What is a Primary Source?

Simply put, primary sources are the original items or records that have survived from the past – such as clothing, letters, photographs, and manuscripts. They were part of a direct personal experience of a time or event. The online collections of the Library of Congress American Memory project are comprised of primary sources. For the purpose of contrast, it is important to note that secondary sources are created by documenting or analyzing someone else’s experience to provide a perspective or framework of a past event. They may have been written long after an event took place and include items such as textbooks, encyclopedias, biographies, and documentaries.
Exploring American Memory

American Memory is an online gateway to rich primary resources relating to the history and culture of the United States. The site offers more than 10 million digital items from more than 100 historical collections. Special collections include documents, film, manuscripts, photographs, and sound recordings that tell the American story.

memory.loc.gov
Important Components on the American Memory Site

Browse Collections by Topic
This box presents a list of all of the digital collections of the American Memory project organized by broad topics. The collection finder is a good place to begin exploring the vast collections or American Memory, however, in order to find more specific sources, you will need to use the "Search All Collections" box (see Figure 1.).

Search All Collections
The Search All Collections box allows you to search by keyword for items across all of the collections. Here is where you will need to go to find specific items. For example, if you wanted to find items on the Civil War in North Carolina, you could type "Civil War in North Carolina" into the search box and find specific items. Sometimes you have to be persistent and creative with the search, because there are millions of items the search engine searches through.

"Browse Collections by Topic" Box

"Search All Collections" Box

Figure 1. Browsing and Searching the LOC.
More Browse Options
The “More browse options” link at the bottom of the American Memory Home page is a useful way to browse the American Memory site.
Exploring the American Memory Collections
Take a look at the sample collection site to become familiar with the common format for American Memory Collections.

A  Links to LOC.gov and American Memory

B  Unique ways to browse a collection

C  Learn more about a collection

D  Explore Collection Connections to locate teaching resources

E  Rights and Reproductions - suggested credit line
Citing Primary Sources from the Library of Congress

The purpose of citing a primary source is to acknowledge the source of information and give as much detail as possible to find that primary source at a later date. The Library of Congress uses a variety of ways to cite primary source material.

Sometimes a credit line is available.

First:
- Find the bibliographic page that contains your primary source
- Look under the Notes area
- Look for the words Cite as:
- Copy the credit line
- Paste it into your document

Second:
- Find the bibliographic page that contains your primary source
- Look at the line above the thumbnail of your primary source
- Click on “Rights and Reproductions”
- Scroll down to CREDIT LINE:
- Copy the credit line
- Paste it into your document (note: change the sample reproduction number or digital ID to the one specific to your primary source)

Third:
- Find the bibliographic page that contains your primary source
- Click on the name of the collection at the top of the bibliographic page
- Scroll to the bottom of the Collection page
- Click on the Copyright and Other Restriction link
- Copy the credit line
- Paste it into your document (note: change the sample reproduction number or digital ID to the one specific to your primary source)

If credit line is not available:
- Follow the directions for citing sources using the MLA style
- Go to: http://memory.loc.gov/learn/start/cite/index.html
- Scroll to the type of primary source you are using
- Identify the information needed (ex. Author, title, date, etc.)
- Copy the example line into your document
- Fill in the information from the bibliographic page
Exhibitions are online exhibits that highlight a specific theme or topic. These special collections allow you to take a virtual tour of the treasures housed at the Library of Congress.

THOMAS is the area of the Library of Congress web site that has information on current and past legislation. THOMAS makes federal legislative information freely available to the public. You can search by word/phrase, bill number or specific legislator.

The Library of Congress collects materials from all over the globe. Its collections of foreign-language materials are stunning in their scope and quality. For many areas of the world, such as China, Russia, and Latin America, its collections are the finest and most comprehensive research collections outside the country of origin. These digitized collections are found within Global Gateway.
This area of the Library of Congress includes resources, information, and activities that would be of interest to kids, parents and teachers.

This site was designed especially with young people in mind, but there are great stories and activities for kids, parents, and teachers. Discover stories from America’s past: Meet Amazing Americans, Jump Back in Time, Explore the States, Join America at Play, See, Hear and Sing.

This site promotes lifelong literacy beginning with young children. When kids become good readers in the early grades, they are more likely to become better learners throughout their school years and beyond. It’s never too early to open your mind to reading. This site includes poetry, digitized rare children’s books, and resources for parents and teachers.

Everyday Mysteries is filled with fun facts from the Library of Congress. Did you ever wonder why a camel has a hump? Can you really tell the weather by listening to the chirp of a cricket? Why do our joints make popping sounds? Visit Everyday Mysteries to learn about the fascinating science behind ordinary things.
The Wise Guide portal was designed to introduce you to the many fascinating, educational and useful resources available from the nation’s library and one of the most popular websites of the federal government. The “Wise Guide” will be refreshed monthly, much like a magazine, offering links to the best of the Library’s online offerings. Each of the “articles” is based on items contained in a collection, database, reading room or other area of the Library’s online offerings.

Today in History is a Library of Congress presentation of historic facts highlighted by items from the American Memory collections. Travel back in time by visiting the Today in History and using the archives to search for specific information by topic or date.

View presentations from dozens of your favorite authors, poets and storytellers as well as speakers from a variety of fields including, science, technology, religion, government etc. New Webcast are added on a regular basis.
www.loc.gov/learn

The learning page is an online resource, created especially for teachers.

It includes:

- Lesson Plans
- Classroom Activities
- Online Chats
- Self-paced Workshops
- Tips and Tricks

The Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources
www.mlbilstu.edu/aam

For additional standards-based lesson plans, created by local teachers, go to:
- AAM/TPS web site address listed above
- Click on the Resources/Standards Based Learning Experience and then choose the appropriate grade level.
The prints and photographs collections include photographs, prints, drawings, posters, and architectural and engineering drawings. The Prints and Photographs Online Catalog holds items that are not located in American Memory, but some collections can be found in both places. Not all images displayed in this catalog are in the public domain, in some collections only thumbnail images are displayed.

1. Click on Teachers from the Library of Congress homepage.

2. From Teachers, click on Prints & Photographs Reading Room

3. Choose to go to the online catalog to search for items
Conducting an Advanced Google Search

There are times when the previous search strategies just don’t work to find the items you are looking for. The Library of Congress holds many primary resources outside the American Memory Collections. For example, if you wanted to locate items related to the diary of Anne Frank and used the previous search strategies, you may not be able to find what you’re looking for. It’s times like these that the advanced search option on your favorite search engine comes in handy. The following activity will take you through the steps for using the advanced search option within the Google Search Engine. An advanced search using the Google Search Engine will allow you to easily search the entire Library of Congress web site at once and return useful items that may otherwise be hard to find.

1. Go to the Google web site at www.google.com

2. Click on the Advanced Search option on the right side of the search box.

3. Look down the list of options until you find Domain and type “loc.gov” in the Domain box. Be sure that “Only” is selected in the drop down in this option.

4. Type the words “school house” in the top box of Find Results labeled "with all of the words."

5. Click the Google Search button.
Research Centers Overview

The Library of Congress is organized into Research Centers, also referred to as Reading Rooms, where collections of materials are maintained. Research Centers/Reading Rooms offer hundreds of special format, language, and subject area Collections.

1. From the Library of Congress Home page, Click on Researchers

2. Click on Research Centers.
The African & Middle Eastern Division Reading Room provides reference and bibliographic services covering more than 70 countries and regions, from South Africa to Morocco to the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union. In most cases, materials written in the vernacular languages of these areas must be accessed through the African & Middle Eastern Division reading room.
http://www.loc.gov/rr/amed/

The Folklife Reading Room of the American Folklife Center is the access point for researchers interested in folklife. The ethnographic collections of the Archive of Folk Culture, part of the American Folklife Center, are international in scope and include over one million photographs, manuscripts, audio recordings, and moving images.
http://www.loc.gov/folklife/

The Asian Division Reading Room serves as the gateway to material in all languages of Asia, about Asian American Studies, the Asian Diaspora, and the Pacific Islands. In most cases, materials written in Asian languages must be accessed through the Asian Division reading room.
http://www.loc.gov/rr/asian/
http://www.loc.gov/rr/asian/collections.html - Asian Collections

Business Reference Services is the starting point for conducting research in all major business subjects including industry information, commerce, statistics, banking, insurance, economics, finance, investment, and marketing. Reference specialists assist in formulating research search strategies and accessing materials contained in the Library's collections.
http://www.loc.gov/rr/business/

The Center for the Book was established in 1977 to use the resources and prestige of the Library of Congress to promote books, reading, libraries, and literacy. Within the Library, the center is a focal point for celebrating the legacy of books and the printed word. Outside the Library, the center works closely with other organizations to foster understanding of the vital role of books, reading, libraries and literacy in society.
http://www.loc.gov/loc/cfbook/
The Children's Literature Center provides reference services to individuals and organizations concerned with young people. It organizes programs, exhibitions, and issues publications.
http://www.loc.gov/rr/child/

The European Division Reading Room is the primary public access point for researchers seeking to use the vast collections of the Library of Congress relating to European countries, including the Russian-speaking areas of Asia. Researchers interested in Spain and Portugal should contact the Hispanic Division reading room; those interested in the United Kingdom and Ireland should consult reference librarians in the Main Reading Room. The European Division Reading Room has custody of current, unbound Slavic and Baltic periodicals and has available recent issues of Western European newspapers and periodicals and collections of pamphlets and "grey literature."
http://www.loc.gov/rr/european/

In the Geography and Map Division Reading Room, researchers can access the largest and most comprehensive cartographic collection in the world, including more than 4.5 million maps and 60,000 atlases as well as a large number of cartographic materials in other formats.
http://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/
http://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/luso/ - The Luso-Hispanic World in Maps
http://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/guide/ - Geography and Maps an Illustrated Guide
http://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/guides.html - Guides to Collections
http://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/places.html - Places in the News: Find maps locations around the world that are in the news

The Hispanic Division Reading Room serves as the primary access point for research relating to those parts of the world encompassing the geographical areas of the Caribbean, Latin America, and Iberia; the indigenous cultures of those areas; and peoples throughout the world historically influenced by Luso-Hispanic heritage. Luso-Hispanic, Iberian, and Caribbean materials can be accessed through the Hispanic Division or through the Main Reading Room.
http://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/
http://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/otherlhcolls.html - Other Luso-Hispanic Collections
Visiting the Law Library
The mission of the Law Library is to provide research and legal information to the U.S. Congress, U.S. Federal Courts and Executive Agencies, and to offer reference services to the public. It contains the world's largest collection of law books and other resources from all countries and provides digitized information with online databases and guides to legal information worldwide.
http://www.loc.gov/law/index.html

Local History & Genealogy Reading Room
The Local History & Genealogy Reading Room serves one of the world's premier collections of U.S. and foreign genealogical and local historical publications. The Library's genealogical collection began as early as 1815 when Thomas Jefferson's library was acquired.
http://www.loc.gov/rr/genealogy/

Main Reading Room
The historic Main Reading Room is, through its catalogs, the primary entrance into the Library's research collections and the principal reading room for work in the social sciences and humanities.
http://www.loc.gov/rr/main/

Manuscript Division Reading Room
The Manuscript Division Reading Room provides access to more than fifty million items in eleven thousand separate collections. It includes some of the greatest manuscript treasures of American history and culture and supports scholarly research in many aspects of political, cultural, and scientific history.
http://www.loc.gov/rr/mss/
http://www.loc.gov/rr/mss/coll/mss-spcol.html -Special Collections

Microform Reading Room
The Microform Reading Room has custody of and provides access to the general microform collection of the Library of Congress. Other specialized reading rooms, such as Law and Manuscript or Area Studies reading rooms, also contain large microform collections.
http://www.loc.gov/rr/microform/

Motion Picture and Television Reading Room
The Motion Picture and Television Reading Room provides access and information services for the motion picture and television collections to an international community of film and television professionals, archivists, scholars, and researchers.
http://www.loc.gov/rr/mopic/
The Newspaper & Current Periodical Reading Room provides public service to material in the Serial & Government Publications Division: current & retrospective newspapers (U.S. and foreign), current periodicals, and government documents (including U.S. Federal Depository, United Nations, and European Union publications). Collections include material published in all Western European languages.  
http://www.loc.gov/rr/news/

The collections available in the Performing Arts Reading Room of the Music Division number close to eight million items. These include classified music and book collections, music and literary manuscripts, microforms, and copyright deposits. The Library of Congress is unique among national libraries because it embraces the complete range of music--newly commissioned and created works are performed and the original manuscripts are placed in the collections for the use of succeeding generations.  
http://www.loc.gov/rr/perform/  

POETRY

Origins of the Poetry and Literature Center date from 1936, when Archer M. Huntington endowed the Chair of Poetry at the Library of Congress. The Center itself was founded in the 1940s and has been almost exclusively supported since 1951 by a gift from the late Gertrude Clarke Whittall, who wanted to bring the appreciation of good literature to a larger audience. As a unit of the Library of Congress, the Center functions within the Library’s Office of Scholarly Programs.  
http://www.loc.gov/poetry/  
http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/ - Poetry 180

The Prints and Photographs Reading Room provides public access to more than 13.6 million images, including photographs, fine and popular prints and drawings, posters, and architectural and engineering drawings.  
http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/  
http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html - Prints and Photographs Online Catalog  
http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/listguid.html - List of Images on Popular Topics

The unique materials of the Rare Book and Special Collections Reading Room include books, broadsides, pamphlets, theater playbills, title pages, prints, posters, photographs, and medieval and Renaissance manuscripts.  
http://www.loc.gov/rr/rarebook/  
http://www.loc.gov/rr/rarebook/digitalcoll/digitalcoll-other.html -Digitized materials from the Rare Books and Special Collections Division
The Recorded Sound Reference Center is the public access place for the Library's audio collections, which reflect the entire history of sound technology, from wax cylinders, through LP's and tape, to compact audio discs.  
http://www.loc.gov/rr/record/

The Science and Technology Division's Reading Room is the public access point for the Library's scientific and technical materials. The reading room supports access to information in all areas of science and technology. The exceptions are clinical medicine and technical agriculture, the subject specialties of the National Library of Medicine and the National Agricultural Library, respectively.  
http://www.loc.gov/rr/scitech/
### Figure 2.1: Primary Source Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maps</th>
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<th>Advertisements</th>
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<th>Memberships</th>
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<th>Census Records</th>
<th>Oral Histories</th>
<th>Speeches</th>
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<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/150" alt="Image of financial records" /></td>
<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/150" alt="Image of census records" /></td>
<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/150" alt="Image of oral histories" /></td>
<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/150" alt="Image of speeches" /></td>
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Why use primary sources?

In words, pictures and sounds the Library of Congress American Memory collections... bring living history into our classrooms.

Develop critical thinking skills...

Primary sources are snippets of history. They are incomplete and often come without context. They require students to be analytical, to examine sources thoughtfully and to determine what else they need to know to make inferences from the materials.

A high school student states, “I learned that in order to do history, one must be objective and be able to look at a puzzle of historical events and put them together in order.”

Understand all history is local...

Local history projects require students to “tell their own stories” about familiar people, events, and places. Memories from an adults’ perspective provide a rich glimpse of history that is not available in a textbook. What evolves is the sense that world history is also personal family history, which provides a compelling context for student understanding.

An elementary/middle school teacher reports that, “...finding information about topics that are of importance to our local history is invaluable. Students are excited by the fact that our local history is archived nationally. This gives their immediate cultural area importance in their eyes.”

Acquire empathy for the human condition...

Primary sources help students relate in a personal way to events of the past coming away with a deeper understanding of history as a series of human events.

A high school teacher reported that, “In sharing the Whitman hospital letters, I clearly saw a sheen of tears in students’ eyes and noted an avid interest in Civil War soldiers as ‘people,’ not simply as pallid historical figures.”
Consider different points of view in analysis...

In analyzing primary sources, students move from concrete observations and facts to making inferences about the materials. “Point of view” is one of the most important inferences that can be drawn. What is the intent of the speaker, of the photographer, of the musician? How does that color one’s interpretation or understanding of the evidence? A high school teacher states that, “Discovering that two people seeing the same primary source differently creates a kind of dissonance that opens up the meaning of the source and creates new understanding in learners.

Understand the continuum of history...

It is difficult for students to understand that we all participate in making history everyday, that each of us in the course of our lives leave behind primary source documentation that scholars years hence may examine as a record of “the past.” The immediacy of first-person accounts of events is compelling to most students.

“Comparisons of events of the past to events our students are engaged in daily helps to bring “history” to the present and make it ‘live’ for our students.”
Why Would I Use a Primary Source in Teaching and Learning Activities?

For years, historians and educators across the curriculum have understood the value of primary sources in K-12 education. Two key reasons for including primary sources in the curriculum are:

1. Primary sources expose students to multiple perspectives on great issues of the past and present. The human experience, after all, deals with matters that were furiously debated by the participants. Interpretations of the past are furiously debated as well, among historians, policy makers, politicians, and ordinary citizens. By working with primary sources, students can become involved in these debates.

2. Primary sources help students develop knowledge, skills, and analytical abilities. By dealing directly with primary sources, students engage in asking questions, thinking critically, making intelligent inferences, and developing reasoned explanations and interpretations of events and issues in the past and present. Primary sources also often provide a real-life framework to apply skills learned in the classroom. For example, using a chart documenting production from a copper mine in Bryson City, NC, students can calculate information such as profits and losses, and cycles of production.
Activity Ideas to Enhance Curriculum

The following suggestions for student activities can help you enhance your curriculum using authentic artifacts, photographs, audio, music, and documents from the Library of Congress and other sources.

Artifacts

Make a hypothesis about the use of an unknown artifact pictured in an old photograph. Use online and library research to support or refute the hypothesis. Make a presentation to the class to “show and tell” the object, hypothesis, search methods, and results.

Study an artifact and trace the development of this invention over time (examples: automobiles, tractors, trains, airplanes, weapons). What can you find about the technology, tools, and materials available through time? Who used the invention in the past? How is the invention used today?
Select a piece of fine art that appeals to your senses. Research the artist, the date of the piece, and the medium. What does information about the artist; the medium, the subject, and the composition tell you about the prevailing attitudes and conditions of the time period? (For example, What symbolism is used? How is perspective used? In what roles are people portrayed? What is left out of the composition?)

Use resources to study fashion trends. How has fashion changed over time? How did clothing styles reflect people’s work and their roles in society? What clothing styles have carried over into present times?

Photographs
Use an historic photograph or film of a street scene. Give an oral description of the sights, sounds, and smells that surround the scene, presenting evidence from the photograph itself and other sources about the time period. Examine the image to find clues about the economics and commerce of the time.

Select a historical photograph or film frame. Predict what will happen one minute and one hour after the photograph or film was taken. Explain the reasoning behind your predictions.

To encourage focus on detail, show a photograph or film frame to the classroom for three minutes and then remove it. Have students draw the contents of the image on a piece of paper divided into a grid of nine sections. Repeat this exercise with new images and watch students’ ability to recall detail improve.
Audio

Research your family history by interviewing relatives. Use letters, audio recordings, and videotape to compile a report on an important time for your family. Make note of differing recollections about the same event.

Work in teams to record interviews of older citizens in the community. Focus on and compile interviews on one aspect of community life such as work, family, or schools. Combine class reports with historical images and documents to produce a documentary on the history of your community.

Introduce an audio recording of a famous political speech. Ask students to think about and write down impressions while they listen to the speech. What is the speaker's key message? What is the speaker's point of view? How does the speaker's oratory style affect the impact of the message? If the text of the speech is available, have students compare impressions from hearing the speech to impressions from reading the speech.

Have students listen to audio recordings from old radio broadcasts. Compare the language, style of speaking, and content to radio and television programs of today. How does the content of the older radio broadcast exemplify the events and prevailing attitudes of the time? How does modern radio and television programming exemplify events and attitudes of the present time?
Music

Research and study lyrics of popular songs from the periods of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. What do the lyrics tell you about public attitudes toward the war? Interview veterans of these wars about their perception of the accuracy of the information in the lyrics.

Have students search for events that have inspired lyrics in current popular music. Have students compare present day events and music to lyrics from the past inspired by historical events. What are the similarities and differences between present day and historical songs and the events that inspired them?

Documents

Study historical maps of a city, state, or region to find evidence of changes in population, industry, and settlement over time. Use other resources to find and report on causes for the changes you find. Use maps to illustrate your descriptions of these changes.

Choose a famous, historical, public building in your area. Research blueprints or architectural drawings of the building. With help from an architect or librarian, compare the plans to the building as it exists today. What changes do you see? Why do you think the changes occurred?

Suggestions for using primary sources were compiled from the National Digital Library’s Educators’ Forum held in July, 1995 and from the Library staff. Educators at the Forum, like many throughout the country, know that history comes alive for students who are plugged into primary sources. These suggestions for student activities can help you enhance your curriculum using authentic artifacts, documents, photographs, and manuscripts from the Library of Congress and other sources.
<table>
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<td>- Welcome&lt;br&gt;- History, Mission, and Priorities&lt;br&gt;- Speeches and Statements&lt;br&gt;- Biography</td>
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# What Do You See: Photo Analysis Guide

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<td>Describe exactly what you see in the photo.</td>
<td>Summarize what you already know about the situation and time period shown, and the people and objects that appear.</td>
<td>Say what you conclude from what you see.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What people and objects are shown?</td>
<td></td>
<td>What's going on in the picture?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are they arranged?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Who are the people and what are they doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the physical setting?</td>
<td></td>
<td>What might be the function of the objects?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What other details can you see?</td>
<td></td>
<td>What can we conclude about the time period?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Further Research:** What questions has the photo raised? What are some sources you can use to find answers?
Wreck on I.C.R.R., near Farmer City, Ill., Oct. 6, '09

CREATED/PUBLISHED: 1909 October 6
NOTES: Copyright deposit; International Stereograph Co.; October 11, 1909.
Copyright claimant's address: Decatur, Ill.
Illinois Central Railroad.
No. I.
Cleanup crew and onlookers surround wreckage.

From Taking the Long View: Panoramic Photographs, ca. 1851-1991
(http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/pnhtml/pnhome.html)