



Primary Sources in the Classroom



Credits

Prepared for the Canadian Jewish Heritage Network by Shannon Hodge. The CJHN endeavors to encourage use of archival materials in learning and community legacy. For more information about how the archivists of the CJHN partnership can enhance your students' classroom learning, contact us directly, archives@iplmontreal.org.

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Introduction

This document serves as a basic introduction for teachers unfamiliar with the use of primary source material in the classroom. In general it is most suited for grades five to eight. It is accompanied with sample exercises for actual classroom use, complete with digitized materials. The benefits of primary source teaching described in this document, as well as the sample exercises, refer heavily to the core competencies required by students under current Quebec Education curricula guidelines for social studies. These core competencies are easily transferable to other provincial requirements as well as to complimentary programmes such as the *Benchmarks of Historical Thinking* programme.

Use

This document, as well as any education kits on the CJHN site, is available free-of-charge for download and use in classrooms or other educational settings. This document is part of a small series dedicated to helping educators introduce primary sources into lessons. Along with this document you may also access several example lessons and activities designed to introduce primary source concepts to students.

Primary Sources Defined

Primary sources are materials created at the time of an historical event or era or very soon afterwards. Primary sources can be viewed as the raw data from which historians, including you and your students, build narratives of history. Students are not just learning history when they use primary sources, but they are *doing* history by being an active participant in their own understanding of historical events, places and people.

Where to Find Primary Sources?

An increasing amount of archives and museums are providing access to archival material through digitized collections. Many of these sites also provide educator resources as well as lessons and game for students. Digitization projects at archives and museums can provide for you and your students a wealth of primary source material. A reference list of sites with primary source material can be found at the end of this document (Appendix A).

It is important to remember that primary sources can be found in your home or in your community as well! Older newspaper clippings, city directories, family archival material, catalogues and sound recordings may be a very useful tool in your classroom.

And don't forget archivists! Speak to an archivist at an institution near you and see how they can help your students discover primary source learning!

Examples of Primary Sources

- Photographs
- Folk Songs
- Oral History
- Diaries, journals and memoirs
- Artifacts
- Catalogues
- Historical Cartoons
- Transcripts
- Newspapers and advertisements from the time
- Historic places, buildings or monuments
- Toys
- Art
- Electronic records (e-mails, electronic documents, websites)
- Posters
- Maps
- Interviews
- Poems
- Directories
- Clothes
- Speeches
- Informational Records/Personal Records (passports, health cards, etc.)
- Documents
- Census reports
- Films
- Letters

Using the Canadian Jewish Heritage Network for Primary Sources

The Canadian Jewish Heritage Network (CJHN) is a platform that allows the presentation of thousands of digitized archival primary sources, all searchable from your own computer. If you would like to use primary sources in your classroom, explore the offerings of CJHN for inspiration or use. If you see material in the CJHN databases that is not yet digitized, contact the archivists and speak to them about how to present this material for your classroom.

Explore

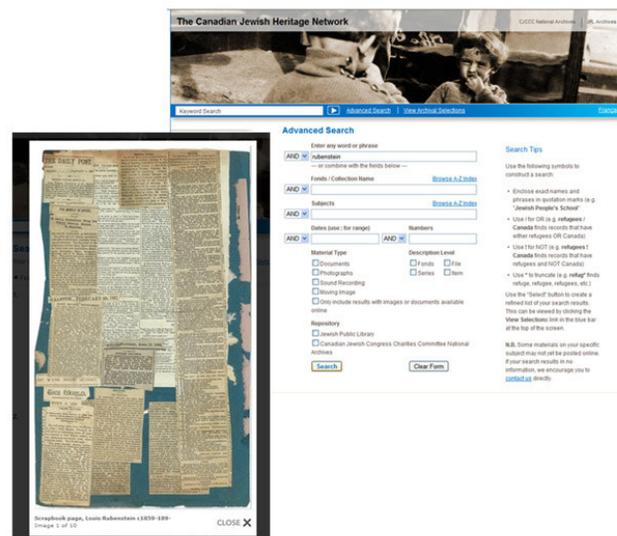
- Search the online catalogue for archival collections dating from the 18th century onwards.
- View digitized photographs, documents and ephemeral material over your computer.
- Select, e-mail, print or order copies of archival material from the web.

Experience

- Browse through galleries of thousands of digitized photographs.
- Research from the comfort of your desk and read through digitized documents including minutes, annual reports, anniversary publications, etc.

Family History

Dive into the CJHN genealogical research database, consisting of family history resources available in our partner institutions. The genealogical database at this time consists of information from Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (1922-1952), Jewish Colonization Association (1906-1951), translated Yiddish obituaries from the *Keneder Adler* (1908-1931), membership information from the Hebrew Sick Benefit Association (1897-1905), and information about Jewish serviceman casualties in the Canadian Armed Forces during World Wars I and II.



Examples of Primary Source Lessons and Activities

In addition to the education kits you will find on the CJHN site, the integration of primary source material into teaching can be done in a myriad of ways. For example:

- Introducing students to analyzing different formats of archival material (photographs, documents, posters, newspapers) for evidence of the past.
- Creating timelines using archival material (popular culture magazines, fashions, music, correspondence or diaries).
- Creating narratives of world events using oral histories.
- Tracing cause and effect relationships for specific events (using a combination of diaries, period poetry, correspondence, and newspapers to trace immigration from Eastern Europe and settlement in North America).
- Establishing context or social reactions to global or local events (comparing Jewish and anti-Semitic newspapers from the 1930s)

Benefits of Primary Source Teaching

- Presents first-hand information about events or time periods.
- Allows students to examine this information.
- Provides students the opportunity to interpret sources that have not been interpreted for them (constructivism).
- Encourages high-level thinking and problem solving.
- Allows students the opportunity to make greater personal connections with the past.
- Can sometimes illicit discussions about the past not generally found in textbooks (personal connection).
- Provides hands-on or alternative learning experiences.
- Encourages development of inquiry skills applicable to cross-curricular competencies.
- Encourages scaffolding of prior knowledge and newly acquired knowledge to develop a student's understanding.

Benefits of Primary Source Learning (con't)

The overall benefit of incorporating primary sources is that you are supplying your students with lessons in becoming more effective learners; lessons that will carry them through their schooling regardless of subject and age. These lessons come in the shape of various learning concepts, particularly in the field of information literacy and historical inquiry. When your students have a grasp of the concepts under these fields they will also meet Quebec core competencies for the social studies classroom as well as cross-curricular benefits.

An excellent source for exploring historical inquiry concepts is the [Benchmarks of Historical Thinking](#) site, a project under the University of British Columbia's Centre for Historical Consciousness. The site offers numerous Canadian history lesson plans that utilize primary sources.

Introducing Information and/or Media Literacy Concepts

- Identifying a requirement for information and seeking it in multiple and reliable sources;
- Uses different technologies to seek and access information sources;
- Evaluates information sources for bias, responsibility and authenticity regardless of format;
- Synthesizes and organizes information in a manner that they can understand and communicate again;
- Makes connections with new information to their own knowledge base

Introducing Historical Inquiry Concepts

- Establish Historical Significance
- Identifies and uses primary source material
- Identifies change and continuity
- Analyze cause and consequence
- Understand historical perspective

Making Core Competencies Connections

- Integrates elements of media literacy
- Examines social phenomena from a historical perspective
- Interprets social phenomena using the historical method
- Constructs his/her consciousness of citizenship through the study of history

Using Primary Source Material Effectively – Points to Remember

1. Context and content. Ensure that your students have at their disposal all the secondary sources they may need to gather background information.
2. Sometimes lessons can be too thematically driven (Social movements in Canada, Women in North America). It is okay to make your students memorize dates. It is a very useful exercise in helping them construct timelines and therefore a chronological understanding of change.
3. Try, whenever possible, to present students with primary source material with which they might have a personal connection or that is timely to their immediate or current socialization: material from their own community, school or neighborhood, material from an event that is being commemorated at that moment, such as Remembrance Day, or have them work with their own family's archival material.
4. Primary source material is evidence. Students should be led to understand though that not all "evidence" is necessarily factual and additionally, not all facts are truth. If students have truly grasped the use of primary source material they should automatically engage in questioning the validity, bias and responsibility of the material.
5. Using primary source material can be extremely frustrating for students who are used to using only textbooks and class notes. Careful planning and scheduling is required to properly introduce your students to these sources.
6. Primary Source teaching can be extremely time-consuming and runs the risk of meandering out of control, which is why its best used in project-based learning for history or social studies unit.
7. Encourage your students to use your school and public libraries. The more comfortable students are with the acts of searching and browsing, the better equipped they will be to tackle primary sources.

Appendix A - Primary Source Reference Sites

Primary Source Teaching Assistance

The Learning Centre – Library and Archives Canada

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/education/index-e.html>

Media Awareness Network

www.media-awareness.ca

Canada's National History Society

www.historysociety.ca/edu.asp

Primary Source Learning – Library of Congress

www.primarysourcelearning.org

National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)

www.archives.gov/education/lessons

Primary Sources – University of California Berkley

www.lib/berkeley.edu/instruct/guides/primarysources.html

Sites with Digitized Archival Material

Jewish Montreal of Yesterday (Jewish Public Library Archives of Montreal)

www.jewishpubliclibrary.org/blog

Canadian Jewish Heritage Network

www.cjhn.ca

UNESCO Archives Portal

<http://www.unesco-ci.org/cgi-bin/portals/archives/page.cgi?d=1&g=407>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<http://www.ushmm.org>

Yad Vashem

www.yadvashem.org

Early Canadiana Online

www.canadiana.org

Library and Archives Canada – Learning Centre

www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/education/index-e.html

Annales Lovell's de Montreal

<http://bibnum2.banq.qc.ca/bna/lovell/index.html>

Bibliothèque et archives nationale du Québec

(PISTARD – can search by limiting to digitized images)

http://pistard.banq.qc.ca/unite_chercheurs/recherche_simple