

What are Primary and Secondary Sources?

Primary sources: materials that were created at the time the event occurred or materials created by those who experienced the event. These materials include letters, speeches, diaries, newspaper articles from the time period, interviews with people who were around when the event occurred, documents, photographs, and artifacts such as tools, weapons, clothing from the time period.

Secondary sources: materials that were created after the event. These materials might tell you about an event, person, time or place, but they were created by someone not from the time period. Secondary sources can include history books, school textbooks, encyclopedias, History magazines, websites, and documentaries.

Test your knowledge out. Are these primary or secondary sources? Circle the correct answer.

1. A biography of Theodore Roosevelt written in 2001
Primary Secondary
2. Photographs of Civil War soldiers in their camp
Primary Secondary
3. Letters written by Abraham Lincoln
Primary Secondary
4. A documentary on PBS about World War II
Primary Secondary
5. A newspaper article from 1912 about the sinking of the Titanic
Primary Secondary
6. A speech given by Martin Luther King
Primary Secondary
7. A magazine article about the War of 1812
Primary Secondary
8. An interview you had with a Vietnam War veteran
Primary Secondary
9. Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography
Primary Secondary
10. A newspaper article from 1991 about the 50th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack
Primary Secondary