

Lesson 2: Learning How to Analyze Lincoln Primary and Secondary Sources

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Abstract:

In this lesson, students will critically analyze the value of using primary and secondary sources in historical investigation. Students will examine how memory and emotion play into primary sources, and will question how these two factors affect the reliability of the source. Finally, students will use Lincoln related primary sources from Central Illinois to practice gathering information from historical documents.

Essential questions/enduring understandings:

- What is a primary source?
- What gives a source investigative value?
- How do we distinguish between clear and muddled memory?
- Does emotion benefit or hinder the value of primary sources?
- Which has more investigative value-primary or secondary sources?
- Can bias help a historical investigation?

Assessment:

The teacher will utilize feedback from class discussion and answers on worksheets to analyze student progress.

Setting the Purpose:

Students will review the definitions and qualities of primary and secondary sources. They will compare the usefulness of each type of source, and the different information each might provide. Next, they will learn the different types of primary sources available within the Lincoln related resources at www.americanhistoryteachers.org and weigh each for its relative usefulness for providing information for investigation. Finally, the students will practice their investigative skills by examining three Lincoln related primary sources as a class.

Duration:

1 to 2 class periods

Procedure:

Part 1

In this section, students explore the advantages and disadvantages of primary and secondary sources used for historical investigation.

- Start class with the questions: What is a primary source? What is a secondary source? Discuss the differences between information that comes straight from the people who were there versus those who interpret the event later. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? What do both have in common? For this part of the discussion, you may want to create a class [Venn Diagram](#).
- Brainstorm with students what can be a primary source-if you have used the [Venn Diagram](#) handout for individual students, they could use the back of this sheet to complete this brainstorm.
- Distribute [Evaluating Primary Sources](#) worksheet. As a class, review the advantages of each type of primary source. What types of information could you get from this source that you may not be able to get from another type of source? What disadvantages are there to this type of source? What information is missing? Remind students that emotion plays into memory-sometimes it clouds information with bias, but sometimes, the bias itself can tell us something about the relationship between the person who created the source and the information presented. Which types of sources rely more on memory? Why?

Part 2

In this section, students will get practice analyzing Lincoln related primary sources.

- Distribute 3 copies of the [Remembering Lincoln Document Analysis Worksheet](#) per student.
- You may choose to put the following primary sources on an overhead projector, LCD projection, or print the documents and provide copies to students.
- Project or distribute these Central Illinois Lincoln related documents: [Ball Invitation](#), [Stolen Letter Copy](#), and [Day After Debate](#).
- As a class, analyze each of the documents. What is the different types of information each provides? For each source, what doesn't it tell us that would be helpful to know?, What questions it leaves us with? Explain that as well as looking for answers in primary sources, it is also important to look for clues to further questions. No one primary source provides all the information we need;

however, it can provide key words that help us to do a deeper investigative search.

- End class with a discussion on why it is important to develop questions about the sources that they look at. Asking the big “why?” questions lead investigators into investigations. Each document is a puzzle piece in understanding the bigger picture.

Analysis of local primary sources:

Students will use the following to guide their analysis:

- Remembering Lincoln Document Analysis Worksheet

Ties to National primary source or sources:

The teacher may want to explore the topics of the three sources used in this lesson: Lincoln’s inauguration, Lincoln’s life as a Lawyer, and the Lincoln Douglass debates.

Attachments:

- [Venn Diagram](#)
- [Evaluating Primary Sources](#)
- [Remembering Lincoln Document Analysis Worksheet](#)

[Ties to Illinois State Learning Standards:](#)