

Evaluating Sources Exercise

by Peter Pappas

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Based on Historical Thinking Skills [SHEG](#)

Here are three sample source comparisons. You don't have to answer the questions. Read them and think about how they help student evaluate the credibility of sources.

1. Historical Question: Who was present at the signing of the Declaration of Independence?

Source 1: Hollywood movie about the American Revolution made 2001.

Source 2: Book written by a famous historian who is an expert on the American Revolution, published in 1999.

Which do you trust more? Why?

2. Historical Question: What was slavery like in South Carolina?

Source 1: Interview with former slave in 1936. The interviewer is a black man collecting oral histories for the Federal Writers' Project.

Source 2: Interview with former slave in 1936. The interviewer is a white woman collecting oral histories for the Federal Writers' Project.

Which do you trust more? Why?

3. Historical Question: What was the layout of the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz?

Source 1: Interview with 80 year-old Holocaust survivor in 1985.

Source 2: Map of concentration camp found in Nazi files.

Which do you trust more? Why?

Tasks

Now it's your turn to create a question and answer a fellow workshop member's question.

1. Create and post a source comparison. Be sure to include: Historical question and two sample sources.

Historical Question: What was it like in the trenches in WWI?

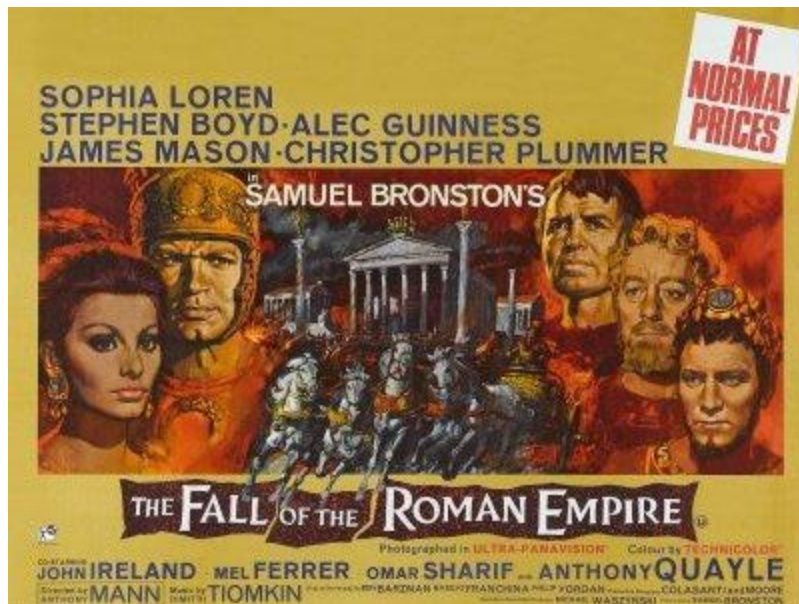
Source 1: Letter from a soldier in WWI.

Source 2: Text book describing conditions in WWI.

Historical Question: What events led to the fall of the Roman Empire?

Source 1: Documentary featuring multiple historians who specialize in Ancient Rome.

Source 2: The Hollywood film “Fall of the Roman Empire” (1964)



Historical Question: Describe the experience of a Native American tribe from the east coast of North America during early contact with European Colonists.

Source 1: Primary sources written exclusively by colonists alive during the period.

Source 2: A collection of films based upon the life of Pocahontas.

Question: How did the industrial revolution change living conditions for the English working class throughout the mid nineteenth century?

1. A series of maps detailing the urban expansion in Manchester illustrating the density and development.
2. OR reading selected passages from Charles Dickens *Oliver Twist*.

2. Once other class members have posted their source comparison questions, use their content to answer the question: “Which do you trust more? Why?”

Feel free to add multiple answers to the same question and / or comment on each others question / or answer. It’s a dialogue.

Historical Question: What was it like in the trenches in WWI?

I believe both the primary source letter and the textbook can be great sources to learn more about conditions in the trenches. The letter is the experience of only one person, and there is the chance that it may not represent the experience or paint a complete picture for us. However,

if it is a letter specifically talking about trenches, it could be an excellent source. While the textbook (hopefully) has taken the information from the accounts of many soldiers and would perhaps provide a more complete picture, based on the way textbooks are written.

Historical Question: What events led to the fall of the Roman Empire?

Although I have not personally seen the film, "The Fall of the Roman Empire," I am certain that a group of historians specializing in ancient Rome did the historical record slightly better justice than Hollywood - although I do love a cheesy "historical" film every so often.

Historical Question: Describe the experience of a Native American tribe from the east coast of North America during early contact with European Colonists.

This is difficult, while normally I would trust primary sources much more than secondary, I feel primary sources from a colonial perspective will have little bearing on 'the experience of a Native American tribe'. If anything using this manner of primary source could lead to the construction of a very binary historical view, akin to Orientalism, reinforcing otherness while illustrating the native experience only through the colonists eyes. The series of videos though, could run the gamut. Depending on when they were made, and the sources utilized the narrative could vary wildly. Thus my answer is that I would stick with primary sources, with the caveat that sympathetic French sources were included. I do believe the videos could provide interesting insight, I simply do not have enough information to judge their quality.

Question: What hardships did men and women experience on the Oregon Trail in the 1830s?

1. Letters written by a man traveling along the Oregon Trail in 1830, detailing his experiences, which he sent east to his brother,
2. OR a newspaper article written, from Boston, written by a man who never went West in 1830 detailing the experience of the Oregon Trail from multiple sources he collected?



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Question: What was it like for Japanese-Americans in Internment camps during WWII?

1. Journals, letters, and other writings and oral histories from the Japanese-Americans who lived in the camps.
2. US government and journalism writings on the matter written from an outside perspective.

¹ "Oregon National Historic Trail (U.S. National Park Service)." 9 Jul. 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/oreg/index.htm>. Accessed 8 Oct. 2018.