



TEACHER PAGE

THE PRIMARY SOURCE

GRADE LEVEL: 5–8 **SUBJECTS:** Technology, Social Sciences, Language Arts **DURATION:** One 40-minute class period, one homework assignment

NATIONAL STANDARDS: Technology, Standard 5: Technology research tools; Social Science, US History, ERA 4: Expansion and reform; Language Arts, Standard 7: Evaluating data

MATERIALS: Access to the Internet, sample primary sources downloaded from the Internet

Use this lesson to introduce the concept of primary sources as historical records and to locate and evaluate a primary source from the Internet.

DESCRIPTION

Flashbacks to the Old West are intertwined in the movie *Holes*. The story lends itself well to the study of the American West and Westward Expansion. Much of what students learn about the West, as with other subjects in school, comes from textbooks that provide timelines and descriptions of historic events. Other items, however, such as journal entries, photographs, letters, and posters, offer different perspectives and tap into students' critical thinking skills in unique ways. These types of primary sources also help to make history come alive.

OBJECTIVES

- To demonstrate understanding of the difference between primary and secondary sources
- To seek primary sources of historic record using the Internet
- To evaluate and identify important features of a primary source, such as the type of document, who created it, what is communicated, and evident bias of the document

ADAPTATIONS

Younger students should work in groups to research on the Internet and discuss source questions in class. Ask students to volunteer thoughts about the images they found.

ASSESSMENT

Design a five-point rubric to assess students on demonstrated competence in using the Internet to locate a specific piece of information, their ability to differentiate between primary and secondary sources, and the degree to which they can evaluate a primary source.

EXTENSION

Ask students to make a list of 10 primary sources for a time capsule that would be representative of their current year in school.

USEFUL RESOURCES

For primary resources check out the National Archives and Records Administration: www.nara.gov

For primary resources check out The End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center: www.endoftheoregontrail.org

The Library of Congress' *American Memory* web site offers specific information on primary resources: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/lessons/primary.html>

The *American Memory* web site includes a collection of photographs from the American West: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award97/codhtml/hawphome.html>

Visit the Buffalo Bill Historical Center for information on Buffalo Bill and the American West: www.bbhc.org



PROCEDURES

1. Show students a variety of primary sources that you, the teacher, found on the Internet. The Library of Congress web site (www.loc.gov) is an excellent source of historic documents.
2. Pose a problem to the students. Ask them: What are these documents? Where or when do they come from? What information about history do we get from them?
3. The purpose of this lesson is to explore primary sources as a record of history. Primary sources include items such as journal entries, posters, photographs, and letters. They are original documents and artifacts from a particular time period.
4. Review with students the differences between primary and secondary sources. While primary sources are defined above, secondary sources are documents created by people who were not present at the event that occurred. History books and biographies are examples of secondary sources.
5. Instruct students to work independently or in teams. Tell each student to search the Library of Congress web site to find an example of a poster or program from Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Remind students to go beyond the first page of their search results to see what they can find. Click on poster or program images to enlarge. For a brief biography of Buffalo Bill check out www.bbhc.org/bbm/biographyBB.cfm.
6. Instruct students to print out the document they find and write down any details from the web site, such as the date, the purpose, and the current location of the original document (e.g., a museum or private collection).
7. Ask students to write two or three sentences answering each of the following questions about their document: What point of view towards the American West does the poster or program convey? What was the purpose of the poster or program? What are two things you can learn about the time period from this poster?

