

LESSON #1: Understanding Historical Perspective in Retelling Events

ABSTRACT: In this lesson, students will practice retelling personal history stories and experience a hands-on experiment to distinguish factual differences between primary and secondary sources.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS/ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

- How historically accurate are secondary sources? Primary sources?
- How do our experiences affect how we see our past?
- How do we evaluate the reliability of sources during historical research?

ASSESSMENT: Students will be evaluated by their responses on the Understanding Historical Perspective Worksheet and through class discussion.

SETTING THE PURPOSE: Students will use this lesson to understand what we mean by historical perspective, and how primary and secondary sources show differences in perspective. They will use knowledge as a foundation for understanding material covered in the rest of the unit, analyzing historical perspective regarding Abraham Lincoln through the lens of some famous entertainment figures in Urbana and national history.

DURATION: One to two class periods.

PROCEDURE:

- On the board, or overhead, write the word “perspective”. As students to brainstorm what this term means. After a few moments, a list should be compiled of possible definition. If everyone agrees on the definition, then the class can move on. Otherwise, have the students look this word up in the dictionary.
- Now, add the word “historical perspective”. Discuss possible meanings for this term.
- Explain to students that today’s activity will help us understand what historical perspective is, as well as what is a primary source or secondary source.
- Distribute the Understanding Historical Perspective Worksheet and read through the instructions together.
- Students will come up with a short but important memory that they can recall in detail. They will then share these stories with a partner that does not know the story. Once they complete this task, they will go back to their seat and write down what they recall of their partner’s story and give the written version back to the person who told the memory.

- Students will then work on the second half of the activity, comparing the accuracy of their partner's retelling to their own retelling. Students will then complete the questions at the end of the worksheet.
- Once all students finish the activity, bring the group back for a class discussion. Possible discussion questions:
 1. How did your story differ from your partner's retelling?
 2. What is a primary source? A secondary source? Which do you feel are more reliable sources in understanding history?
 3. Are primary sources always reliable? Why or why not?
 4. Just because someone lived through an event, does it mean that they remember it all correctly?
 5. How does point of view (historical perspective) change the way people remember current events? Historical events?
- Wrap up the lesson by explaining that the class will be learning about how everyone has a viewpoint of history that is affected by our experiences and stories that we have heard. Some of these viewpoints are based in fact, some in fiction that we've come to believe as fact. This unit will look at how two historic Urbana residents saw Lincoln, and how this affected the way their audiences saw Lincoln too. We'll then be studying Lincoln ourselves, and forming our own opinions of the man.

ANALYSIS OF LOCAL PRIMARY SOURCES: None in this introductory activity; the sources are the students themselves.

TIES TO NATIONAL PRIMARY SOURCE OR SOURCES: None in this introductory lesson.

LIST OF MATERIALS AND RESOURCES:

- Understanding Historical Perspective Worksheet

ATTACHMENTS:

- Understanding Historical Perspective Worksheet