

# Primary and Secondary Source Materials

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## Indiana State Standards

**4.1.15** Using primary source and secondary source materials, generate questions, seek answers, and write brief comments about an event in Indiana history.

**Primary Source:** developed by people who experienced the events being studied (i.e. autobiographies, diaries, letters, government documents)

**Secondary Source:** developed by people who have researched events but did not experience them directly (i.e. articles, biographies, Internet resources, nonfiction books)

**Objectives and Purposes:** The students will be able to distinguish a primary source from a secondary source. This knowledge will enable them to be better judges of what is authentic and what is swayed by personal opinion.

## Materials:

- One transparency of a journal entry, or access to the website to view journal entries
- Photocopies of journal entries on worksheets for groups to use
- Highlighters

**Review:** Have the students recall something they have written in their journal. Remind them that this is first person writing. This is also called a *primary source* for research purposes. Review the definitions of *primary and secondary sources*.

If the class has ever played the old game Telephone, they can relate to how quickly information is changed. This will help them understand that sometimes a secondary source of information has inaccuracies because the person did not hear all of the story, did not understand the events, or wished to change them for some reason.

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Review with them what they know about George Winter, the artist, who came to what is now Indiana in 1837 to capture the images of the Native Americans before they were led away on the Trail of Tears. His art work is so valuable because it gives us an idea of what Indiana looked like in the 1830s, and he recorded the images of the Indians who were our first residents. Indiana does mean “land of the Indians.”

**Anticipatory Set:** Learning to tell the difference between primary and secondary sources will enable the students to become more discerning in their ability to determine how reliable a document is. They will be using either a print copy of a journal entry of Winter’s or using the image from the website. Have someone determine how long ago the journal would have been written.

<http://earchives.lib.purdue.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/gwinter&CISOPTR=679&REC=1>

**Input and Modeling:** Using one document that could be projected for the entire class to see, read through it and find words or phrases that give authenticity to the passage. Remind the class that primary sources are eye-witnesses to an event. Relate this to people being interviewed on TV who have witnessed an event. Why do we want first-hand experiences? Why do courts of law want eye-witnesses?

**Guided Practice:** Pass out papers with journal entries to the students. They could work in pairs or teams. Using a highlighter, indicate which passages are first person writings. Discuss some phrases or words that lend themselves to this identification. Such words are usually first person pronouns, I and we.

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Remind the class that first-person accounts are more likely to talk about physical and emotional changes the person is feeling. They are also more inclined to talk about sounds and smells that occurred. Some examples would be: “I was scared to death.” “I could feel the sound of the cannon in my chest.” “The hair on my head stood straight up!”

Relate these primary and secondary authors’ voices to first and third person writing that they are familiar with in literature.

**Closure:** Remember to use your previous knowledge to figure out if a document is a primary or secondary source of information. Judge whether or not the information is accurate or skewed by opinion or memory of the author.

**Independent Practice:** Homework for the day will be to have the students look through a newspaper or magazine to find two articles. They will need a firsthand account (primary source) of some event, and a secondary source article which will be easier to find. These will be used to make a class list of words or phrases that help indicate which type of article it is.

**Assessment:** Form teams who will decide on an event that all of them witnessed. For example: a basketball game at recess. Half of each team will collaboratively write a paragraph from the first person perspective. The other half of the team will write about the same event from a secondary perspective.

Have the students share their two versions of the event for their classmates. Discuss what made it easy to determine which was the primary source document.