

## LESSON A

### PRIMARY SOURCES VS. SECONDARY SOURCES

**Standards:** History Standard Two: Students will gather, examine, and analyze historical data.

History Standard Three: Students will interpret historical data.

**Objectives:** 1) Students will be able to explain the difference between primary sources and secondary sources.

2) Given a large group of records students will categorize each document as a primary or secondary source.

**Materials:** 1) *Lesson A, Delaware Public Archives, World War I Diary, RG 9200*  
2) Secondary Source describing end of World War I (example: encyclopedia article)  
3) Small trash bag  
4) Notecards with examples of primary and secondary sources  
5) Primary sources - these will be drawn from other lesson plans in the kit  
6) Secondary sources including social studies textbooks, biographies, CD-ROMS, encyclopedias and history books describing a particular event (i.e. The Battle of Gettysburg, The Oregon Trail)

**Procedures:** 1) In preparation for this lesson, lay out a combination of ten primary and secondary sources on a table.

2) Gather the class around the table and inform the students that today's lesson will demonstrate the differences between primary sources and secondary sources.

3) While the class examines the various documents instruct several individuals to use dictionaries to look up the words **primary, secondary, and source**. Although there are numerous entries for each of these words the definitions generally needed are:

Primary - firsthand; direct

Secondary - a) derived or resulting from something considered primary or original; dependent; derivative b) second-hand; not original

Source - a person, book, document, etc. that provides information

- 4) Discuss these words and their definitions with the students.  
Inform the students that:

**A primary source is a firsthand account of an event that is recorded or produced by an individual who was an eyewitness or a participant.**

**A secondary source is a description of an event after it has happened by someone who has gathered information about that event.**

- 5) Discuss the differences between the two types of sources.

Examples of Primary Sources: Diaries, Journals, Letters, Photographs, Interviews, School Menu, Spelling Test, Driver's License

Examples of Secondary Sources: Encyclopedias, Biographies, History Textbooks

**EXAMPLE:** Pass out copies of the World War I diary from a Delawarean in the 59th Pioneer Infantry that concerns the end of the War. Compare it with a history textbook, encyclopedia, or some other publication describing the end of World War I. Concerning the diary, focus on the transcribed, italicized section because it deals with the final days of the war. Which one of these is a primary source and which one is a secondary source? (*The letter is the primary source because it was written by someone who was an eyewitness. The textbook or encyclopedia is written by someone who researched the event and was not an eyewitness to the event.*)

- 6) Inform the students that they will be playing a game. The class will be split into two teams. Members of each team will take turns picking from a bag either a source (textbook, photograph, biography, letter, etc.) or a notecard with a source description written on it. The student will then choose whether the source is primary or secondary. The team with the most correct answers wins the game.

- 7) To complete the lesson, instruct the students to take out a sheet of paper and number it one to ten. One by one - hold up the ten sources originally laid out for examination by the students. Have the students write down if the source is primary or secondary. Then, review the documents and ask for a choral response from the students.
- 8) Journal Prompt: Is a newspaper a primary or a secondary source? Explain your answer. Look for some debate on this question. Newspapers can be viewed as primary or secondary sources depending on the information in the newspaper. For instance, a newspaper that contains an article by a reporter who witnessed the event and wrote an article about it for his newspaper would be considered a primary source. If an article was written by a person who did not witness the event it would be considered a secondary source.

### **TRANSCRIPTION OF DIARY**

y plane, but it was up in the clouds so far that it was impossible to trace  
Had "short arm" inspection at 5 P.M.

Nov. 3. Have been very busy for the last week issuing winter clothing and equipment. "Pop" returned and reiterated all about his wondrous trip. He had some hair-breadth escapes and brought back as a memento 3 Boche helmets, dozens of buttons, and a few phennigs which he said he had procured from the enemy. Told all about the Metz front where he was compelled to seek shelter in a protected dug-out. Also visited Argonne Forests where the gas gongs sounded and all were compelled to resort to their old comrade the gas-mask. He said the firing was intense from the big guns. Also stated that if a man lived in front of them very long he would never again become civilized.

During the week we have had an air raid most every night, and the sky would be lighted up by the bursting shells from the anti-craft guns close by. We brought one down this P.M. at the R.R. Station. At this writing a report has been made that Turkey had signed peace terms and is demobilizing her Army, also that Austria is in a state of revolt and that the Italian Army is advancing through to the Boche border.

Another incident of this day is that our company moved from their billets among the horses and cattle and occupy the upper story of a chateau. Here we have wooden cots to sleep on, which is quite a relief from the damp, open stables.

I am now anticipating a very pleasant night's rest, so I can arise early in the morning and take in the summer underwear.

Nov. 15. The weather for the past 2 weeks has been very pleasant. Clear days generally, and cool, frosty nights.

We have been supplied with an extra uniform and various other equipment which has kept the Supply Dept. busy for the last two weeks. The men work all day and during the evening visit the "soda water" resorts, or gather around for a card party, or play a visit to the Y.M.C.A. hut to play a game of

dominoes, write a letter, or listen to the beautiful strains of "Joan of Arc" played by the world famous 59th Pioneer Infantry Band.

All last week the evenings were very entertaining in the open air, as you could hear the buzz of machinery running smoothly in the air, then you would hear a "hit and miss" sound like a 4 cylinder auto running on 3 cylinders, and would recognize this to be a bombing `plane, then the searchlights would locate the machine, and the sky would be lighted up with the bursting shells from the anti-aircraft guns.

One night last week a regiment of French Artillery arrived in town and parked their 4.75 field pieces nearby, occupying the stables under us for their animals. They only stayed 2 days, then left for Toul.

The next day a Division of American troops passed through town on their way to another section of the line and also for a breathing spell in the rear. Then another Division moved into our nearby towns making their supply headquarters at this place, at the present time they are busily engaged handling food for the men, as Uncle Sam believes that a fighting army is a well fed army.

*The town was very much agitated upon the report that Germany demanded peace. The Frenchman would stand up to you and discuss things in his own language for an hour at a time, all you have to say is "Oui, Oui" or "Compre and guess at what he was saying. Finally, on Monday, Nov. 11, news was received that the enemy plenipotentiaries had met Marshall Foch and signed the "Terms of Armistice" 2 A.M.. Church bells tolled incessantly, guns were fired and flags which had not waved for over 4 years were seen flying from eve-house and public building, the French tricolor alongside the Stars and Stripes.*

We have now received our little barrack stoves and life is more like living for, when you can sit beside the little friend and enjoy a few moments of warm comfort.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

This lesson plan will serve as an introduction to primary source documents for many students. The concept of primary sources versus secondary sources may take some time for a student to comprehend. People are creating primary sources every day of their lives. There are numerous primary sources that can be found in the classroom - the teacher's gradebook, student papers, the school menu, etc. One example that you may want to begin this lesson with is your drivers license or a modern birth, marriage, or death record. The students should understand that a primary source does not have to be "old".

### **WARM-UP EXERCISE**

For the warm-up exercise the teacher can choose any number of primary sources from the project kit for the students to examine. These sources should be mixed with textbooks, encyclopedias, biographies and/or other secondary sources to show the differences between the two types of sources.

## **THE GAME**

Place notecards with examples of secondary sources written on them and some actual sources in the bag. These items may include textbooks (any subject), encyclopedias, biographies, etc.

Place some actual primary sources in the bag and notecards with the following titles:

letters	diary
report card	teacher's gradebook
birth certificate	death certificate
My last math test	marriage certificate
lunch menu	class worksheet

Primary sources are created everyday in the classroom so there should be no shortage of these items for the game. However, if you run out of items during the game - simply suspend the game midway through and put the items and cards back in the bag. Although this is "doubling up", it will serve as a chance to reinforce the idea of primary and secondary documents.

## **DOCUMENT BACKGROUND**

The document used in this lesson is part of the diary of Anthony Summers, a sergeant in the 59th Pioneer Infantry. It is located in the Summers Papers (Small Manuscript Collection, Record Group 9200). Anthony Summers lived in Harbeson near Milton, Delaware when he was drafted into the army in 1917. After serving in France from September 1918 until July 1919, Sgt. Summers returned to Delaware and settled in Milford. He served as a postman in the Milford area for many years and also was instrumental in starting the local National Guard unit. Summers died on March 9, 1944.