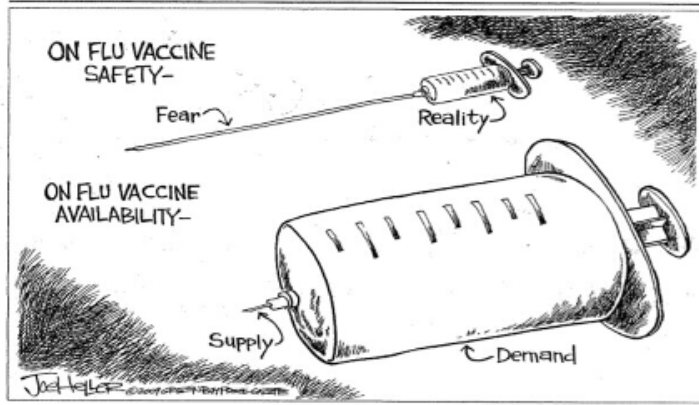


Editorial cartoon



WHAT ARE SOURCES?

A *SOURCE* is any provider of information used to interpret a topic.

Here are just a few examples:

1. Written documents

Diaries, letters, books, articles, certificates, journals

2. Artifacts

Physical remains, maps, photographs, art, tools, furniture
(objects from everyday life that have historical significance)

3. Recordings

Video, film, audio recordings

4. Personal Interviews

In-person discussions, discussions over the phone, or via e-mail

DEFINITIONS OF SOURCES: PRIMARY AND SECONDARY

Primary Source

- A piece of information about a historical event or period in which the creator of the source was an actual participant in or a contemporary of a historical moment. A primary source can be a written document created by someone in the past.
- A primary source can be an object, place, song, or other cultural artifact created during the historical period you are studying.

Secondary Source

- A source that was not created first-hand by someone who participated in the historical era. Secondary sources are usually created by historians, but based on the historian's reading of primary sources. Secondary sources are usually written decades, if not centuries, after the event occurred by people who did not live through or participate in the event or issue.

Primary vs. Secondary Sources

History Fair rules require the use of primary sources if they are available. Many are. Here is the difference between Primary and Secondary sources:

Primary

- Created at the time the event being studied occurred.
- Or created by a participant of the event being studied.
- **Examples:** letters, diaries, and journals, also flight records or ship's logs; business records; government documents; photographs and films; audio tapes; oral history interviews with people who were involved in or witnessed the event being studied; newspaper or magazine articles from the time of the event being studied; songs, poems, ads; autobiographies
- Is the "raw" material—you have to figure out what it means to your topic and what is important about it.
- Can easily be biased—so examine the source carefully. Some questions to ask:
 1. Why was this item created?
 2. Was the creator promoting a particular viewpoint?
 3. Does it contradict information from other sources?

Secondary*

- Created at any time after the event being studied occurred.
 - Created by a third party like an historian, a film maker, or a writer.
 - **Examples:** encyclopedias and other reference books or sets of books; history textbooks; documentaries (the "original film" included is primary); interviews with "experts" on the event being studied such as a college professor or a museum curator; newspaper or magazine articles written at a later time; worksheets, handouts, or "lessons" about the event; biographies
 - Is the "processed information". Someone else has read the primary sources and decided what they mean. The historian tells you what happened and why it is important.
 - Can be biased, also. Check credentials of the writer or creator.
- * Reliable, unbiased, secondary sources can usually be found in school, public, and university libraries.

Adopted from:
History Fair Workbook
A Manual for Teachers, Students, and Parents
Carlita Kosty, Scarecrow Press

COMMON MISTAKES

- 1** "Primary sources" does not mean the main sources you use in your project.
- 2** Primary sources are not fundamentally better than secondary sources. A good History Day project depends upon research into both kinds of sources.
- 3** When you find primary material within a secondary source, don't list it as a primary source in your bibliography.