



Analyzing Sources from the Past



CONTENTS

["read" the source closely]

CONTEXTS

["plug in" to readings and lectures]

Who is the **author** or creator? [age, gender, race, social position, values, motives, bias]
 Who is the intended **audience**? Is the author part of/opposed to/related to the audience? [purpose]
 What is the **subject** or topic? Is the author related to the subject? [authority, reliability]
When and where was the source created?
 What **type of source** is this? [diary, newspaper, map, etc.]
 What **inferences** can be drawn about the author, audience, and occasion?

What is the **main idea**, position, or interpretation?

How is the main idea **developed** and supported? Who are the actors, characters, or participants? What are the key ideas, images, or metaphors?

What does this source defend or challenge? [stakes]

What **evidence** is presented to support the claims? Who speaks? Who is quoted? How is the position justified? [appeals to reason, science, nature, common sense, the people]

How is the main idea **presented**? [narrative, exposition, persuasion; tone of anger, humility, objectivity]

What is **missing** or unanswered? [silences, omissions]

What is left unstated? [assumptions, values, allusions]

What else was happening **at the same time**? [nameable events, developments within events, generic or comparative events; long-term societal, cultural, political and demographic processes; parallels with contemporary, previous, or subsequent events]

What else was happening **in the same place**? [specific geographic locations, generic place types]

How does the source fit within the **life and work** of its creator? How does it fit within the life and work of its subject?

How does the source fit within the broader history of this type of source?

How do the contents of this source compare with **other sources** from the same time and/or about the same subject? [corroboration]

SIGNIFICANCES

[appraise the source's value then and now]

How does the source document **conditions in the past** and/or illuminate the past for us today? What does the source permit us to say about its creator, its preserver, or American life at the time of its creation?

What does the source tell us about the **things that preceded** it? [precursors, novelty, causality]

What were the **immediate consequences** of the source and/or its subject? [change, causality, importance]

What was the **long-term impact** of the source and/or its subject? How widely was the source distributed, read, and acted upon? How has its meaning or interpretation changed over time? [durability, profundity, precedence]

What can we make of the source today? Does this source relate to other sources (particular), the larger story (general), you the reader (generic)? Could you use this source to _____? [relevance, application, lessons]

