

Historical thinking

(or How historians do their work)

Directions: Use the key terms of the Word Bank below to complete the following narrative about how historians do their job. Each word will only be used once unless it has a specific number after it.

Maria and Dmitri were interested to understand the following question: “How do we know that what happened in the past actually occurred? Perhaps some people are making all this **history** up and it never really took place. Good for them! They are using their minds and thinking critically about this important issue. 😊

They decide to talk to Enrique about their questions since he seems to know more about this topic than they do. Enrique explains that being a **historian** is like being a detective. You are on a mission looking for clues. He states, “Historians use **sources** to learn about the past. Two major types are **primary sources** and **secondary sources**. First of all, a primary source is a document that was created at the time the event occurred or by people who experienced the event. Examples of this would be letters written, speeches shared, and **photographs** that were taken of an event.” It could also be an **interview** that someone gives years later about their experience of an event. For example, if someone was in New York City on Sept. 11, 2001 and **observed** the terrorist attacks that day, their sharing of the event on August 7, 2019 would still be considered a **primary source**.”

Enrique continued to share the following: “A **secondary source** is one that is created after an event occurred by someone who did not witness the event. If I write a book about Abraham Lincoln, I was not alive to see his life. There are many types of these sources such as historical biographies about someone’s life or a **documentary** on television that someone might create about an event which occurred hundreds or even thousands of years ago.”

“Whoa, wait a minute, Enrique,” Maria shares. “How do we know for sure that what these people wrote about in the past really happened? Perhaps they are **lying** about it and making it all up?” Enrique responded, “Great question, Maria. As we look at history, we want to use the process of **corroboration** which means that we compare multiple sources to see what they say about a historical event. More than one person will write about an event. If someone writes about Abraham Lincoln, for example, and says that he never was President, we can be suspicious of that because there are many, many people that lived during his time which tell us he was the President of the United States. When we compare multiple sources, we will learn various facts about Lincoln since there is no source that tell us everything about him. It is the same with two **eyewitnesses** who see a crime occurring. They will give slightly different details what they observed but will agree on the main issue that a crime occurred.”

Dmitri replied, “Great points shared, Enrique, but what about someone’s personal **bias** when they write about an issue? Many people only look at history through a certain view point and don’t consider all perspectives.” Enrique thought about this for a moment and then said, “Yes, this does occur all the time. That is why we have to continue to compare sources with one another and see what the main facts are. Then, we can use those facts to make **inferences** or reasonable conclusions. These conclusions will help us to use our minds to go deeper and deeper into uncovering the past.”

Word bank

corroboration	interview	history	observed	historian
photographs	primary source (2)	bias	secondary sources (2)	inferences
eyewitness	lying	sources	documentary	