

Guide to Primary Source Analysis - Extended



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An archive consists of primary sources—materials in a variety of formats that serve as evidence documenting a time period, an event, a work, people, or ideas—such as letters, books, pamphlets, personal diaries, etc. The following worksheet asks you to consider the importance of a specific item and its relationship to the archive. Choose an artifact in front of you that you are curious to learn more about and begin a more in-depth analysis on your specific object.

1. Identify the type of artifact (letter, photograph, newspaper clipping...)
2. Provide identifying information (Transaction #, Collection/Box/Folder Name, etc.)
3. Describe exactly what you see. Act as if you are explaining the item to somebody who has never viewed it before. What type of document is it?
4. List three things that you immediately find striking or noteworthy:
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5. Who was the intended audience, if any?
6. Who produced this document? When? How reliable is this author?
7. What is the historical context of the object?

