

THE GREAT SEATTLE FIRE TEACHER RESOURCES

LESSON 2: Introduction to Primary Sources- Document Analysis

Lesson Description:

This lesson is designed to help your students understand the importance of using primary sources for their research. Through a game, analysis of letters and newspapers from the Great Seattle Fire, and class discussion, students will see firsthand how information can be altered, and will learn why it is important to utilize multiple primary sources when attempting learn the truth about a person, place, or event. This lesson is designed for students in 5th grade or above. For younger students, we recommend limiting discussion to document A, and skipping steps 13 & 14.

Objectives:

- Students will learn the difference between primary and secondary sources
- Students will learn how to analyze primary documents and pull out relevant information
- Students will learn the importance of using multiple sources
- Students will begin gathering information about the Great Seattle Fire

Potential EALRs / GLEs Met:

	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4
<i>Reading</i>					X				X	X						
<i>Writing</i>						X	X			X	X					
<i>Communication</i>		X				X										
<i>Social Studies</i>															X	
	5.1	5.2	5.3	5.4												
<i>Social Studies</i>	X	X		X												

Potential CBAs Met:

Constitutional Issues	Causes of Conflict	People on the Move	Dig Deep	Why History?	Cultural Contributions
			X		

Materials:

- Access to the list of class questions generated during *Lesson 1: What is Going on Here?*
- Document Analysis Handout (optional)
- Highlighters
- Primary Source Documents:
 - Document A: Account of the Seattle Fire Narrated by Mrs. Melvin Weed
 - Document B: Letter by Henry McClure
 - Document C: Letter by Helen Mae Anthony
 - Document D: Letter by Isaac Bechtel
 - Document E: Seattle Times PI front page June 7th, 1889
 - Document F: Seattle Times PI June 21st, 1889



Suggested Teaching Procedure:

1. Play a class game of "Telephone." Split your class into two groups. Whisper a phrase (of your choice) into the ear of one student from each group, then have students pass the information on to each member of the group by whispering the phrase to the person next to them.
2. Have the last person to receive the message from each group tell the rest of the class what they heard. Was the information passed on the same at the end of the line as it was at the beginning? Discuss reasons information might change as it is shared.
3. Explain to students that gathering information can be a tricky process. There is a lot of false, biased, and misleading information out there, so when we start to investigate a person, event, time period, place, or other topic it is important to think about where our information comes from and what steps we can take make sure we are actually getting the truth.
4. Have your class think about ways they could get information about a *current, local* event (asking Aunt Sally in Idaho, looking at posters, asking someone who went, going through trash, actually going yourself, etc.). List student ideas on the board.
5. Looking at your class list, ask your students which methods of gathering information would be the most accurate. Discuss why going to the event and gathering information for themselves might be more reliable than using information that has been interpreted, retold, and filtered by others (a.k.a, **secondary sources**).
6. Explain that evidence (something that is written created or otherwise produced) that is directly connected to the person, place, event, or time period you are studying is called a **PRIMARY SOURCE**.
7. Ask students to list some primary sources they could use to research a historic topic that they cannot experience firsthand (artifacts, photos, letters, newspapers, journals, etc.).
8. Have students look over their list of theories and questions from Lesson One. In teams, have each group come up with one more question that they think primary sources might be able to answer.
9. Split up Documents A, B, C, D, and/or E and distribute to pairs/groups of students. For younger students, focus on Document A only. If you would like to use all documents from the list, you may want to hand them out in sets and repeat steps 11 & 12 for each set.
10. Can students answer any of their initial questions? Can they confirm or deny any of their theories? Do they have any new questions? Have students find answers (or clues) to questions from the class list. When they come across information that relates to their questions, have them highlight it.
11. Discuss the documents as class, having students answer questions from the list by citing information from their documents as evidence. Write answers/additions to your class list on the board.



- 12.** Give particular attention to questions that received different answers (i.e. how the fire started and whether or not anyone was killed during the fire). Discuss why some of the documents contain conflicting facts: What can we as historians do to figure out the truth?! Distribute Document F to everyone. Have students corroborate their facts with this source. Go back over the remaining questions/theories from the class list and discuss any evidence that relates to them that has not yet been covered (it's okay if you don't find answers to everything!).
- 13.** Based on what they have learned from this lesson, ask students to discuss in their groups what they think are the most important rules for doing research. Discuss answers as a class, and then post the rules somewhere visible in your classroom. The two rules that will likely come out of this discussion are:

 - 1.) Use primary sources to get the full story
 - 2.) Fact check by using as many sources as possible
- 14.** As homework, have students create their own newspaper article or letter from the perspective of someone (fictional or real) connected to the fire.