

INTERPRETING THE PAST

LEARNING OBJECTIVE STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO

Students will be able to 1) distinguish between primary and secondary sources. 2) analyze a variety of primary source documents (letters, diaries, pictures, maps, objects, and oral histories) and 3) understand the importance of primary source analysis in the research process.

LESSON OVERVIEW STUDENTS WILL

- ✓ Watch a video in which an historian discusses America's role in WWII
- ✓ Complete primary source document analysis exercises
- ✓ Write a 3-5 paragraph short essay interpreting two primary source documents

VIDEO SYNOPSIS

Students will hear from Distinguished Professor of History at Miami University, Dr. Allan Winkler about the impact of WWII on the United States and modern world history. Professor Winkler discusses why it's important to learn about the past, provides an overview of America's involvement in the war, and describes how historians go about doing research and interpreting the past.

TEACHER OVERVIEW

To students, and to many of us, history can seem abstract—a string of distant events that have little bearing on our own lives or communities. History can often be presented as a list of facts, names, and dates to be memorized, creating the impression that history is set in stone. Yet, history is not static. New interpretations are being written as new facts come to light. As our perceptions and priorities change, the past is examined from new angles. And, as the vantage point from which we view the past changes, so does the interpretation and writing of history.

Historians write most of what we read in books and textbooks. Historians are professionals trained in the methodology of conducting historical research. They interpret and present their findings in publications such as scholarly journals and monographs. Their process of “doing history” is much like an investigation where the researcher must look at a number of primary sources as clues. Primary sources are records that have survived from the past that were created at the time of a specific event or during a specific period. Examples of primary sources include documents, photographs, letters, artifacts, and eyewitness accounts. Historians also look at secondary sources like books and articles to see what other academics in their field have discovered or asserted about past events.

In their work, historians strive to remain objective when looking at the past. This objectivity can be difficult to achieve, especially when examining events like those of World War II (1939-1945) where emotions remain high. The events of WWII are at times challenging to interpret and many events, such as the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, remain controversial to this day. Historians must be cautious when examining sources, as facts can be misrepresented and mistakes can be made. Historians must sort through differing viewpoints, eye witness accounts and information that may be incorrect or difficult to interpret. Primary sources and secondary sources can contain bias so it's important for the researcher to take these concerns into account. Historians must also take multiple perspectives into consideration to truly arrive at a broad, inclusive picture of the past.

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MATERIALS

LCD Projector

Computer Lab or Library Access for Web research

VOCABULARY

Monograph

Bias

Scholarly journal



OHIO ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS

Grade 9-10

Social Studies Skills and Methods

- A. Evaluate the reliability and credibility of sources.

Grade 9

Citizen Rights and Responsibilities

3. Analyze how governments and other groups have used propaganda to influence public opinion and behavior.

Social Studies Skills and Methods

1. Detect bias and propaganda in primary and secondary sources of information.
2. Evaluate the credibility of sources for:
 - a. Logical fallacies;
 - b. Consistency of arguments
 - c. Unstated assumptions
 - d. Bias
3. Analyze the reliability of a sources for:
 - a. Accurate use of facts;
 - b. Adequate support of statements;
 - a. Date of publication

Grade 10

Social Studies Skills and Methods

1. Determine the credibility of sources by considering the following:
 - a. The qualifications and reputation of the writer;
 - b. Agreement with other credible sources;
 - c. Recognition of stereotypes
 - d. Accuracy and consistency of sources
 - e. The circumstances in which the author prepared the source

Grade 11-12

Social Studies Skills and Methods

- b. Critique data and information to determine the adequacy of support for conclusions.

Note: The lesson can be adapted to the analysis of any primary source or propaganda in any time period.

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INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURE AND CORE ACTIVITIES

AN HISTORIAN'S PERSPECTIVE GUIDED VIEWING

1. Explain to students that primary sources are a vital piece of history and offer “first hand” glimpses of the past. Ask the class for examples of primary sources (speeches, letters, diaries, pictures, etc) Allow the students ample time to understand the difference between primary sources and secondary sources. Ask the students what problems can surround primary sources. (bias, inaccurate information)
2. Define point of view for the students. Ask why it is important to always determine the point of view of the primary source. Propaganda posters are good examples.
3. Next, based on the information in the overview, explain that historians examine these historic records in order to write their own interpretation of past events.
4. Now, explain that students will be watching a brief video and will hear from an historian who specializes in modern American history. He presents a broad overview of the war, its impact on America, and explains how historians “do history.”
5. Play the video **An Historian's Perspective** from **Disk 2** and have students complete the Guided Viewing Worksheet while watching. Advise students that they should also watch for examples of primary sources that they see in the video (note: all images and historic footage are examples)

PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. Using an LCD projector show the primary source Power Point included on **Disk 3** (photos, advertisements, letter, speech) to students. Ask students if they recognize any of the Primary Sources. (Students should recognize images from the video)
2. Distribute the **Primary Source Analysis Worksheet** and, together as a class complete a Primary Source Analysis exercise while analyzing one of the sources from the Power Point. Have students fill in answers on a blank sheet of paper so they can continue to use the worksheet.
3. After practicing analyzing primary sources as a class, pair students and show another document on the LCD (or handout) for the pairs of students to analyze. Use a variety of primary sources for the students to analyze.
4. As a class, discuss the results of the analysis.
5. Conclude the lesson by assigning the students to locate a WWII era primary source for homework. Students should print a copy of the source and list on the print out what type of primary source it is. You may suggest the following Web sites for students to look:

The Library of Congress American Memory
www.memory.loc.gov

National Archives and Records Administration
www.archives.gov

Ohio War Stories
www.ohiowarstories.org

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1. Explain that now that students have learned to analyze primary sources, they will now interpret an event based on their analysis. For this, students will analyze the letters exchanged between Albert Einstein and Franklin Roosevelt regarding the potential use of atomic energy. Distribute copies of the letters as handouts to the class.
2. After reading both documents closely, students will complete **Primary Source Analysis Worksheets** for both and then use this to help write a 3-5 paragraph short essay which summarizes and interprets the conversation between the two historical figures.
3. Let students know that their short essay must include a thesis statement, introductory and conclusion paragraphs, and topic sentences. You may wish to collaborate with the Language Arts teacher for this portion of the assignment. You may also wish to have students think about the following questions to help them form their thesis and frame their argument in their short essay:

What was Albert Einstein's fear concerning uranium and what statement in his letter supports this?

How did Roosevelt respond to Einstein's letter, and what can this tell you about his reaction to the information?

ANSWER KEY

AN HISTORIAN'S PERSPECTIVE GUIDED VIEWING

1. Franklin Roosevelt
2. The War set the stage for the modern era in that the Civil Rights and Women's movements were set in motion.
3. The New Deal programs were intended to alleviate some of the effects of the Great Depression like unemployment.
4. The United States wanted to stay out of the war because of its experience in WWI. It did not want to be drawn into what it saw as European conflicts and the United States wanted to focus on its own domestic problems.
5. Lend Lease was a program of material aid to its allies before the U.S. entered in the war.
6. An important factor leading to the attack on Pearl Harbor was the U.S. embargo of raw materials to Japan.
7. On the home front, businesses were converted to war production; a rationing program was put in place; people planted victory gardens, participated in scrap metal drives, and women entered the workforce.
8. The Manhattan Project developed the first workable atomic bomb.
9. According to Professor Winkler, the United States should have waited for the Japanese response before dropping the second bomb.
10. Its important to look at more than one source because sources can be wrong, disagree, and contain bias among other things. Some examples of primary sources include photographs, letters, official documents, and eye witness accounts.

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ANSWER KEY

PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET RUBRIC

Rubric	4	3	2	0-1
DESCRIPTION	Elaborate with details; format correctly identified	Complete; format correctly identified	Partial; format correctly identified	Partial
WHO	Complete with elaboration	Complete	Partial	None
WHAT	Topic is correctly identified with elaboration	Topic is correctly identified	Partial	None
WHEN	Complete with elaboration	Complete	Partial	None
WHY	Complete with elaboration	Complete	Partial	None
AUDIENCE	Correctly identified with interpretation and relates to historical context	Correctly identified with interpretation	Correctly identified	Attempted or None
ANALYSIS	Includes correct analysis and interpretation, identifies point of view or bias, correctly identifies key issues and relates to historical context.	Includes correct analysis and interpretation; identifies key issues and relates to historical context.	Includes correct analysis and interpretation; identifies key issues.	Attempts analysis and interpretation.

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ANSWER KEY

INTERPRETING THE PAST ESSAY RUBRIC

	4	3	2	0-1
THESIS	Includes clear, insightful, plausible, thesis that establishes position.	A clear thesis is included and establishes a position.	A thesis statement is included but may be unclear.	Difficult to identify thesis, or not included.
ORGANIZATION/STRUCTURE	Essay includes introduction and conclusion paragraphs, the body of the text contains topics sentences and is logical with clear transitions from ideas.	Essay includes introduction and conclusion paragraphs, the body text and transitions are generally clear.	Essay may include introductions and conclusions, may be unclear and jump around from ideas.	Unclear, lacks organization.
USE OF PRIMARY SOURCE EVIDENCE	Primary Source information is referred to and used to support ideas. Integrates quotes, dates, and other facts.	Primary Source is referred to and used to support some ideas.	Most points lack supporting evidence from source. Quotes not used or used incorrectly.	Uses few or weak examples of Primary Source evidence to support arguments.
ANALYSIS	Analysis is insightful; demonstrates critical thinking and relates to thesis.	Analysis demonstrates critical thinking and does a fair job of relating to thesis.	Analysis demonstrates little critical thinking; relation to thesis may be unclear.	Very little attempt to interpret primary source evidence or relate to thesis.
MECHANICS	Excellent sentence structure, grammar, spelling and punctuation.	Strong sentence structure, grammar, spelling and punctuation. May one or two grammatical errors.	Problems in sentence structure, grammar, spelling and punctuation.	Multiple problems with sentence structure, grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation.
AUDIENCE	Correctly identified with interpretation and relates to historical context	Correctly identified with interpretation	Correctly identified	Attempted or None

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Student Name: _____

Date: _____

AN HISTORIANS PERSPECTIVE GUIDED VIEWING

1. Who was president of the United States in the years leading up to WWII and for most of the War?

2. According to Professor Winkler, how did the War set the stage for the modern era?

3. What were the New Deal programs of Roosevelt aimed at helping with?

4. What are some reasons that the United States had for wanting to stay out of the War?

5. What was Lend Lease?

6. Name an important factor that led Japanese Expansionism and the eventual attack on Pearl Harbor.

7. What types of efforts were underway on the Home Front to support the War?

8. What was the Manhattan Project and what was developed as a result of the project?

9. Why, according to Professor Winkler, is the dropping of the second atomic bomb controversial?

10. According to Professor Winkler, why is it important to look at more than one source when studying the past? What are some examples of primary sources we can look at?

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Student Name:

Date:

PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Title:

Author:

Date:

1. List the format of the primary source, include a description of how the item looks.

2. Who is the intended audience?

3. What is the topic?

4. What is the purpose or function of the primary source?

5. When was the source written?

6. Who is the intended audience?

7. Why was the source written? Cite specific parts from the source that supports your answer.

8. Write a 3-5 sentence analysis of the source that determines point of view, identifies bias, and explains the purpose or key issues as related to the historical context.

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Source Courtesy of:

National Archives and
Records Administration

Albert Einstein
Old Grove Rd.
Nassau Point
Peconic, Long Island

August 2nd, 1939

F.D. Roosevelt,
President of the United States,
White House
Washington, D.C.

Sir:

Some recent work by E. Fermi and L. Szilard, which has been communicated to me in manuscript, leads me to expect that the element uranium may be turned into a new and important source of energy in the immediate future. Certain aspects of the situation which has arisen seem to call for watchfulness and, if necessary, quick action on the part of the Administration. I believe therefore that it is my duty to bring to your attention the following facts and recommendations:

In the course of the last four months it has been made probable - through the work of Joliot in France as well as Fermi and Szilard in America - that it may become possible to set up a nuclear chain reaction in a large mass of uranium, by which vast amounts of power and large quantities of new radium-like elements would be generated. Now it appears almost certain that this could be achieved in the immediate future.

This new phenomenon would also lead to the construction of bombs, and it is conceivable - though much less certain - that extremely powerful bombs of a new type may thus be constructed. A single bomb of this type, carried by boat and exploded in a port, might very well destroy the whole port together with some of the surrounding territory. However, such bombs might very well prove to be too heavy for transportation by air.

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Source Courtesy of:

National Archives and
Records Administration

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The United States has only very poor ores of uranium in moderate quantities. There is some good ore in Canada and the former Czechoslovakia, while the most important source of uranium is Belgian Congo.

In view of this situation you may think it desirable to have some permanent contact maintained between the Administration and the group of physicists working on chain reactions in America. One possible way of achieving this might be for you to entrust with this task a person who has your confidence and who could perhaps serve in an inofficial capacity. His task might comprise the following:

a) to approach Government Departments, keep them informed of the further development, and put forward recommendations for Government action, giving particular attention to the problem of securing a supply of uranium ore for the United States;

b) to speed up the experimental work, which is at present being carried on within the limits of the budgets of University laboratories, by providing funds, if such funds be required, through his contacts with private persons who are willing to make contributions for this cause, and perhaps also by obtaining the co-operation of industrial laboratories which have the necessary equipment.

I understand that Germany has actually stopped the sale of uranium from the Czechoslovakian mines which she has taken over. That she should have taken such early action might perhaps be understood on the ground that the son of the German Under-Secretary of State, von Weizsäcker, is attached to the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut in Berlin where some of the American work on uranium is now being repeated.

Yours very truly,

A. Einstein

(Albert Einstein)

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Source Courtesy of:

National Archives and
Records Administration

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

October 19, 1939

My dear Professor:

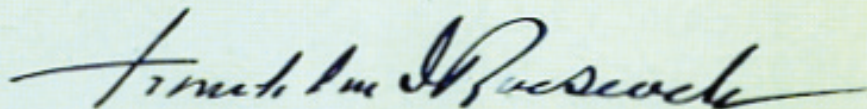
I want to thank you for your recent letter and the most interesting and important enclosure.

I found this data of such import that I have convened a Board consisting of the head of the Bureau of Standards and a chosen representative of the Army and Navy to thoroughly investigate the possibilities of your suggestion regarding the element of uranium.

I am glad to say that Dr. Sachs will cooperate and work with this Committee and I feel this is the most practical and effective method of dealing with the subject.

Please accept my sincere thanks.

Very sincerely yours,



Dr. Albert Einstein,
Old Grove Road,
Nassau Point,
Peconic, Long Island,
New York.