

# Selecting Primary Sources



Source: Fairleigh Dickinson, Teaneck, New Jersey. Classroom building, classroom 1, Gottscho-Schleisner, Inc., 1956. From the Library of Congress.

## ✓ Consider your students

### Length:

Will the length of the letter, diary entry, or newspaper article affect student comprehension? Is an excerpt or the entire source more appropriate?

### Prior knowledge needed:

Do outdated terms or phrases need to be defined? Will your students be able to connect to the time period and/or geography related to the source?

### Diverse learners:

Will source(s) challenge a diverse group of learners? Will sources include text and/or imagery? Will sources be diverse to include multiple formats, such as a narrative, advertisement, artifact, oral history, letter, film, and/or map?

## ✓ Consider copyright restrictions and fair use

### Are there restrictions on the item(s)?

Refer to Copyright and Primary Sources - For Teachers (Library of Congress):  
<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/copyright.html>

### Will your use be considered fair?

Refer to Copyright and Primary Sources - For Teachers (Library of Congress):  
<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/copyright.html>

## ✓ Consider point of view and perspective

### Target audience and purpose of the primary source:

Can students infer the intended audience for the primary source, and whether the creator might have been promoting a certain idea or agenda?

### Your own point of view:

Consider your own beliefs about a historical event or issue. By selecting a particular primary source, are you inadvertently presenting one point of view over another?

### Different perspectives:

When using more than one primary source, have you selected items that present different perspectives?

### Overall meaning preserved:

If you plan to use an excerpt of a primary source, is the meaning of the entire primary source preserved?

## ✓ Consider historical context

### Bibliographic information:

How detailed is the item's bibliographic record?  
Should you provide a source statement or share background information?

### Creator name and creation/publication date:

Are the creator's name and creation date available on the primary source or in the bibliographic record? Are you studying point of view and therefore need to identify the creator of a particular primary source?

### Time and topic under study in your classroom:

How important is the source in understanding the time and topic under study?

### Contextual clues:

Are there clues *within* the primary source that will help students place the primary source into context? Will students be familiar with any of the personal, social, cultural, or political events that surrounded the creation of the primary source?

### Contextual extraneous markings or annotations:

Will Library of Congress cataloguer's notes or other markings distract your students and interfere with their ability to place the primary source into historical context? How will the markings impact your plan in teaching with the source?