



Primary Source Strategies

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Teachers whose students have had little or no experience with primary source materials should begin to introduce these students to strategies that help them analyze these materials.

As part of its Pre-AP® initiative, the College Board has developed two strategies -- APPARTS and Asking Questions and Drawing Inferences -- that have been used successfully by AP United States History teachers. The following examples allow students to begin honing their analytical skills with primary source materials.

I. APPARTS

The acronym APPARTS provides students with prompts that gives them a format for dissecting and analyzing primary sources. Once students are comfortable using this strategy they will have a valuable analytical tool.

Author: Who created the source? What do you know about the author? What is the author's point of view?

Place and time: Where and when was the source produced? How might this affect the meaning of the source?

Prior knowledge: Beyond information about the author and the context of its creation, what do you know that would help you further understand the primary source? For example, do you recognize any symbols and recall what they represent?

Audience: For whom was the source created and how might this affect the reliability of the source?

Reason: Why was this source produced, and how might this affect the reliability of the source?

The main idea: What point is the source is trying to convey?

Significance: Why is this source important? Ask yourself "So what?" in relation to the question asked.

II. Asking Questions, Drawing Inferences

The ability to pose good questions is a critical element of historical investigation. Students with the latter skill may then develop the ability to draw inferences beyond the stated text, and formulate hypotheses, based on evidence, that can be tested. The following is an exercise using the Asking Questions/Drawing Inferences strategy:

What interesting facts/characteristics do you notice in the above document?

What questions are raised by this information?

What inferences can be drawn from these questions?

What evidence is there in the documents to support these inferences?

What further questions come to mind?

What insights about this historical period have you gained from this document?