

EXAMINING AND ANALYZING SOURCES IN THE K-2 PRIMARY CLASSROOM



By focusing on the documents, objects, photographs, and oral histories—students can get a glimpse into the past beyond what a textbook can provide. Analyzing sources is crucial to the study of history. They provide tangible links to the past that help students build personal connections to history.

Table of Contents

The purpose of this document is to provide teachers tools to assist students as they examine and analyze sources. Examining sources is a part of all Social Science Standards K-12. Please feel free to use materials “as is” or adapt for classroom use.

- I. Sources in the Illinois Social Science Standards**
- II. Why Use Sources in the Elementary Classroom?**
- III. Types of Sources: Strengths, Limitations and Questions to Ask**
 - a. Photographs
 - b. Written Documents
 - c. Objects
 - d. Oral Histories
- IV. Teacher Tips for Examining Sources**
- V. Optional Graphic Organizers for Analyzing Sources**
- VI. Lessons Using Sources**
 - 1. Kindergarten: “Mail Then and Now”
 - 2. 1st Grade: “30-Second Look: Classrooms Then and Now”
 - 3. 2nd Grade: “Stars, Stripes and Symbols of America: Our Flag, Past and Present”
- VII. Additional Library of Congress Primary Source Sets Information**

Illinois Social Science Standards Connection to Sources

To meet the Illinois Social Science Standards for K-2, students must engage with a wide variety of sources. The following Illinois Social Science Standards address sources specifically.

SS: Social Sciences

G: Geography Standards

IS: Inquiry Standards

H: History Standards

Kindergarten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SS.IS.2.K-2: Explore facts from various sources that can be used to answer the developed questions. • SS.IS.3.K-2: Gather information from one or two sources with guidance and support from adults and/or peers. • SS.IS.4.K-2: Evaluate a source by distinguishing between fact and opinion
1st Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SS.IS.2.K-2: Explore facts from various sources that can be used to answer the developed questions • SS.G.1.2: Construct and interpret maps and other graphic representations of both familiar and unfamiliar places • SS.H.3.2: Explain how different kinds of historical sources (such as written documents, objects, artistic works, and oral accounts) can be used to study the past.
2nd Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SS.IS.2.K-2: Explore facts from various sources that can be used to answer the developed questions. • SS.IS.3.K-2: Gather information from one or two sources with guidance and support from adults and/or peers. • SS.IS.4.K-2: Evaluate a source by distinguishing between fact and opinion. • SS.G.1.2: Construct and interpret maps and other graphic representations of both familiar and unfamiliar places. • SS.H.3.2: Explain how different kinds of historical sources (such as written documents, objects, artistic works, and oral accounts) can be used to study the past.

Why Use Sources in the Elementary Classroom?

All sources (primary and secondary) can provide a window into the past. Explain to students that primary sources are direct firsthand accounts about an event, object, person, or work of art.

Secondary sources are any account of something that is not a primary source. Examples include:

Primary: autobiographies, diaries, personal letters, photographs, speeches, etc...

Secondary: things usually written about primary sources - articles, newspapers, books

Using sources for instruction can provide opportunities for students to:

1. Engage – sources (especially primary) can help students relate in a personal way to events of the past and understand history as a series of human events.
2. Develop critical thinking skills – sources are not always complete or have little context, “question asking” and “question development” are at the heart of critical thinking and can be used to allow for classroom opportunities to paint a clear picture of what is happening.
3. Construct knowledge – sources can allow students to construct knowledge as they come to examine, analyze, ask questions and investigate source.

Types of Sources with Tips

Photographs	Questions to Ask	
<p>Photographs provide images of past events. Historians who study the everyday lives of anonymous people find photographs are an invaluable source.</p>  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a list of any people in the photograph. • What is happening in the photograph? • Make a list of any activities you see going on in the photograph. • Are there any captions? A date? Location? Names of people? • What kind of clothing is being worn? • Is there any lettering on signs or buildings? • What time of year is pictured? Time of day? Cite your evidence. • Where was the photograph taken? Cite your evidence. 	
	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are important to the study of people who did not leave many written records • Can stimulate the personal involvement of the viewer. • Do not require fluency in a particular language to understand. 	<p>Limitations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People, place, date, and the name of the photographer are often not identified. • The emotions and thoughts of those involved often are not evident. • Information from this kind of source is often suggestive rather than definitive.
Written Documents	Questions to Ask	
<p>Diaries, letters, newspapers, passenger lists, etc..</p>  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of document is it (letter, ad, newspaper, etc.)? How do you know? • When and where was the document written? • What images, words or numbers do you see? • Who wrote or created the document? How can you tell? • For whom was the document written or created? How do you know? • What is the purpose of the document? What makes you think this? 	
	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides information on the who, what, where, when, why, and how of an event • Can be a clue to the level of education of the author • Can offer evidence of emotion • Can stimulate the personal involvement of the reader 	<p>Limitations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a thoroughly objective source • Possibly difficult to read • Bias and agenda of the author to be considered • Identity of the author often unclear (especially true in the case of government documents) • Language is unfamiliar

Types of Sources

Objects	Questions to Ask	
<p>Any object and can include artistic works such as paintings, sculpture, architecture, and jewelry.</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have any idea what the object might have been used for? • What is it made of? • Does it look old or new? Does it make a noise? • Is it handmade or made by machine? • Where can/could it be/have been found? • Is this object still used today? 	
	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides clues about its function. • Convey information of everyday life. • Tells of ideas and information which either are not or cannot be expressed effectively in writing or speech 	<p>Limitations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If there is only one object to look at, the following challenges exist: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How typical the object is of its time or of its type. ○ Are parts missing?
Oral Histories, Audio & Videos Recordings	Questions to Ask	
<p>Oral histories are the recording & collection of people’s reminiscences, accounts, and interpretations of the past in their own words.</p>  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the name of the informant? • What is the date of the interview, location, personal circumstances, and the topic of the interview • What people, places, and dates does the informant mention? • What topics is the informant discussing? Does the informant reveal any emotions about these topics such as excitement, sadness, or happiness? • What was the informant’s role in the events he or she describe? • How was the informant affected by the events he or she described? • How could information obtained from other primary sources reinforce the informant’s story? 	
	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalizes history by recording an individual’s remembrances (or opinions) about their life or an event in which they were involved. • Provides information about a topic or time period that may otherwise lack documentation in written or archival records. • Often conveys emotion clearly. • Often informant is living and may be consulted for clarification or additional information. 	<p>Limitations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May contain unusual dialect or speech patterns. • It may not be accurate. (Memory of the informant is fallible.) • The bias, objective, or the relationship of the interviewer to those being interviewed must be considered. • Interviewer’s questions may intentionally or unintentionally influence the informant’s response.

Examining Sources

Before	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine what you want students to learn from the source. (See Standards) Is there specific background knowledge your students need to know before examining the source? Do the sources need to be examined in a “chunk” or section so details are not missed? 	
<p>Decide the best way for students to see/examine the source:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make individual or group copies of the source for students to examine, or Project a copy of the source for students to examine. Gather supplies such as highlighters, magnifying glasses, sticky notes, protector sheets, dry erase markers, etc... 	
During	
<p>Ask students to respond to each chunk or section of a source with any combination of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying key details by circling, underlining or highlighting Answering a question about a section or a chunk by drawing, dictating, writing or talking. Discussion with a partner or small group about what the student sees in a section or a chunk 	
After	
<p>Encourage students to think about their personal response to the source.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What feelings and thoughts does the primary source trigger in your students? What new questions are being asked? Ask if this source agrees with other sources, or with what the students already know. (This step is very important so students begin to understand that information that is corroborated by multiple sources is valid and reliable and paints a clearer picture of what happened.) Expect students to create a product to show what they learned. This can be a drawing, writing, poster, retelling, etc... 	 

- Project or provide a copy of the document for students to see.
- Read aloud the document to the students.
- Divide chart paper into the following sections or provide a copy to of this graphic organizer for groups of students or individuals.

Historical Documents

Document Title:

What I see:



Hint: Have students use magnifying glasses for a close look at document

What I wonder:



Any questions students have can go in this section.

Where can I find more information about what I wonder?

Brainstorm where more information can be found to answer questions or to corroborate the information.



I Spy Evidence

Topic or Question

Evidence from Source #1

Evidence from Source #2

I Wonder...

Comparing Two Sources

	Source #1 _____	Source #2 _____
<p>Describe the source? (Circle which senses were used when examining the source)</p>		
<p>Where did the source come from?</p>		
<p>What does the source tell us about?</p>		
<p>Which source has the most information? Place an "X" by #1 or #2 and then explain why.</p>	Source #1	Source #2
<p>Are there facts and opinions in the source? If so, what are the facts and what are the opinions?</p>	Facts	Opinions

Name _____

Analyzing Symbols

Draw a detailed picture of the symbol.



What do you see? (Describe colors, shapes and overall appearance)

What do you think you know about this symbol?

What would you like to find out about this symbol?

Adapted from Library of Congress

Kindergarten Lesson Idea from Library of Congress

Mail Then and Now

Overview:

This lesson uses primary sources in an exciting way for kindergarteners to discover how mail was transported and delivered in the past.

Illinois Social Science Standards Addressed

Inquiry Skills Standards

Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries

- SS.IS.1.K-2: Create questions to help inquiry about a topic with guidance from adults and/or peers.
- SS.IS.2.K-2: Explore facts from various sources that can be used to answer the developed questions.

Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence

- SS.IS.3.K-2: Gather information from one or two sources with guidance from adults and/or peers.
- SS.IS.4.K-2: Evaluate a source by distinguishing between fact and opinion.

Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action

- SS.IS.5.K-2: Ask and answer questions about arguments and explanations.
- SS.IS.6.K-2: Use listening, consensus-building, and voting procedures to decide on and take action in their classroom

Civics Standards

- SS.CV.1.K: Describe the roles and responsibilities of people in authority.

History Standards

- SS.H.1.K: Compare life in the past with life today.

Objective:

Kindergarteners will use primary sources from the Library of Congress to discover how mail was transported and delivered in the past and how it compares to present day.

Materials:

- Review pages 3-5 for additional ideas and questions for analyzing photographs and videos.
- Videos
- Photograph placed in a transparency sleeve, dry erase markers, chart paper
- Optional Graphic Organizers – page 6-8 of this document.

Procedure:

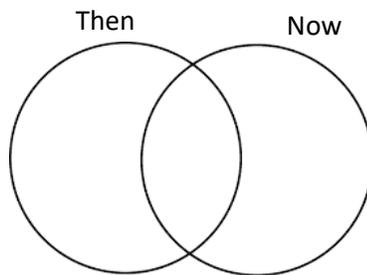
This lesson plan includes a look at two different types of primary sources: videos and photographs. The following lesson idea can be adapted to meet the needs of your classroom.

- a. Students will watch two early motion pictures.
- b. First, a 1903 short film titled “Collecting Mail”. The video (<https://www.loc.gov/item/00564547?loclr=blogtea>) shows a man wearing the uniform of a mailman removing mail from the mailbox. After the video, the students can express their ideas about what they thought was happening. Record their thoughts on chart paper next to the “Collecting Mail Video ”.

Primary Source	Notes	Questions I Have
Collecting Mail Video • What is happening?		
Train Video • What is happening?		
Photo: Men Working • Where are the men working?		

- c. In the next short film, <https://www.loc.gov/item/00564551?loclr=blogtea> the students will observe a train taking up a mailbag. Record what students believe is happening in the train video. (At the end of the film, a mailbag is snatched from a suspension device.)

- d. Have students independently analyze a photo by circling what they see that helps them guess where they think these men are working. (These can be reused if the photo is placed in a transparency sleeve.) (It is a photo of men working in a railway train car. There is a label on this photograph that reveals where this photo takes place. Cover the label so students who can read, do not read where the photo takes place.) <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/93507556/resource/?loclr=blogtea>
- 
- e. As a whole group students should share what they circled and why and add to the chart. This will provide students support for completing the next phase which will be in small groups.
- f. Teachers should determine supports needed in the next phase where students have small group conversations with peers around a set of three early 1900s sources. The first one is a video and the last two are photos of delivering mail in the past.
- A horse-drawn U.S Mail wagon at a railway station:
<https://www.loc.gov/item/00564538/>
 - Unsorted mail at the post office:
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/ggbain.17146/?loclr=blogtea>
 - Girl handing a letter to the mailman in “A letter to papa”: (this is a stereograph – see below)
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3b45635/>
- g. In small groups or in whole group, describe the similarities and differences between mail delivery then and now using a Venn Diagram.



- h. Students can then share out to the whole class or write a summary of what they learned.
- i. Extension Activity: To model the mail delivery that they had observed in these primary sources, have each student create his or her own postcard using the 1904 *stereograph “A letter to papa”.
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/90708161/?loclr=blogtea>



*A stereograph is composed of two pictures mounted next to each other, viewed with a set of lenses known as a stereoscope. See below.



- j. Each student can write a message on the postcard, which could be mailed home.

Adapted from Library of Congress: <https://blogs.loc.gov/teachers/2013/05/our-favorite-posts-kindergarten-historians/>

1st Grade Lesson Idea from Library of Congress

30-Second Look: Classrooms Then and Now

Overview:

Students practice their observation skills by participating in a timed 30-second look at a historic photograph of a classroom. Students may then work together as a class to record and compare their observations, ideas and questions about the photograph, or they may record their observations individually and pair and share with a partner first. Students conclude by reexamining the photograph to identify similarities and differences between this classroom from the past and their classroom today.

Illinois Social Science Standards Addressed

Inquiry Skills Standards

Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries

- SS.IS.1.K-2: Create questions to help inquiry about a topic with guidance from adults and/or peers.
- SS.IS.2.K-2: Explore facts from various sources that can be used to answer the developed questions.

Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence

- SS.IS.3.K-2: Gather information from one or two sources with guidance from adults and/or peers.

Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action

- SS.IS.5.K-2: Ask and answer questions about arguments and explanations.
- SS.IS.6.K-2: Use listening, consensus-building, and voting procedures to decide on and take action in their classroom

History Standards

- SS.H.3.2: Explain how different kinds of historical sources (such as written documents, objects, artistic works, and oral accounts) can be used to study the past.

Objectives

After completing this activity, students will be able to:

- observe details in a historic photograph
- express ideas and questions about the photograph based on observations and prior knowledge
- identify similarities and differences between the historic photograph and their own classroom

Materials

Have these materials ready before the activity:

- Review pages 3, 5 and/or 8 in assist with question generation and other ideas when using sources
- Photograph: "Classroom scenes in Washington, D.C. public schools: studying the dog, 5thDivision." 1899? From Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3a39508>
- Prepare to distribute unlined paper, one sheet per student:
- (Optional) Print copies of the take-home activity worksheet, one copy per student



Procedure:

1. Ask students: have you ever played a game where you had to remember what you have seen? After they share experiences, emphasize that being a good observer—someone who can look closely at details and remember what he or she sees—is important for learning in school, too.
2. Explain that to help students practice their observation skills, you are going to show them a picture for 30 seconds only. Their challenge is to look very carefully at this picture and try to remember as many details as they can. Students cannot talk to each other or draw or write anything down on paper during their 30-second look.
3. When students are ready, project the historic classroom photograph. Tell students their 30 seconds starts now. Walk among them to ensure no one talks or records any details on paper.
4. Alert students when they have only 10 seconds remaining, and countdown the final three seconds before removing the projected image from view.

5. Distribute unlined paper, one sheet per student, and instruct students to work individually to record everything they can remember about the picture. It is their choice to draw, write or do both. Explain that what they draw or write does not need to be spelled correctly or neat; it is just to help them remember their observations.
6. After students have time to record notes, pair students with partners and ask them to share their recorded observations. Each pair should compare and contrast observations, discussing:
 - Which of our observations are the same?
 - Which of our observations are different? How are they different?
7. Provide a few minutes for student pairs to discuss their observations.
8. Draw a large chart on a board with three columns labeled:

What did we see? (Observations)	What do we think we know? (ideas)	What do we wonder? (questions)

9. Prompt the class to begin sharing their observations, ideas and questions about the picture by asking, "What did you see?" Each time a student shares an observation, idea or question, ask the class questions to determine where it goes on the chart. Possible questions include:
 - How many of you made this same observation (e.g., "I saw a dog") How many did not?
 - What other details can you remember about this observation? (e.g., dog was on a desk)
 - What do you think you know but are not certain of? (e.g., teacher was petting the dog)
 - What do you wonder about this picture? (e.g., why is there a dog in the classroom?)
10. Encourage students to try to recall as many details as possible and note any differences of opinion. For example, how many of the students in the photograph were girls? What were they wearing? How were they sitting? Activate prior knowledge by prompting students to use vocabulary words like "school," "teacher" and "students" during discussion.
11. After students have shared all of their observations, ideas and questions, project the picture again and guide students in comparing and contrasting. Possible questions include:
 - Let's review the observations we wrote under the "What did we see" column: how do they compare to what we see now in the picture?
 - What evidence, if any, do you see in the picture that supports the ideas we wrote under the, "What do we think we know?" column?
 - Which questions, if any, that we wrote under "What we wonder?" can you answer now looking at this picture?
 - What new questions do you have about details that you may have missed the first time?
12. Project the picture's bibliographic record and read aloud to students the title and date created. Explain that 1899 means this picture shows a classroom from more than 100 years ago, long before students' grandparents and even great-grandparents were born. As a class, discuss the following questions to conclude the activity:
 - How is this classroom from the past different from our classroom today?
 - How is it the same?
 - Would you rather be a student in this classroom from the past or in our classroom? Why?
13. Students can write their answers to their questions or share a summary of what they learned.
14. The following page is an optional take home activity that will involve family members or friends.

Name: _____

Take-Home Activity Directions:

1. Think about our classroom. Write down your observations: what do you see? Describe as many details as you can.
2. Ask an adult to read your observations. What do they remember about their classroom at your age? Write or draw their memories.
3. On the back of this page, write 1-2 sentences about how your adult's classroom was the same or different from our classroom now.

My Classroom Observations

My Adult's Classroom Memories

2nd Grade Lesson Idea from Library of Congress

Stars, Stripes and Symbols of America: Comparing Our Flag, Past and Present

Overview:

In this activity, students will learn about an important national symbol: the American flag. Students will analyze an image of an American flag from the post-Civil War era (1865-7) and compare its details (i.e., the stars and stripes) to those of our nation's flag today.

Illinois Social Science Standards Addressed

Inquiry Skills Standards

Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries

- SS.IS.1.K-2: Create questions to help inquiry about a topic with guidance from adults and/or peers.
- SS.IS.2.K-2: Explore facts from various sources that can be used to answer the developed questions.

Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence

- SS.IS.3.K-2: Gather information from one or two sources with guidance from adults and/or peers.
- SS.IS.4.K-2: Evaluate a source by distinguishing between fact and opinion.

Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action

- SS.IS.5.K-2: Ask and answer questions about arguments and explanations.
- SS.IS.6.K-2: Use listening, consensus-building, and voting procedures to decide on and take action in their classroom

History Standards

- SS.H.3.2: Explain how different kinds of historical sources (such as written documents, objects, artistic works, and oral accounts) can be used to study the past.

Objectives

After completing this activity, students will be able to:

- Identify the American flag as a national symbol
- Analyze details of this symbol
- Compare two different versions of the American flag to understand why this symbol has changed over time

Materials

Have these materials ready before the activity:

- American flag (use your classroom's flag or bring one in)
- Thirty-Six Star United States Flag image - <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/pnp/pga/02800/02834r.jpg>
Prepare to display the image for discussion either by printing or projecting an analysis sheet. Print one copy for each student

Resources

- Thirty-Six Star United States Flag: <https://www.loc.gov/item/97515549/>
- History of Flag Day (June 14) and the American flag <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/jun14.html>
- The Star-Spangled Banner Web Site, Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History (includes image of the original Star-Spangled Banner, circa 1813)
<http://amhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/>

Procedure:

1. Working with the entire class, explore students' understanding of a symbol by drawing their attention to the classroom's American flag. Ask the following questions to frame the discussion:
 - Where else have you seen the American flag? (e.g., at home, government buildings, on TV, etc.)
 - When have you seen a lot American flags in many places? (e.g., on the Fourth of July, Memorial Day, etc.)
 - Why do you think people fly the American flag? What does it mean? (e.g., it means the United States of America, it means our home, etc.)
2. Acknowledge students' responses about the American flag's meaning and introduce the word, "symbol" by writing it on the board. Tell students that the flag is a symbol— something that stands for or represents something else. Reiterate students' responses about what the flag stands for. Tell students that symbols make people feel certain emotions. How does the American flag make you feel? (e.g., proud, happy, etc.)
3. Explain that in this activity, students will be taking a closer look at the American flag, a symbol of our nation, to learn more about how this symbol has changed over time and why.
4. First, focus students' attention on the classroom's flag. Model the observation and analysis process by guiding the entire class in viewing the flag's details. Ask the following questions:
 - What do you see? (e.g., white stars, blue square, white and red stripes, etc.)
 - What do you think you know about this flag? (e.g., it's old, it's an American flag)
 - What do you want to know?
5. Now display the image of the Thirty-Six Star United States flag and pass out copies of the Analyzing Symbols organizer on page 9 of this document. Working with the entire class, repeat the observation and analysis process modeled above but this time, complete the Analyzing Symbols sheet together step-by-step while viewing the image.
6. Use this sheet to guide students through the process:
 - What do you see? (e.g., white stars, blue square, white and red stripes, etc.)
 - What do you think you know about this flag? (e.g., it's old, it's an American flag)
 - What do you want to know?
7. Next, keep the image on display while bringing students' attention back to the classroom's flag as well. Working with the entire class, guide students through a comparison of the two flags. Possible questions include:
 - How is this flag (the image) different from our classroom's flag? How is it the same?
 - How many stripes are on this flag? How many stripes are on our flag? (count aloud)
 - How many stars are on this flag? How many stars are on our flag? (count aloud)
8. Share the history of the American flag as a national symbol. Explain that both flags are American flags but the one with fewer stars is older; it was made many years ago after the Civil War ended. While the American flag itself is a national symbol, the stars and stripes on it are symbols, too. Tell students that as a nation, we decided to keep the number of stripes the same to honor the original 13 colonies. But we have added a new star to the flag every time a new state joins the union.
 - How many states made up the United States long ago when the older flag was created?
 - How many states make up the United States today?
9. Conclude by asking students to think about the following questions:
 - How do you think the American flag might change in the future?
10. Have students draw and or write what they think the flag may look like in the future.

Primary Source Resources for K-2 from the Library of Congress

The Library of Congress has three primary source sets that were designed with the early elementary grades in mind. They are: [Symbols of the United States](#), [Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln: Three Great Presidents](#), and [Children's Lives at the Turn of the Twentieth Century](#). Each one contains a selection of primary sources – all available as easy-to-use PDFs – with historical background information, teaching ideas for the early childhood classroom, and an analysis tool and teacher's guides.

Additional Source Sets from the Library of Congress can be found at the following link:

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/>