

# Analyzing a Primary Source

Have students observe, reflect, and question a primary source(s).

Using an “investigative question” throughout analysis can help provide direction, promote reflections, more observations (evidence, facts), and self-generated questions.

## Observe

Ask students to closely observe each primary source. (*Words, images, symbols, etc.*) Record observations in the 1<sup>st</sup> column.

Help students notice key details using specific scaffolding questions or questions from the *Teacher’s Guides*.

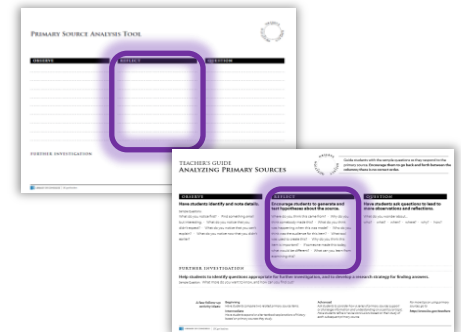


## Reflect

Reflections refer to the student’s opinions and reasoned judgments about the source. Encourage students to think about their personal response to the source and to the observations and details they see or read.

Record reflections in the 2<sup>nd</sup> column.

Help students reflect using specific scaffolding questions or questions from the *Teacher’s Guides*.



## Ask for Evidence!

Challenge students to make a supported hypothesis: “I think \_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_”

Reflections should be supported by evidence from the primary source.

## Question

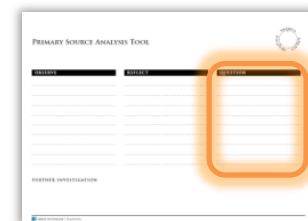
Have students ask self-generated questions related to their observations and reflections.

Record questions in the 3<sup>rd</sup> column.

Encourage students to begin their questions with *who, what, when, where, why, and how*.

Encourage students to speculate about the source, its creator, and the source’s context.

- *What questions do observations or reflections raise?*
- *How does the source raise questions about the creator?*
- *How does the source information raise questions about the purpose of the source or the message being conveyed? What bias exists?*



*Create a discussion time where students can be rewarded for taking risks in sharing their thinking.*

## Example of a Teacher's Think-Aloud:

I notice the source was created in \_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_.

Hmm...I see a sign that says " \_\_\_\_."

I also notice

This source was created in a time when \_\_\_\_.

I wonder if \_\_\_\_?

Why does the sign look like \_\_\_\_?

That sign makes me think \_\_\_\_.



*Make thinking visible for your students by recording your think-aloud in the appropriate columns using chart paper. Also highlight how observing, reflecting and questioning is not a linear process.*

## Further Investigation

*After observing, reflecting, & questioning, help students to ...*

- 1) Identify questions appropriate for further investigation
- 2) Develop a research strategy for finding answers

*Scaffold their further investigation (inquiry) with questions such as:*

- Who is writing or creating the source and why?
- What bias does the author have?
- Does this source agree with what the students already know?
- What are the strengths and limitations of this source?
- Is this source credible and reliable?
- What other primary sources do they want to investigate?
- What sources may support or contradict the primary sources they just studied?



*How can this primary source analysis tool or method be adapted for use in your classroom?*

## Analysis can lead to new understandings...

After analyzing a primary source and engaging in discussion, students are ready to share their new understandings through speaking, writing and creating.

### Activity Ideas:

- Write a “quick write” (summary of the central ideas or their opinions with supporting evidence from the primary source)
- Journal using sentence stems
- Write a diary or journal entry of a person from the time
- Write a summary describing how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally) and helps to uncover the author’s purpose and intent of the source
- Write a cause and effect essay citing evidence from several primary sources
- Debate using primary sources to support opposing views of an interpretation
- Recreate the “scene” of a primary source, where each character steps out of the scene to tell their story or answer questions
- Create an online infographic using data from primary sources to illustrate new understandings
- Create an illustration showing a connection between the past and the present, referring to recent analyses of primary sources
- Create a newspaper article for a different time and place related to a recent analysis of primary sources
- Be interviewed as a person from the time of the primary source(s)



## Measuring Student Understanding

Are students using historical thinking skills?\*

- Chronological Reasoning
- Comparison and Contextualization
- Crafting Historical Arguments from Historical Events
- Historical Interpretation and Synthesis

\* “Historical Thinking Skills”, Advances in AP, The College Board:

<http://advancesinap.collegeboard.org/english-history-and-social-science/historical-thinking>

- Are students sharing ideas supported by the source(s)?
- Are students sharing an idea about the past as being separate from today? (then and now, difference in language, values, etc.)
- Does the student share empathy of the past?
- Are they assessing the source’s reliability?

What else should be considered?

See **example primary sources assessments** from “Beyond the Bubble” at [beyondthebubble.stanford.edu](http://beyondthebubble.stanford.edu)



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