

Creating and Using Primary Source Sets

Why use a Primary Source Set?

Digital resources are wonderful. They can bring rich content from far beyond the classroom to your students. But there are times when learners need to "hold" a resource, touch it, and see it first hand to really understand it. Primary Source Sets are perfect for such times. They create a "history lab" experience in which students become historians who apply historical thinking and use appropriate tools to analyze historical artifacts.



How can I introduce a Primary Source Set to my students?

Donning white cotton gloves (to protect the artifacts), using a magnifying glass (for close scrutiny of the documents and images), and carefully observing and recording observations (with graphic organizers and recording forms) set the stage for an engaging inquiry learning experience. The teacher's job is to provide the materials and context, then become the "guide on the side" who prompts student thinking through judicious questions and comments. Because primary sources come without "context" and can come with subtle biases, it is critical that students learn to observe carefully what they see or hear before bringing their prior knowledge or personal reflections into an analysis task. This is a skill that must be modeled before students are "turned loose" with materials.

How can I create my own Primary Source Set(s)?

To construct a Primary Source Set, select items that will intrigue and inform your students. Choose artifacts that offer complexity through historical evidence about the era, the events, the persons and the places they show. Selected images can be stored in a "portfolio" file along with a magnifying glass and a set or two of white, cotton gloves. Multimedia can be recorded to CD and placed in the portfolio, as well. A Primary Source Set can be shared by a pair of students or by a small group. For technical tips about preparing materials, see [Recreating American Memory Materials for Off-line Use](#).

http://memory.loc.gov/learn/educators/summer_institute/docs/makeit_takeit.doc

Primary Source Sets truly engage students and often spark their independent research. Primary Source Sets can create a bridge to the past for your students, making history come alive.