

Using Primary Source Sets in the Classroom

Primary sources are a great tool for learning.

Here are several suggestions for using primary source sets in the classroom:

Category Sort

A category sort is a simple way to introduce all the items in a set at once. Students examine the items for differences, similarities, and themes. What categories can they create? How many categories can they create? Which items go in which categories?

Compare/Contrast

Students focus on two items selected from the set to consider different perspectives on the topic of the set.

Focus Question

Teachers and students can work together to develop a question about the topic that prompts inquiry into multiple sources from the set. How do different sources help answer the question? How do additional sources enrich the answer?

Timeline

Students use details gathered during analysis to put the sources in chronological order as best they are able. Once the order is determined, students can look for change in how the topic is represented over time, new issues that arose about the topic during certain time periods, or connect specific items to other events that occurred at that time in the state, the country, or in other parts of the world.

Museum Exhibits

Full exhibit: Educators hang up images in the hallway or in the classroom with blank paper under each one. Students examine the sources and write one word per source on the paper that relates to how they interpret the source. Once the class has all contributed, students and teachers discuss the words and themes, patterns, or discoveries made.

Micro exhibit: Students select three items from the set for close analysis. After analyzing the items, the students use them to curate a micro exhibit about the topic.

Illustrated Guides

Select items from the primary source set to illustrate the student guide and prepare a presentation, either an online slideshow or a printed book.

Be sure to visit the [Analyze It!](#) section of the website to learn more about a variety of student-centered close-looking techniques that will help make primary sources more accessible for children.