



The Midway Museum: Primary Source Activity

Name: _____ Date: _____

Grade: _____ School: _____

In this activity, you will learn how historians examine sources to try and form an assumption about the past. As a historian, your job is to interpret the past. Primary sources are a historian's best asset because they give them access to the past when the event occurred. Historians use the clues they find in their research, like a detective would, to solve a case. They pay attention to source information, select the main argument and supporting information, and look for credibility and bias.

Notice* When working with primary sources, it is essential to understand the language and terminology used within the context of the source's creation. While definitions may remain the same over time, their meanings may change in any lexicon.

Primary Source:

- Letter from Mary Jones to her daughter, Mary S. Mallard

Mrs. Mary Jones to Mrs. Mary S Mallard

Montevideo, Tuesday, January 8th, 1867

My dearest Daughter,

I sometimes feel I must sink under the various perplexities of this situation, and know that if God should withdraw the hope and confidence which I trust He permits me to entertain His infinite wisdom and special guidance, that I should be truly desolate and miserable. I have struggled hard to hear up under the severe losses, the sad reverse, and I may almost say pecuniary ruin of our temporal prospects. I have tried to live here that I might protect and sacrifice this our home from any feeling of loneliness or isolation, or from motives to ease and deliverance from care. I have labored to preserve it as my only home, and what might in God's providence be a home to my dear children. And now I am not willing, if I can prevent it, to have it sacrificed. But I feel that God is hedging up my way here; and I have come to the determination that if a purchaser can be found, we must part with our beloved, our long-cherished home. I do not see how I can keep it up, dependent as I am upon a manager for the oversight and upon the false and faithless freedmen as laborers. If there was hope of improvement in the future, I could endure any temporary trials; but I am convinced the condition of things will grow worse and worse. There is nothing to make it better- at least with the present generation; and by what means the Negro is to be elevated to an intelligent and reliable laborer I cannot see. The whole constitution of the race is adverse to responsibility, to truth, to industry. He can neglect duty and violate contracts without the least compunction of conscience or loss of honor; and he can sink to the lowest depths of want and misery without any sense of shame or feeling of privation which would afflict a sensitive Caucasian.

Question 1: Is this a primary or secondary source, and how do we know? What type of source is it? Is it a journal, newspaper, or interview?

Question 2: Who is the author? Is there any information in the source that says who the person is who is writing this?

Question 3: Underline a sentence that best describes the author's main idea. What is the big idea? Circle supporting evidence that she uses to support her argument/claim.

Question 4: Historians often seek answers beyond the source itself. Where do you begin your research? Would you look on the Internet or ask a librarian?

Question 5: How different is this source from others from the same period? Does it sound in favor of the societal norm or contrary to what people believed then?