

Primary and Secondary Historical Sources

When we are trying to find out about an historical event, we need to look at sources to help us discover what happened.

Historical sources are split into two main categories:

Primary and **Secondary**

Primary or Secondary?

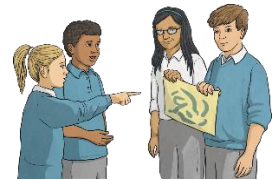
Can you come up with a definition for a primary source by reading the information below?

Primary Sources:

- diary entry recalling events that were witnessed;
- letter telling someone about something that they saw happening;
- photograph of an event;
- artefact (e.g. a tool or weapon) from a particular time in history.

Not Primary Sources:

- textbook written by a historian;
- someone retelling stories they were told by their grandparents;
- an encyclopaedia entry about an historical event;
- an academic journal article written for pupils.



1. My definition for a Primary Source is ...

Secondary Sources

So how would you define secondary sources? Look at the examples below to help you:

- textbook written by a historian;
- someone retelling stories they were told by their grandparents;
- an encyclopedia entry about an historical event;
- an academic journal article written for pupils



2. My definition for a secondary source is ...

Which of these are primary sources and which are secondary?

3. Next to each box write the word Primary and Secondary, depending upon which one you think it is:

A. A lecture given in 2018 by a professor of the Victorian period about life in Edinburgh in the 1890s.

B. Letter from someone involved in Battle of Falkirk.

C. A photograph of the Queen on the day she opened the Scottish Parliament.

D. Textbook for school children about the Roman Empire.

E. A sword from the 1600s.

Advantages of Primary Sources

4. What do you think are the advantages of primary sources over secondary sources?



The Football Match

Read these two primary sources from the football match.

“Our team was definitely better than the Green team in the first half. They couldn’t keep up with us. We should have had at least two penalties but the referee was clearly on their side. In the second half, their striker got lucky and the ball bounced off him into our net. Our team kept fighting until the end but we just couldn’t quite get a goal back. We were just unlucky.” Supporter of the Blue Team

“What a brilliant game! We deserved the win. Our players completely outplayed them. The referee made some really important decisions in the first half. The Blue team thought they deserved a couple of penalties, but their players were just diving. Our striker scored an excellent goal in the second half, their keeper never saw it coming. After that, their team just gave up. All in all, it was a fantastic win for us!” Supporter of the Green Team

5. Why are these reports on the same event different?

Answers

1. Primary Source definition -

Primary sources are original first-hand accounts of an event, topic or historical time period.

2. Secondary Source definition -

A secondary source is a second hand account that interprets primary sources.

3. Which of these are primary sources and which are secondary?

- A. Secondary
- B. Primary
- C. Primary
- D. Secondary
- E. Primary

4. What do you think are the advantages of primary sources over secondary sources?

Primary sources are eye-witness accounts so they are generally considered to be more reliable.

Secondary sources have had to interpret primary sources to get their information. This means that when we read a secondary source, we are reading someone's perspective on a primary source.

5. Why are these reports on the same event different?

Both of the previous sources were one sided. They have a preference for or prejudice against something. In the case of the football teams, each supporter had a particular bias for their team and against the other team.

When we are reading sources, we have to be aware that there might be one sided or bias, as this can affect the reliability of the information we can get from the source.