

# BECOMING A HISTORY DETECTIVE



In this learning plan, students engage with the process and materials historians use to determine the course of historical events. Students are invited to explore key vocabulary and identify the difference between primary and secondary source documents and how they are used in the historical process. Students also gather their own primary and secondary samples as they solve a mystery with clues.



## STANDARDS

- Learning for Social Justice Standards: Diversity 7 – DI.3–5.7
- Learning for Social Justice Standards: Justice 14 – JU.3–5.14
- NCSS Standards: Theme 3: People, Places, and Environments
- NYS K–8 Social Studies Framework: Grade 3: Gathering, Interpreting, and Using Evidence

## OBJECTIVES

- ✓ Students will demonstrate their understanding of the difference between primary and secondary sources.
- ✓ Students will explore the concept of inference and how it is used in a historical context.
- ✓ Students will reflect on the perspectives of others and how different experiences and perspectives impact the retelling of historical events.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

What are primary and secondary sources?  
-How are they the same?  
-How are they different?

What types of evidence are used to learn about history?

What is inference, and how does it help us understand the past and the present?

## MATERIALS

- Becoming a History Detective K–W–L worksheet
- History Detective Vocabulary Sketch Notes
- Primary & Secondary Sources visual organizer
- Primary, Secondary, or Artifact sorting activity
- What is an Inference? anchor chart
- What Would You Think? worksheet
- It's a History Mystery! Assessment (2 pages)
- It's a History Mystery! Assessment rubric
- Board or chart paper for display

# BECOMING A HISTORY DETECTIVE



## ASSESSMENTS

Formative assessments and checks for understanding occur throughout the lesson:

- Students' responses to questions
- Students' ability to relate new concepts and vocabulary to prior knowledge throughout the activity.
- Student completion of visual organizers

**Summative Assessment:  
It's a History Mystery!**

## DIFFERENTIATION STRATEGIES

- Model the thinking process for students (verbally and visually) throughout the lessons.
- Allow students to work independently, in pairs, or in small groups.
- To challenge students, invite them to analyze the vocabulary terms and provide examples from their own life.
- Reflect on the lessons by creating a poster or digital presentation summarizing the students' key concepts.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Students can explore the concept of inference while reading texts across literary genres.
- Students can investigate how scientists help historians piece together the past through evidence collection and the scientific method.
- Students can list five examples of primary and secondary sources in their learning space.





## ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

### Activity 1

#### What is a History Detective?

Students discover how historians are detectives and explore relevant vocabulary and tools.

### Activity 2

#### Is it a Primary or Secondary Source?

Students learn the difference between primary and secondary sources and how historians use them to uncover the past.

### Activity 3

#### Primary and Secondary Sources Sort

Students explore and classify examples of primary and secondary sources within their environment.

### Activity 4

#### What Would You Think?

Students use primary and secondary sources and artifacts to infer relationships and create meaning.

### Activity 5

#### It's a History Mystery!

Students create a historical mystery that includes primary and secondary sources of their choice.

### ACTIVITY 1: WHAT IS A HISTORY DETECTIVE?

- Ask students if they have heard the word “detective” before and invite them to share what it means.
  - Do they know any detectives from movies or TV shows?
- Share the definition: A detective is a person who collects sources of information about past events to better understand them. Inform students that historians must often be detectives when learning about the past.
- Encourage students to think about how a historian, a person who studies history, might have to be a detective when learning about past events.
- Work with students to complete the Becoming a History Detective K-W-L to guide students' thinking.
- Distribute the History Detective Vocabulary Sketch Notes worksheet and assist students in reading the terms and definitions on the sheet, as needed. Invite students to create an illustration that sums up the meaning of each word.
- When students have completed the worksheet, invite them to explain their illustrations and how each represents the chosen vocabulary word.



**ACTIVITY 2: IS IT A PRIMARY OR SECONDARY SOURCE?**

- Invite students to reflect on the previous learning activity by discussing their History Detective Vocabulary Sketch Notes.
- Ask students to share ways in which historians are detectives as they learn about places and events from the past.
- Ask students to brainstorm what types of evidence historians could use to better understand past events and places. Record their answers on a paper or board for reference during the discussion.
- Provide students with a copy of the Primary & Secondary Sources visual organizer worksheet. Use the information to explain the difference between primary and secondary sources.
- Facilitate a discussion about primary and secondary sources of information by helping students properly categorize the following scenarios:
  - Aisha found an old book of letters her grandfather wrote about his experiences in World War II. (The book of letters is a primary source.)
  - Jose checked out a book from the library about his favorite athlete. (The book from the library is a secondary source.)
  - Naveah's aunt showed her a newspaper article about a holiday parade when she was a child. (The newspaper article is a secondary source and an artifact.)
  - In a museum, you see a small statue from a group of people who lived long ago. (The statue is an artifact.)
- As students provide examples, display them on a board or paper for others to see. Invite students to share the reasoning for their choices and allow others to provide respectful feedback, if time allows.

**ACTIVITY 3: PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES SORT**

- Display the names of two different information sources on a board (e.g., personal journal/cell phone) and ask students to raise their hand to indicate which is a primary source and which is secondary source.
- Share the Primary, Secondary, or Artifact? worksheet and review the instructions. Invite students to complete the worksheet and inform them that you will discuss their answers as a class.
- Consider asking questions about their choices. Here are some examples:
  - Why do you think \_\_\_\_\_ is a primary source?
  - Why do you think \_\_\_\_\_ is a secondary source?
  - Could you give me another example of a primary/secondary source?
- Record student ideas on the board or chart paper.



## ACTIVITY 4: WHAT WOULD YOU THINK?

- Invite students to consider a time when something happened and they had to use clues to figure out how/why it happened. Allow them to share examples, if time allows.
- Share the What Would You Think? worksheet and Inference Anchor Chart with students.
- Review the definition of the term "inference" on the Inference Anchor Chart. Explain that inference is a skill we use in our everyday lives. Note that historians use this skill to make sense of the past.
- Model the process of making an inference using sample #1 on the Inference Anchor Chart. Read the sample aloud and model the thinking process aloud for students.
- Invite students to share their ideas as you move through the thought modeling process. Ask them clarifying questions to foster critical thinking and increase engagement. Here are a few examples:
  - What is the evidence we're examining?
  - Why do you think \_\_\_\_\_?
  - Who has an idea about \_\_\_\_\_ they are willing to share?
  - How does \_\_\_\_\_ lead you to think \_\_\_\_\_?
- Inform students they will work with a partner as history detectives using the What Would You Think? worksheet.
- Pair students with a partner to complete the worksheet exercise or allow them to work independently.
- Invite students to reflect on their learning by sharing their ideas with the class, if time allows.

## ACTIVITY 5: IT'S A HISTORY MYSTERY!

- Conduct a brief review of primary and secondary sources and artifacts. Invite students to share how these items are used to understand the past.
- Share the It's A History Mystery Assessment and review the instructions.
- Review the sample exercise on the assessment with students to foster understanding and allow time for them to complete the activity independently.
- Use the It's a History Mystery! assessment rubric to score the assessment.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

# BECOMING A HISTORY DETECTIVE K-W-L



WHAT I **KNOW** RIGHT NOW

WHAT I **WANT** TO KNOW

WHAT I HAVE **LEARNED**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

# HISTORY DETECTIVE VOCABULARY SKETCH NOTES

Draw pictures or add images that represent each word/term in the boxes.

**DETECTIVE**



A person who collects sources of information about past events to better understand them

**HISTORIAN**



A person who studies and makes meaning from past places, people, and events

**ARTIFACT**




Items created by people in the past like pottery, tools, musical instruments, books, and even food

**PRIMARY SOURCE**




Evidence created by someone who directly witnessed an event like papers, letters, journal entries, text messages, photos, artwork, and more

**SECONDARY SOURCE**



Evidence created when someone talks about an event but wasn't actually there like textbooks, encyclopedias, TV shows, documentaries, and more

**INFERENCE**



When you combine information sources with what you already know to understand something (For example, you see an empty box of cookies and crumbs on the floor. You infer someone has eaten the cookies!)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

# PRIMARY & SECONDARY SOURCES

Tools historians use to understand Then and Now.

**PRIMARY SOURCE**

Firsthand account of an event (They were there!)

**SECONDARY SOURCE**

One step removed from the event (They heard about it!)

**ARTIFACT**

An object made by a human

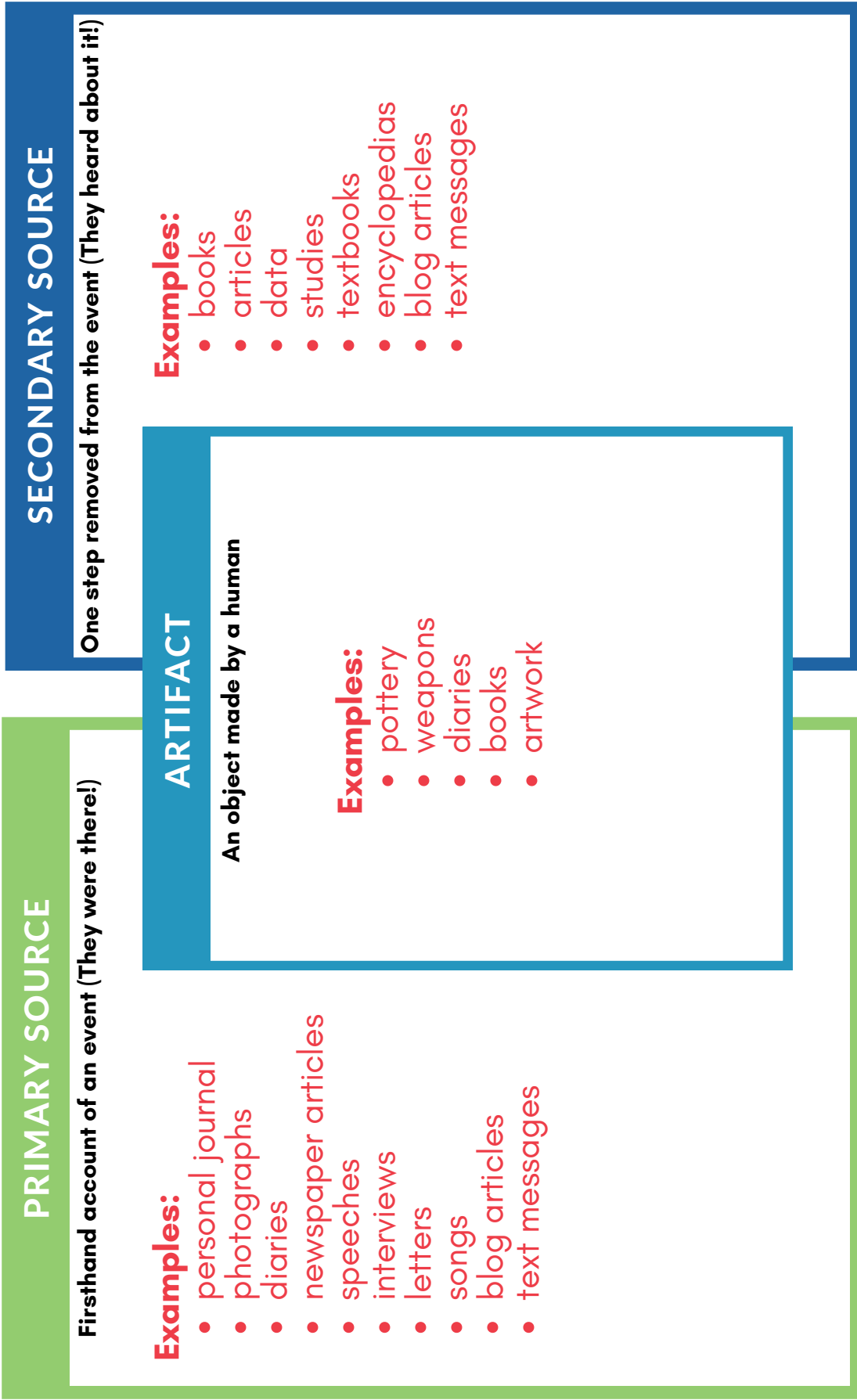


NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

# PRIMARY & SECONDARY SOURCES

Tools historians use to understand Then and Now.



NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

# PRIMARY, SECONDARY, OR ARTIFACT?

Look at the items in the bank on the bottom of the page  
and write them under the correct category.

Remember,  
some items  
might belong in  
more than one  
category!

PRIMARY SOURCES	ARTIFACTS	SECONDARY SOURCES

photo of a  
famous person

someone tells you  
about an event

picture book  
about an event

story about an event

journal entry

movie

tractor

voice recording

map

clay pot

painting

farming tools

writing tablet

mobile phone

textbook

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## PRIMARY, SECONDARY, OR ARTIFACT?

Look at the items in the bank on the bottom at the page and write them under the correct category.

Remember, some items might belong in more than one category!

PRIMARY SOURCES	ARTIFACTS	SECONDARY SOURCES
journal entry	photo of an event	story about an event
map	movie	someone tells you about an event
photo of an event	voice recording	movie
letter to someone	picture book about an event	picture book about an event
painting	clay pot	painting
	painting	textbook
	farming tools	
	writing tablet	
	mobile phone	

photo of a famous person	someone tells you about an event	picture book about an event
story about an event	journal entry	movie
tractor	voice recording	map
clay pot	painting	farming tools
writing tablet	mobile phone	textbook

# WHAT IS AN INFERENCE?



**SOURCES**




**WHAT YOU KNOW**



**INFERENCE**

## EXAMPLE

### SOURCES/ARTIFACTS:

- OLD BIRTHDAY PARTY PHOTO
- A RECIPE FOR PIE 
- A PHOTO OF KIDS WITH PIE
- A PARTY HAT

### WHAT I ALREADY KNOW:

THESE ITEMS ARE OFTEN FOUND WHEN CELEBRATING A BIRTHDAY.



### MY INFERENCE:

THIS EVENT WAS A BIRTHDAY PARTY WHERE THEY ATE PIE INSTEAD OF CAKE!



## WHAT WOULD YOU THINK?

Let's practice using your inference skills! Look at the history clues below and make an inference.

### EXAMPLE:

#### SOURCES/ARTIFACTS:

- EMPTY FIREWORKS BOX
- PHOTO OF A BARBECUE
- A PARADE POSTER



#### SAMPLE INFERENCE:

IT'S THE FOURTH OF JULY.  
PEOPLE WATCHED  
FIREWORKS AND A PARADE.

#### SOURCES/ARTIFACTS:

- PHOTO OF A MUMMY
- AN ANCIENT PYRAMID
- ARTICLE ABOUT EGYPT
- PAINTING OF A KING



#### INFERENCE:

#### SOURCES/ARTIFACTS:

- A TEDDY BEAR
- A PHOTO OF A SAD CHILD
- A TRAIN TICKET



#### INFERENCE:



NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## WHAT WOULD YOU THINK?

Let's practice using your inference skills! Look at the history clues below and make an inference.

### EXAMPLE:

#### SOURCES/ARTIFACTS:

- EMPTY FIREWORKS BOX
- PHOTO OF A BARBECUE
- A PARADE POSTER



#### SAMPLE INFERENCE:

IT'S THE FOURTH OF JULY.  
PEOPLE WATCHED  
FIREWORKS AND A PARADE.

#### SOURCES/ARTIFACTS:

- PHOTO OF A MUMMY
- AN ANCIENT PYRAMID
- ARTICLE ABOUT EGYPT
- PAINTING OF A KING



#### INFERENCE:

THE MUMMY OF A KING  
FROM ANCIENT EGYPT  
WAS FOUND IN A PYRAMID.

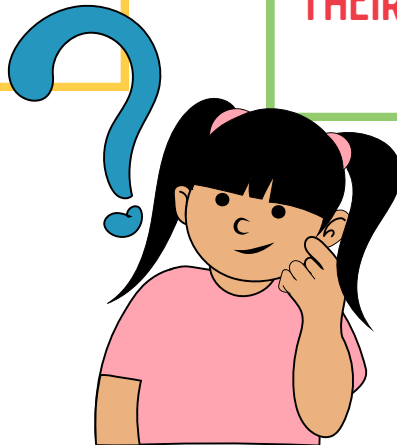
#### SOURCES/ARTIFACTS:

- A TEDDY BEAR
- A PHOTO OF A SAD CHILD
- A TRAIN TICKET



#### INFERENCE:

A CHILD HAS TRAVELED  
ON A TRAIN AND FORGOT  
THEIR BEAR.



**ANSWERS  
MAY VARY**

# IT'S A HISTORY MYSTERY!

Historians are often detectives who have to examine primary and secondary resources and artifacts to solve historical mysteries. A mystery is something that is difficult or hard to explain.



Some examples of mysteries historians have solved include:



- what Vikings ate
- how George Washington died
- what happened on the Titanic



For this assignment, you are a historian in training. Reflect on what we have learned about primary sources, secondary sources, and artifacts. Think about the difference between each. Read the History Mysteries below and write three examples of sources you could use in each column.

**EXAMPLE:**

History Mystery	Primary Sources I Could Use	Secondary Sources I Could Use	Artifacts I Could Use
What happened during the Revolutionary War?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• soldier's diary</li> <li>• artist's drawing of a battle</li> <li>• speeches</li> <li>• map</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• textbooks</li> <li>• old pamphlets</li> <li>• fiction story about the war</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• painting</li> <li>• soldier's uniform</li> <li>• diary</li> <li>• newspaper</li> </ul>

History Mystery	Primary Sources I Could Use	Secondary Sources I Could Use	Artifacts I Could Use
What happened at the 2021 Olympics? 			
How have cars changed from the past to the present? 			

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## IT'S A HISTORY MYSTERY! (CONTINUED)

History Mystery	Primary Sources I Could Use	Secondary Sources I Could Use	Artifacts I Could Use
How have schools changed since your grandparents were kids?			
What was life like for children in the past?			
What were movie theaters like in the past?			
What was the best video game when your teacher was a kid?			
What toys were popular when your grandparents were kids?			
What is the president's favorite food?			



## IT'S A HISTORY MYSTERY! ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

Standard	3 Exceeds Standard	2 Proficient	1 Progressing
<b>Recognize and use primary sources to make meaning in social studies</b>	Students can list three or more primary sources appropriate to the event.	Students can list two primary sources appropriate to the event.	Students can list one primary source appropriate to the event.
<b>Recognize and use secondary sources to make meaning in social studies</b>	Students can list three or more secondary sources appropriate to the event.	Students can list two secondary sources appropriate to the event.	Students can list one secondary source appropriate to the event.
<b>Recognize and use artifacts to make meaning in social studies</b>	Students can list three or more artifacts appropriate to the event.	Students can list two artifacts appropriate to the event.	Students can list one artifact appropriate to the event.

### ADDITIONAL NOTES

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