

All primary sources need to be interpreted or “figured out” in order to be understood. They do not speak for themselves. Often, primary sources express a culture or a world view that is very different from our own. For this reason, we need to ask ourselves certain questions to help us discover what the primary source can tell us about the past.



- ◆ **Examine the historical context of the source.**
 - Who wrote it?
 - Where and when was it written?
 - For whom was it written?
 - Why was it written?
- ◆ **Understand the source.**
 - What are the key words and what do they mean?
 - What is the writer's main point? What opinions does the writer express?
 - What evidence does the author give to support the main point?
 - What values and beliefs are expressed in this writing?
 - What problem or historical situation does this writing deal with?
- ◆ **Evaluate the source as a source of historical information.**
 - What other historical evidence supports what is said in this source?
 - What can this source tell you about the historical period or situation?
 - What can this source tell you about the world view of that historical period?

Adapted from *History Basics, Using Primary Sources* by David W. Koeller. Used with permission. Available at www.thenagain.info/Classes/Basics/PrimarySources.html