



The ABC's of Primary Source Analysis

For educators—how to use this resource:

Teaching students how to interpret primary sources is integral to well-rounded social studies education. Primary sources provide first-hand accounts of historical events, and the skills students develop by analyzing and interpreting them allow them to consider context and gain a sense of media literacy.

Before presenting students with Primary Source Guided Analysis activities, go through this document—"The ABC's of Primary Source Analysis"—so they feel confident in the steps to take in order to analyze a source.

Start here: What is a primary source? Watch the video below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dv3D8q4LZbM&t=52s>

As part of your Primary Source Guided Analysis, you will be asked to identify the "ABC's" of your source.

A is for Audience: Who is the original, intended audience of the source? For whom was it created?

Here are some examples:

Diary – self

Campaign speech – voters

Newspaper article – readers of that particular newspaper

Movie – the public of the time, those with enough money to purchase tickets

Hint: YOU are almost never the original, intended audience

B is for Bias: What is the author's bias? There is always bias, but not necessarily in an overt, negative connotation.

Bias included factors that influenced the author's/creator's point of view.

Using a primary source that is biased is not necessarily a bad thing because it tells us a lot about the creator and the historical context.

It is VERY important to be able to identify the bias.



Here are some examples:

Martin Luther King Jr. is biased toward racial equality. He trusts that the government can take an active role in producing change toward equality. He believes that peaceful protests will achieve the desired goal.

Ask yourself what about Martin Luther King Jr. and his background (his demographics, educational background, socioeconomic status, etc.) may have led him to the ideology he had. What about his experiences and ideas made him interested in civil rights? Made him trust in the work of the government? Made him favor peaceful protests over acts of violence?

Not all people or civil rights activists at the time shared his views. What, therefore, is specifically Martin Luther King Jr.'s bias(es)?

C is for Cause: What caused the source to be created? What did the creator hope to accomplish?

Here are some example:

- Letter – to communicate information to someone
- Diary – for self-expression
- Campaign speech – to influence voters
- Movie – to entertain, make money, spread a message