

Name _____

Date _____

Worksheet 1 The Difference Between Primary and Secondary Sources

Compare your description with what B.F. Harris said about his formal education.

“I was at six years of age when I commenced going to school. The school house was two miles and a half. I remember the morning I first started to school my mother gave me the little primer and folded up a nice square piece of paper. I asked her what the paper was for. She said it was a thumper and showed me how to use it. So I put out to school, arrive safely, walked in with my primer and thumpaper in hand. The teacher gave me a seat. I looked around and with other things I saw about a half dozen nice hickory switches sittin in one corner near the teacher’s chair. I wondered what they ware for in a short time the teacher drew out one of the hickorys and commenced whipping a boy. I soon found out what the hickory was for. I was scared and kept watch of the Teacher and the switches. Before night the switches was purty well used up. In those days whipping was all the go. The Teachers name was Pilcher. The first few days of my school life I put in my time in watching the Teacher and the switches he would bring in every morning to whip the scholars. In the course of a few weeks I got used to it, and continued going to school some three or four years, to different teachers, at the same school house, until I was about ten years old and then attended school in the winter and worked on the farm in the summer until I was sixteen years of age.”

This excerpt was taken from Notes of B.F. Harris, Sr. reproduced from the original manuscript by B.F. Harris, III. Produced and bound in November, 1964 for members of the family and friends. Champaign County Historical Archives, Urbana Free Library, 210 West Green Street, Urbana, Illinois. This account is on pages 4 and 5 and was originally written by B.F. Harris in 1899 when he was 88 years old.

1. Underline sections you omitted from Harris’s account. Circle words that you did not understand when you heard them. Next look at what you wrote. Put a box around points you remembered correctly. Put a double line under things that are wrong. How did you do?

2. Did you leave out things you did not understand, or did you guess at the meaning and include your guess in your paragraph? If possible, give an example.

3. Is your summary or Harris’s account a more accurate source for someone interested in learning either about school life in the early 1800s or about the life of B.F. Harris? Why?

4. B.F. Harris's original manuscript was over 300 hand-written pages. His great-grandson, B.F. Harris III, transcribed the original document. What are some of the difficulties he might have encountered as he typed the manuscript?

5. B.F. Harris's account is an example of a primary source. He wrote it, and he experienced it. The typed manuscript is also considered a primary source because it was duplicated as faithfully as possible without corrections or interpretations. You will also be viewing copies of original documents and artifacts such as pages from a family Bible, birth certificates, pictures, and wills. These have not been altered and are considered primary sources. Your description of what B.F. Harris said about his formal education is a secondary source. You were not there. You simply retold what you heard. With these points in mind, define:

Primary Source:

Secondary Source:

6. Do you feel one source is more reliable than the other? Why or why not?

7. Because someone lived through and wrote about an event, is it necessarily an accurate account? Why or why not?

8. What cautions would you give to someone using primary and secondary sources to gather information about a person or event?