



The lesson plans in this section of primary source mini-units were all created by Lindsay Hobson, a GWHI participant from 2007-2010. Lindsay teaches 7th grade Social Studies at Roosevelt Middle School in Cedar Rapids, IA.

Lindsay began design on the lessons in the Spring of 2009. Her goal was to create a series of lessons that would engage students in the heuristics that Sam Wineburg identified in his study of expert readers in history.¹ The heuristics for analyzing and interpreting primary sources include sourcing, or identifying the attributes of a piece of evidence prior to reading it, contextualizing, and corroborating. Each one of Lindsay's activities engage students in the rudimentary forms of these activities. By repeatedly using the same skills to closely read evidence, students may begin to develop habits of mind they will take from the classroom to apply in other contexts.

The lessons all are formatted so that the first page includes a copy of the main piece of evidence the students will explore. Next to the evidence is a column in which Lindsay briefly describes Source, Contextualize & Corroborate activities for engaging students in the evidence. Additional guides and copies of evidence appear on subsequent pages in the lessons.

Lesson Elements

Sourcing:

When we pick-up a piece of historical evidence, our first step in reading should be to take inventory of the who, what, when, where and why of the source's creation. That is, before reading or examining a written or visual source, we should look on it for information about the creator, what type of source it is, the date and location it was created, and why it was created. From these attributes, we may infer the intended audience for the source and the relationship between the writer and the audience. All of which leads us to a series of questions.

How does our *sourcing*, or understanding of the information in the attributes, influence how we can accurately question a particular piece of evidence...

- ✧ Should we question the source to explore the author's perspective on an event or development, or can we use the source to also accurately determine details about an event?
 - ✧ Does our prior knowledge about the attributes help us determine how to question the document? This is called contextualizing and we'll look more closely at that skill below.
 - ✧ Do we need to seek information in additional evidence or accounts to help us determine how we can accurately question this evidence? This is called corroborating, and again, we'll look more closely in a moment.

Contextualizing:

This means that as we read a piece of evidence, we try to understand it in the context of the time and place in which it was created.

- ✧ How does our prior knowledge of time and place, and of human nature, help us understand an author's motives for creating a piece of evidence, or for using the words or images s/he chose to use?



- ✧ Does the context in which a piece of evidence was created suggest we should take someone's words with a grain of salt?
 - ✧ Does our knowledge about the audience and author of a piece of evidence from a particular time and place mean we should question that piece of evidence to determine how the author hoped to influence his/her audience, rather than questioning the evidence to glean an accurate picture of an event or of the author's truest feelings?
 - ✧ What do we do when we can't decide how to question a source just on the basis of our background knowledge? We corroborate...

Corroborating:

Almost always, when we are deciding how to question and interpret a piece of evidence, we must compare it with other evidence. If we read a letter from one Norwegian pioneer woman to her sister in New York City, can we generalize from that letter? Can we accurately conclude that the letter tells us all there is to understand about that woman's life as a pioneer, and about all other pioneer women? That would be silly. By itself, we can only question this letter to learn what it suggests about one bit of time. Before we decide whether we can accurately question such a letter to learn what that woman's entire pioneer life was like, we must compare it with other letters the woman wrote. And if we want to determine whether the author's life was similar to other pioneers' lives, then we must compare her letters with letters that other pioneer women wrote.

¹ Wineburg, 2001