

Primary Sources Around the House

Introduction:

You may think that being stuck around the house can be pretty bland, and pretty boring, but the things you have around your home are filled with histories, and each item you interact with everyday gives insights into your life. Artifacts are important sources that historians and other scholars can use to study how human life existed in the past and how it has changed and evolved into the life we know today. A way you can inject some excitement into being stuck at home is to look closer at the everyday objects that surround you. Artists like those on the audio tour, did this with objects that people may have thrown out. Found object art is a way that artists look at everyday objects in a more analytical way, when scholars do research they do exactly the same thing. Scholars examine objects and research to discover all sorts of information.

Types of Sources:

When people, like historians (or students of history like you!), study a topic they use information from many different sources. There are three different kinds of sources, and these sources encompass many different objects. Written texts, art, videos, or even toys can all be source material for research! There are two major types of sources, with a third minor type.

- **Primary Sources:** Primary sources are firsthand accounts, meaning they usually come from the time period or event you are studying. Primary sources include objects like: diary entries, documents, transcripts of court cases, paintings, sculptures, interviews, and works of literature. These are just a few examples, as discussed earlier primary sources can include pretty out there objects like clothing or shoes can be primary sources too!
- **Secondary Sources:** Secondary sources are meant to explain, describe, and analyze primary sources. These can be things like: scholarly articles, critiques, reviews, biographies or textbooks. Remember that these sources explain primary sources, they are usually not from the time period. Looking to the bibliography of a secondary source may, however, help you find some primary sources.
- **Tertiary Sources:** The third type of source is very, very, closely related to secondary sources. These sources are ones that compile information, or compile many sources. Examples of tertiary sources are things like: dictionaries, encyclopedias, manuals, guidebooks, bibliographies, or indexes. Sometimes textbooks can be considered tertiary sources.

Knowing the differences, and purposes of sources can help you when you need to do research and write about it. Though sources can be quite tricky sometimes.

Some items like a newspaper article could be considered either a secondary or a primary source; textbooks can be considered secondary or tertiary, if you are ever in doubt about the type of source you have, ask your teacher!

Activity:

This activity is designed in the spirit of found object art! You will need to look around your house for objects that could be considered primary sources. When you decide on one to focus on then you will need to research about it. Remember to think analytically about whatever source you chose, and make sure to be creative! After you have done your research, you'll make a museum style label, that uses only 100 words to describe your primary source and why it is significant to history.

Directions:

1. **Finding Your Primary Source:** First, you need to find a primary source to work with. Remember these sources are "first hand", and they provide insight about the past. When looking for your primary source, think about what kind of old objects you have around the house. Maybe your parents have some old vinyl records, old family pictures or videos. Cookbooks passed down, old journals, or even old posters can be examples of primary sources you could use.
2. **Researching Your Source:** This could take many forms, this project is not meant to be an intense research assignment, so talking with family members, or googling your object are suitable. Just be careful of the online sites you use, make sure they are credible sites. (This means that they are current, they come from a respected source, the author is a respected expert in the particular area they are writing about.)
3. **Writing your Didactic:** If you have ever taken a visit to the Akron Art Museum, you probably saw small labels next to the different art objects on view. These labels are called didactics, and they explain information about the art on view. Below is a sample didactic to consider when writing your own. Your description is only limited to 100 words, so write carefully!

Creator Name (Years creator lived)
 Title of Source, (Date it was created)
 Materials
 Description : This is where you will use your 100 words to describe your primary source. Remember to explain in this section why your primary source is significant to history.

Below the description comes the credit line. (This is how you acquired the source)

Example

To show you how this assignment looks when it is completed, look to the photo below. For my primary source I chose a vintage Mr. Potato Head from the 1960's!

