PRIMARY SOURCE DETECTIVE

Instructions: Historians learn about the past by asking questions and examining evidence left behind by people, places, and communities. Every artifact tells part of a story, but no single artifact tells the whole story.

Carefully examine one historical artifact or primary source of your choice. Before reading any background information, use your observations and questions to investigate what this artifact might reveal about history. Remember that historians often begin with curiosity rather than certainty.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY

Type of artifact:

Description:

Creator (if known):

Where was it created (if known):

When was the artifact created (if known):

STEP 2: OBSERVE — What do you notice about the artifact?

Objects:

People:

Words:

Symbols:

Places:

Dates:

Other Details:

STEP 3: INTERPRET — What might this artifact tell us about the people or time represented?

What do you think is happening?

What evidence supports your thinking?

What does this source tell us about its historical moment?

What additional historical information would help you better understand it?

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STEP 4: PERSPECTIVE — Whose perspective does the artifact preserve?

Whose perspective is represented?

Whose voices may be missing?

Why might those voices be absent?

STEP 5: INQUIRE

List three questions this artifact raises:

1.

2.

3.

STEP 6: CONNECT — What other sources could help you follow the evidence and learn more?

If you were a historian, where would you look next?

- ☐ Photographs
- ☐ Maps
- ☐ Newspapers
- ☐ Letters
- ☐ Oral Histories
- ☐ Interviews
- ☐ Historic Places
- ☐ Internet Site
- ☐ Other