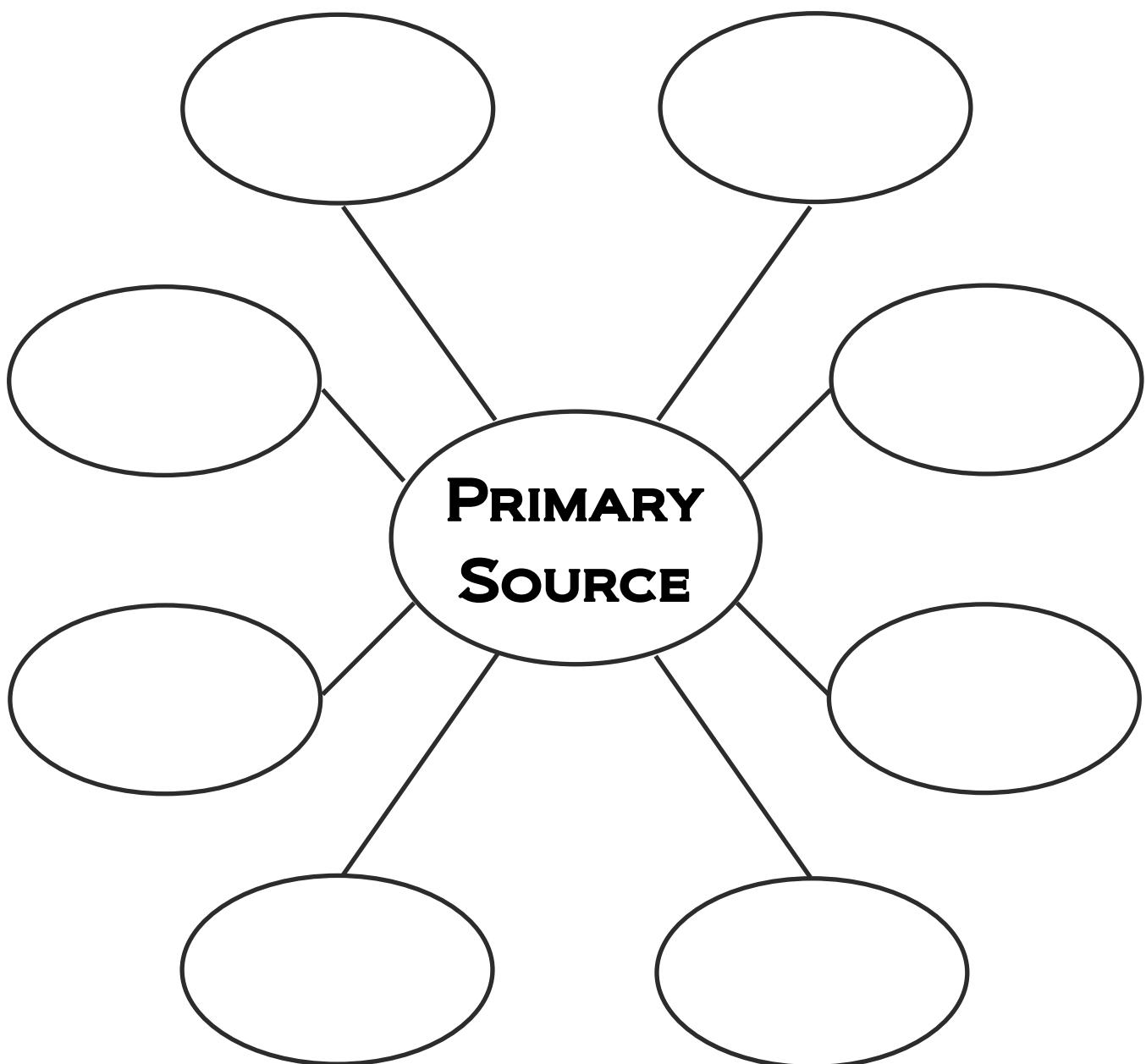


**Secondary**—coming from or created using an original source

**Secondhand**—not original; taken from someone or something else

Definitions compiled from *Webster's for Kids* online dictionary

**Directions:** Using your definitions, brainstorm examples of Primary Sources in the web diagram below. Draw more circles if you need to.



# Source Scenarios

**Directions:** Give student volunteers copies of the cards below. Have each student read their card and ask the class if they are discussing a primary or a secondary source. After each card, allow students to ask questions to further clarify. To conclude the activity, have students identify examples of primary and secondary sources in the classroom or in their homes.

**KEY:** The gray boxes are primary sources; the red boxes are secondary sources.

I was watching the Disney channel and one of the reporters **said I should see a movie** she really liked. When she talks about the movie, what is she?

My sister leaves a **letter** she wrote to her best friend on the kitchen table. I want to read it but I don't because I know it's private. What is her letter?

I was playing with my friends and found an old **wedding dress** in the attic. My father said it was his mother's. What is the dress?

At school we use **textbooks** to find out about many different people and events. When we use textbooks, what are we using?

I like to read magazines for kids. I really like the **stories** about famous people who are in movies. When I read these stories, what am I reading?

When I visit my Aunt she shows me **pictures** of my parents when they were little. What am I looking at?

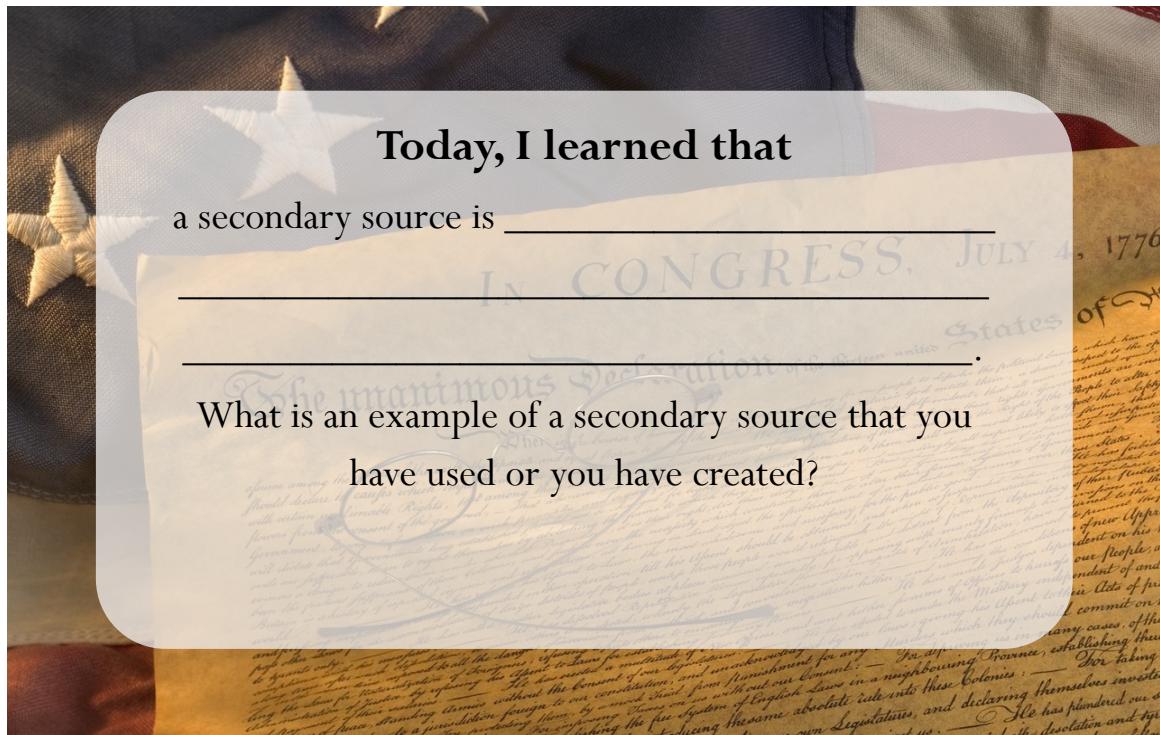
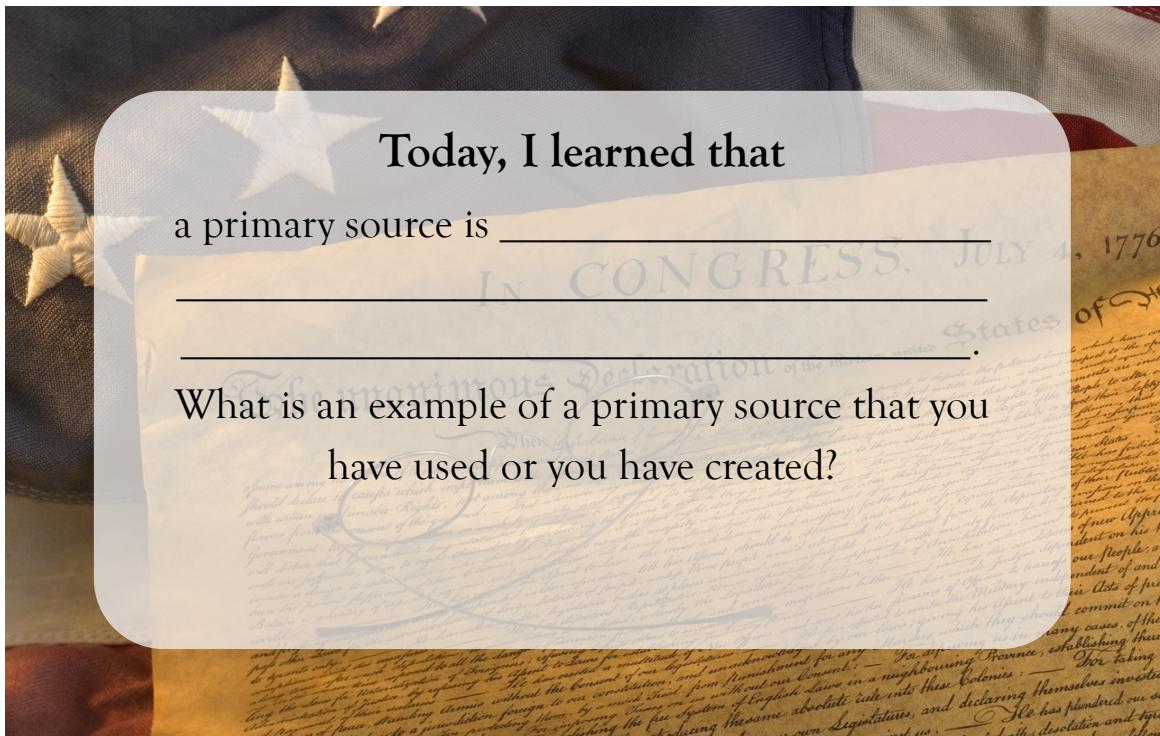
When I was at summer camp last year, I found an **arrowhead**. My parents said they were used a long time ago by Indians. What is my arrowhead?

My mom has CDs of my grandparents telling **stories** about when they were kids. We love to listen to them before bedtime. What are we listening to?

My friend Tim **told me about a book** he read that he really liked. He said I should read it too. When Tim talks about the book, what is he?

I am writing a report on George Washington and my friend lends me her **encyclopedia**. What am I using?

**Exit Ticket Directions:** Have students complete one or both of the following cards. Ask for volunteers to summarize and share their responses as a concluding activity to this lesson.



# TEKS Standards

## Kindergarten

- (3) History. The student understands the concept of chronology. The student is expected to:
- (B) use vocabulary related to time and chronology, including before, after, next, first, last, yesterday, today, and tomorrow.
- (14) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:
- (B) obtain information about a topic using a variety of valid visual sources such as pictures, symbols, electronic media, print material, and artifacts; and
- (16) Social studies skills. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings. The student is expected to:
- (A) use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution;

## First

- (3) History. The student understands the concepts of time and chronology. The student is expected to:
- (A) distinguish among past, present, and future;
- (17) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:
- (B) obtain information about a topic using a variety of valid visual sources such as pictures, symbols, electronic media, maps, literature, and artifacts; and
- (19) Social studies skills. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings. The student is expected to:
- (A) use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution;

# TEKS Standards

## Second

(3) History. The student understands how various sources provide information about the past and present. The student is expected to:

- (A) identify several sources of information about a given period or event such as reference materials, biographies, newspapers, and electronic sources; and
- (B) describe various evidence of the same time period using primary sources such as photographs, journals, and interviews.

(18) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

- (A) obtain information about a topic using a variety of valid oral sources such as conversations, interviews, and music;
- (B) obtain information about a topic using a variety of valid visual sources such as pictures, maps, electronic sources, literature, reference sources, and artifacts;
- (D) sequence and categorize information; and

(19) Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:

- (A) express ideas orally based on knowledge and experiences; and

## Third

(3) History. The student understands the concepts of time and chronology. The student is expected to:

- (A) use vocabulary related to chronology, including past, present, and future times;
- (B) create and interpret timelines; and
- (C) apply the terms year, decade, and century to describe historical times.

(17) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

- (A) research information, including historical and current events, and geographic data, about the community and world, using a variety of valid print, oral, visual, and Internet resources;
- (B) sequence and categorize information;
- (C) interpret oral, visual, and print material by identifying the main idea, distinguishing between fact and opinion, identifying cause and effect, and comparing and contrasting;
- (E) interpret and create visuals, including graphs, charts, tables, timelines, illustrations, and maps; and

(18) Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:

- (A) express ideas orally based on knowledge and experiences;

# TEKS Standards

## Fourth

- (21) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:
- (A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software; interviews; biographies; oral, print, and visual material; documents; and artifacts to acquire information about the United States and Texas;
  - (D) identify different points of view about an issue, topic, historical event, or current event;
- (22) Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:
- (A) use social studies terminology correctly;
- (23) Social studies skills. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings. The student is expected to:
- (A) use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution;

## Fifth

- (24) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:
- (A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software; interviews; biographies; oral, print, and visual material; documents; and artifacts to acquire information about the United States;
  - (D) identify different points of view about an issue, topic, or current event; and
- (25) Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:
- (A) use social studies terminology correctly;
- (26) Social studies skills. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings. The student is expected to:
- (A) use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution;

# TEKS Standards

## Sixth

(21) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

(A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software; interviews; biographies; oral, print, and visual material; and artifacts to acquire information about various world cultures;

(D) identify different points of view about an issue or current topic;

(22) Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:

(A) use social studies terminology correctly;

(23) Social studies skills. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings. The student is expected to:

(A) use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution;