



Learning About the Past

Comparing Primary and Secondary Sources



Patricia Turner, Sherri Cornelius

Published by *Oklahoma Young Scholars/Javits*

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

Grade Level 2nd – 3rd Grade

Time Frame 4-5 class periods

Subject Social Studies

Duration 45 minute sessions

Essential Question

How can I learn about the past from primary and secondary sources?

Summary

In this lesson, students will use primary and secondary sources to learn about history. Students will compare and contrast how primary and secondary sources can offer different views and perceptions of events. Students will demonstrate understanding by creating their own primary and secondary sources.

Snapshot

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Grade 2)

2.3.3: Compare different accounts of the same historical event using primary and secondary sources.

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Grade 2)

4: Read Critically and Interpret Informational Sources -Students will engage in critical, active reading of grade-level appropriate primary and secondary sources related to key social studies concepts, including frequent analysis and interpretation of informational sources.

Attachments

- [Anchor Chart Example—Learning about the Past.docx](#)
- [Anchor Chart Example—Learning about the Past.pdf](#)
- [Card Sort—Learning about the Past.docx](#)
- [Card Sort—Learning about the Past.pdf](#)
- [Lesson Slides—Learning about the Past .pptx](#)
- [My Reasons—Learning about the Past.docx](#)
- [My Reasons—Learning about the Past.pdf](#)
- [Note Catcher—Learning about the Past.docx](#)
- [Note Catcher—Learning about the Past.pdf](#)
- [Primary Source—Learning about the Past.docx](#)
- [Primary Source—Learning about the Past.pdf](#)
- [Some Toys Still Look Like Fun Secondary Source—Learning about the Past.docx](#)
- [Some Toys Still Look Like Fun Secondary Source—Learning about the Past.pdf](#)

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Note Catcher (attached; two copies per page; one copy per student)
- Chart paper for Anchor Chart
- Anchor Chart example (attached)
- My Reasons (attached; one per student)
- Some Toys Still Look Like Fun Secondary Source (attached; one per student)
- 1887 Catalog Primary Source (attached, one per student)
- Primary and secondary source cards printed and cut apart
- Other primary and secondary source examples

Lesson Snapshot

Engage

Students are introduced to different sources that tell about toys from the past. A class anchor chart is started to help students make sense of the differences between primary and secondary sources.

Explore

Students explore primary and secondary sources by having students look at items that use different modalities to present information about toys from the past. The class anchor chart is added to as students participate in a card sort.

Explain

The anchor chart is completed during this part of the lesson. The class adds to the primary source and secondary source examples by taping pictures from the card sort in the appropriate places. If there are items they are not sure about, these are put to the side until later. The class then generates a list of characteristics of primary and secondary sources and the definitions for both sources is created and added to the anchor chart.

Extend

Students create their own primary source document from their own personal experience. They then create a secondary source by interviewing a family member about an historical event and recording their interpretation of that event based on the interview.

Evaluate

Students use the documents they created to write a brief explanation of what qualities make each document a primary or secondary source.

Engage

Open the attached **Lesson Slides**. Introduce the essential question on **slide 3** and the lesson objectives on **slide 4**.

Present the following question: *How do we know about things that happened a long time ago or in the past?* Have students think about this for a few minutes and then share their responses with a classmate. Use the [Think-Pair-Share](#) strategy. Be sure to give enough time for the “Think.” Have a few students share some ideas with the whole class.

Introduce the word *source* by engaging your students in a conversation about the sources shown on **slide 5**. *The items on the slide will come in one at a time as you click on the PPT.*

As you scroll through the items, discuss what people could learn from that item.

Some suggested starter questions and statements are listed below:

- *What do you see in the photo?*
- *The Wikipedia website has information that tells us about the toy company called Fisher Price. It was started in 1930. What else does it tell us about Fisher Price?*
- *What information do you think we would find in this diary?*
- *What is the newspaper article telling about?*
- *The American Girl book is a biography of the inventor of the American Girl Dolls. What information would we find in this book?*

Students should infer from the pictures and discussion that these sources could be used to find out about toys that children played with in the past. The keywords to develop here are the words *source* and *past*.

Teacher’s Note–Anchor Charts

At this point in the lesson you will start creating an [Anchor Chart](#) that the class creates together as they progress through the lesson. The **Anchor Chart example** is attached as well as shown below. You can use chart paper or a large sheet of bulletin board paper for your chart. Use what students shared as a class to create the definition for the word *source* and add it to the Anchor Chart.

Sources	
Sources are:	
Primary Sources:	Secondary Sources
<p>Definition:</p> <p><i>(the class will create the definitions during the Explain phase of the lesson)</i></p> <p>Examples:</p> <p><i>(after students do the card sort and discussion have the students decide which pictures to tape under each kind of source.)</i></p>	<p>Definition:</p> <p>Examples:</p>

Explore

Teacher's Note–Preparation

Students are now going to view a primary and secondary source about the same topic and discuss as a class. Use slide 6 or show an actual item as a primary source. (*This could be an artifact from the past— typewriter, arrowhead, rotary phone, etc.—or a photo of a historical event*). Then use the story on slide 7 in the PPT or a story written about the item you chose making sure that the story was written using other sources for the information making this story a (secondary source). To help facilitate the discussion, each part on the slide comes in separately as you click. The documents are also available as handouts in the attachments.

Use **slide 6** to show students the example of a primary source and have the students discuss what they notice about the 1887 toy catalog page. *What can we learn about toys from this page? What does it tell us about the people of that time?* Consider using the [Collective Brain Dump](#) strategy to gather student responses.

Introduce the term *primary source*. Add primary source to your word wall and tape a copy of the catalog picture to the example part of the Anchor Chart.

Display **slide 7** to show students the secondary source and pass out the **Some Toys Still Look Like Fun Secondary Source** handout. Read the story together. Continue with the “Collective Brain Dump” as students share what they learned from the story and what they notice about how it is written. Now address the question: *Where did Beth Brindle find the information she used to write this story?* Go back to the story and point out the sources that were cited: Encyclopedia Britannica and Chudacoff. If you click on the links they will take you directly to the sources.

Introduce the word *secondary source*. Add secondary source to your word wall and tape a copy of the story to the example part of the Anchor chart.

Teacher's Note–Preparation

Print the attached **Card Sort**. These cards have examples of primary and secondary sources. Consider laminating these cards for repeated use. You will also need a set for yourself to tape or glue to the anchor chart during the Explain portion.

Explore Primary and Secondary sources by having students using the [Card Sort](#) strategy to divide the attached **Card Sort** into two groups. Display **slide 8**.

As you monitor students, look to see how students are sorting and ask them guiding questions to help them make more detailed observations. Some suggested questions are:

- *What do you observe in the pictures? What are the images, who are the people, what are the objects?*
- *Are there any words or numbers on the images?*
- *What do you think is the importance of these images, words, numbers, and symbols?*
- *What do you think is happening?*
- *Why would someone take this picture?*

Using a modified version of the “Think, Pair, Share” strategy, have students explain to a nearby group or partner why they sorted the cards the way they did.

Explain

Display **slide 9**. Pull the class together for a class discussion and to work on the Anchor Chart.

Ask a few students to share what the other students told them about their card sort. Let this lead to the following questions.

Discussion Questions:

- *How do primary and secondary sources differ?*
- *What makes a primary source?*
- *How is that different than a secondary source?*

Primary Sources

Explain to the class that primary sources are the pieces of evidence that historians use to learn about people, events, and everyday life in the past. Just like a detective uses clues to help them solve a mystery, we can learn about the past by looking at clues in primary sources. These original records or actual items are created by first-hand witnesses of an event or by looking at the actual item.

Add to the primary source section of the Anchor Chart by having students tell you which of the pictures from the card sort should be added as examples. Use your additional card sort and tape the pictures the students suggest onto the chart. If they are not sure about some of the items, put them to the side for later discussion. As a class, have students list characteristics of a primary source and create the definition for the anchor chart.

Secondary Sources

Tell students that documents, texts, images, and objects about an event created by someone who used the primary sources for their information are called secondary sources. Keep this as simple as you can, secondary sources can be confusing.

As a class, have students decide which pictures should be added as secondary source examples. Students should help you create the definition of a secondary source by starting with their reasonings for each item. Suggested questions and possible student responses:

- *Why is the solar system text a secondary source? Possible student response: It is not the real thing and it was written based on what scientist have read or pictures they have seen.*
- *Why is Wikipedia a secondary source? Possible student response: It is a summary of other people's ideas and information.*
- *Why is the dictionary a secondary source? Possible student response: Lots of people studied the words and thought of the meanings and wrote them in a book.*
- *You said the sketch or drawing is a secondary source. So why is this? Possible student response: The person drawing the sketch got the information from other people who saw the actual area.*

Have students go back to their card sorts to see if there are any items they still have questions about. Have students make changes to their card sort if needed, and then have students explain to their partners how primary and secondary sources are different.

Display **slide 10**. Check student understanding using the [Muddiest Point](#) instructional strategy. Use this to determine if students are ready for the Extend section or if the material on **slide 11** should be reviewed again.

Extend

Students create their own primary resource from their own personal experiences. This can be a diary entry, letter, map, etc. Students are making the connection that a primary source is from someone with actual knowledge of an event or place.

You may want to model this to your students by showing them a primary document you created. Display **slide 12** and go over the checklist below to help them get started.

- *What am I making?*
- *Are you writing a letter about something that happened to you?*
- *Are you writing a diary entry for a day or specific time?*
- *Are you making a map of something from what you see?*
- Include only things you have seen, heard or experienced yourself.
- Include date, place, time , as much specific information as possible.

Display **slide 13**. When modeling the creation of the secondary source document, consider interviewing another adult in your building by asking them the question: *What is the most significant historical event that you remember?* Create the secondary source together as a class.

Make Your Own Secondary Source Document:

- *Who am I going to ask my question to?*
- *Do you have your notecard ready to record what you heard from the person talking?*
- Here is a question to ask: *What is the most historical event that you remember?*

Display **slide 14** and pass out the **Note Catcher**. Have students share their primary documents with each other in small groups (*2-4 students*). Have students write down one thing they learned from each person's primary document.

Repeat this process when the students bring back their secondary source documents. Hopefully the students will find these interesting and fun.

After students have finished sharing in small groups, display **slide 15** and have a group discussion about the essential question: How can I learn about the past from primary and secondary sources?

Ask students if there is anything else they would like to add or change on the class Anchor Chart.

Evaluate

Students use the primary and secondary documents they created for this evaluation. Display **slide 16**. Using notebook paper or the attached **My Reasons** handout, have students write a brief explanation of what makes their first document a primary source as well as why the second document they made is a secondary source. The class Anchor Chart can be an available resource for students.

Resources

- Brindle, Beth. "Some Toys Still Look Like Fun." (n.d.). How Stuff Works. <https://www.howstuffworks.com/>
- K20 Center. (n.d.) Anchor Charts. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/58>
- K20 Center. (n.d.) Card Sort. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/147>
- K20 Center. (n.d.) Collective Brain Dump. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/111>
- K20 Center. (n.d.) Muddies Point. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/109>
- K20 Center. (n.d.) Think, Pair, Share. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/139>
- Morris, J. (2009, February 14). Lacey with some of my old toys :). Flickr [Photo]. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/70831250@N00/3279356590>