

## Primary and Secondary Sources (Teacher Background Notes)

In their study of Canadian history in Grade 5, students have been introduced to the concept of primary and secondary sources, and have used both types of sources in their research. Students will continue to consult primary and secondary sources in Grade 6, and will learn to distinguish between various examples of each. They will also enrich their interpretive skills and their critical thinking about both primary and secondary sources.

**A primary source is anything that has survived from events in the past, and that tells us something about those events.** Due to the fact that primary sources were created when the events were happening, or just afterward, they are usually more useful to historians than secondary sources.

Primary sources in electronic format are still primary sources. They record the words, images, or objects that were created by the people who were there.

**A secondary source is any image or description of an event or place that has been made at some time after the events,** usually by someone who was not there.

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Encourage students to think of a variety of types of sources of historical information when they are conducting historical research. Some examples of primary sources may include written materials such as letters, reports and books of that period, diaries and journals, government documents, cookbooks, literature, and poetry; visual media such as pictures, maps, photographs, art, and statues of that time; objects and artifacts of that time, including clothing, tools, household items, architecture, and other constructions; original stories from the oral tradition of that time; and songs, music, and dance from that time.

Some examples of secondary sources may include textbooks, encyclopedias, websites, pieces of art, literature, music, or dance created later to represent life in that time period.

Teachers may wish to caution students that, although primary sources may give a more complete picture of life in another historical period, they may also be subject to error or misinterpretation. Written accounts from primary sources often include opinions, attitudes, words, and values that reflect the biases of a particular group living in a particular time. Primary sources are not free of bias or errors. Encourage students to think critically about any source they consult in their historical inquiries.