What is a Primary Source?

Video Transcript

In this video, I want to look at the definition and value of primary source materials.

So, what is a primary source?

Primary sources are items created during a specific time period that document that time period in some way. They can include eyewitness accounts, experiment results, statistical data, original pieces of creative writing, original artwork, and legal documents.

Types of Primary Sources

There are many different types of primary sources and these can include:

- Autobiographies
- Government documents
- Images (artwork and photographs)
- Letters, correspondence, diaries, scrapbooks
- Music and lyrics
- Newspapers (both the articles and the ads)
- Speeches
- Oral histories and
- Translations of original text

What is the Value of Primary Sources?

So, I’ve defined primary sources and listed some examples. But what exactly is the value of using primary sources?

Well, primary sources, or primary evidence, are the foundation of historical research. They are what excite and compel historians to pursue their craft and are the material from which historians formulate questions.

When do you use Primary Sources?

- Maybe you need to get an unbiased account of an issue or look at multiple points of view on an issue.
- Maybe you want to discover what a certain period in history was like.
- Maybe you need to get the latest data.
- You want to figure out how the government handled a specific situation by looking at the documentation.

These are all examples of when you might need to use primary sources.

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