

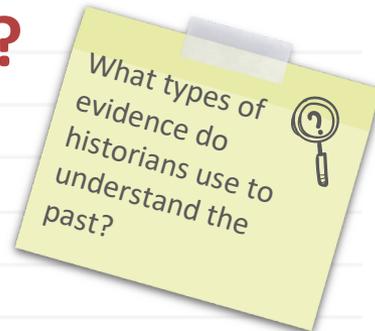
Lesson 1.2

How Does a Historian Work?

Discover Our
Past

World History

What Is the Evidence?



- Historians ask questions about the information they find from the past.
 - Why did some nations go to war?
 - How were the people affected by that war?
 - How did events of the past change people's lives?

- To learn the answers to the historical questions, historians look for evidence.
- **Evidence** is something that shows proof or an indication that something is true.
- Evidence could be in the form of material objects, such as a soldier's uniform or scraps of pottery from an archaeological dig.
- Other evidence may appear in documents or written materials that were created during a historical event.
- Historians use the evidence they read in historical **sources** to interpret what happened in the past.

What Is the Evidence?

Primary & Secondary Sources

- Historians look for clues about the past in primary and secondary sources.
- **Primary sources** are firsthand pieces of evidence.
- They were written or created by the people who saw or experienced an event.
- Primary sources include letters, diaries, or government records.



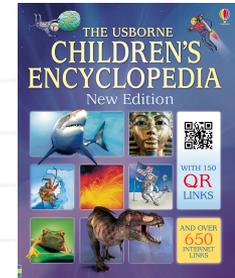
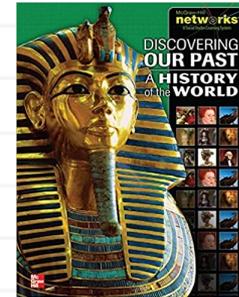
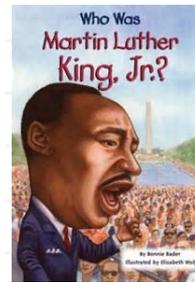
- Literature or artwork from a particular time and place is a primary source.
- Spoken interviews and objects, such as tools or clothing, are also primary sources.
- Historians use the sources to find evidence that explains historical events.

Primary sources help historians learn what people were thinking while the events took place.

What Is the Evidence?

Primary & Secondary Sources

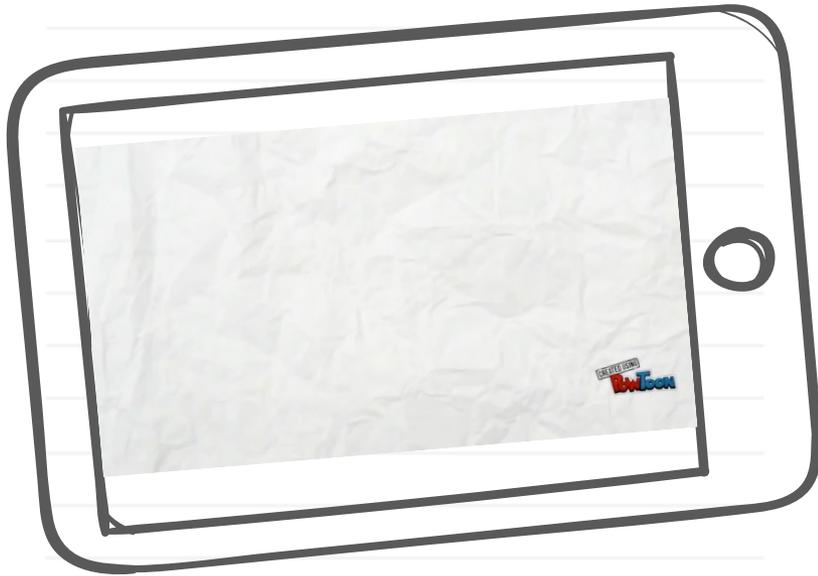
- Historians also use secondary sources.
- **Secondary sources** are created after an event.
- They were created by people who were not part of the historical event.
- The information in secondary sources is often based on primary sources.
- Examples of secondary sources are biographies, encyclopedias, history books, and textbooks.



- A second sources contains background information.
- Secondary sources also offer a broad view of an event.
- However, a historian must use primary sources to find new evidence about a subject.

What Is the Evidence?

Primary & Secondary Sources



Primary Sources

letters autobiographies
diaries government records
artifact computer software



Secondary Sources

articles encyclopedia
textbooks dictionaries
biographies atlases



What Is the Evidence?

Reliable Sources

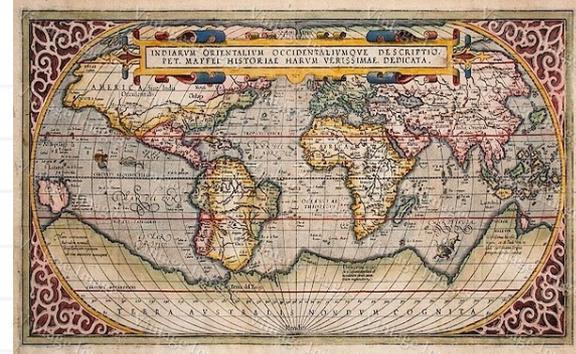
- Suppose you were studying the history of England and you wanted to know how ancient people lived.
- You might look in a book called *Domesday Book*.
- This book was created in A.D. 1086 by administrators under William I.
- The book is a primary source from the period.
- It contains information about the people of England at the time it was written.



- The *Domesday Book* is a long list of manors and the names of their owners.
- It includes details about how many workers worked the land.
- It lists the number of fishponds, mills, and animals owned by each person.
- It also estimated the value of each property.

What Is the Evidence? Reliable Sources

- It's a historian's job to analyze and interpret the information from primary sources.
- They consider where and when a source was created.
 - What is a secret letter?
 - Was it a document created for the king, such as the Domesday Book?
 - Was it written so that all the people in a town or country would read it?



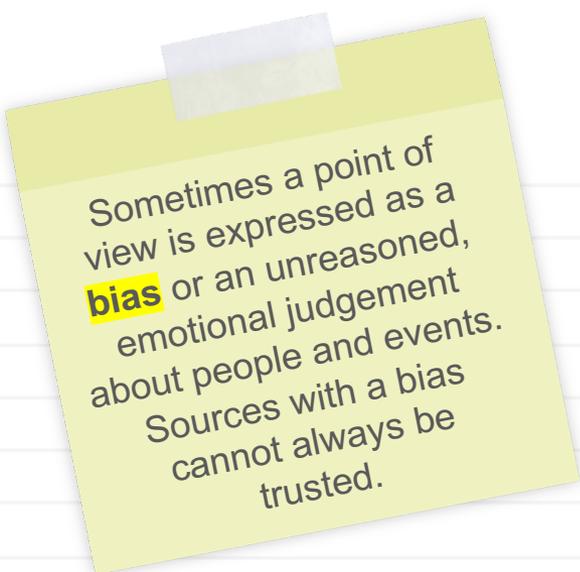
Maps can be primary sources. The top map was created around A.D. 1500. How does it compare with the modern world map on the bottom? What can historians learn by comparing these maps?



What Is the Evidence?

What is Point of View?

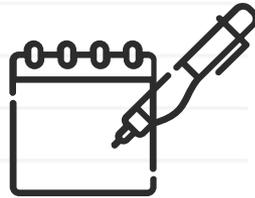
- Historians interpret the document and the reasons it was created.
- Then they form an opinion about whether the source is trustworthy and reliable in its facts.
- This step is important since each source was written with a particular **point of view** or general attitude about people or life.



Sometimes a point of view is expressed as a **bias** or an unreasoned, emotional judgement about people and events. Sources with a bias cannot always be trusted.

- The authors of primary sources use their point of view to decide what information is important and what to include in the document.
- Historians evaluate a primary source to find its point of view.
- They decide if it has a trustworthy viewpoint.

Writing About History



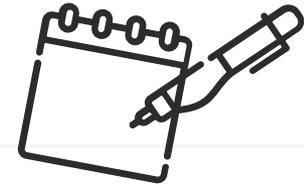
- When historians write about an event, they interpret the information from primary sources to draw conclusions and making inferences.
- Making an inference means choosing the most likely explanation for the facts at hand.



- Sometimes the inference is simple.
- For example, if you see a person who is wearing a raincoat walk into a room with a dripping umbrella, you can infer that it is raining outside.
- The dripping umbrella and the raincoat are the evidence that combine with your prior knowledge about weather to infer that it is raining.

Writing About History

- Making inferences about historical events is more complex.
- Historians check the evidence in primary sources and compare it to sources already known to be trustworthy.
- Then, they look at secondary sources that express different point of view about an event.
- In this way, historians try to get a clear, well-rounded view of what happened.
- The inference they make is how they explain what happened in the past.
- This explanation is based on the evidence in primary and secondary sources.



- For example, you might read the *Domesday Book* to analyze the types of animals raised in 1086.
- You could add this knowledge to additional evidence from another source about grain that was planted.
- Then, you could think about what you know to be true about food.
- You might use all this information to make an inference about the types of food people ate in the 11th century England.

Writing About History

Looking at History

- Professional historians become experts on their historical subject.
- Historians gather artifacts and data about a subject and then write what they have learned from the study.
- Such writing may become an article in a **scholarly** journal, or magazine.
- It may become a book on the specific subject.

- In most cases, historical books and articles are reviewed by other scholars for accuracy.
- Experts in the field will review the sources and write their own articles.
- They evaluate how the historian has interpreted the facts.
- The study of historical interpretations is called historiography.
- Historians must keep accurate notes and be careful that their inferences are reasonable.



Writing About History

Focusing on Research

- Some historians keep their areas of study very narrow.
- For example, someone could spend an entire career investigating the events that occurred on a single day, such as the day in the year A.D. 79 that Mount Vesuvius, a volcano in that region that is now Italy, erupted and destroyed the city of Pompeii.
- This subject is a **finite** place and time.



- Other historians focus on broader subjects.
- For example, some historians study the economic history of a period.
- Others study the political history of a country during a certain period.
- Still others might study military history, the history of medicine, or the history of technology in a certain place.

Writing About History

Drawing Conclusions



- A **conclusion** is a final decision that is reached by reasoning.
- You draw conclusions all the time.
- For example, you may notice that a friend often wears T-shirts from music concerts that he has attended.
- You might also remember he can never get together on Thursday nights because he has guitar lessons.

- Based on these two clues, you could draw the conclusion that your friend is really interested in music.
- Historians draw conclusions in the same way.
- They look for facts and evidence in their primary and secondary sources.
- Then, they use reasoning to make a judgement or draw a conclusion.





U.S. marines land on Guadalcanal in August 1942. Guadalcanal was the first major U.S. land offensive in the Pacific during World War II.

If you were researching World War II, you could use this photo to help you. Using photos as evidence is a good way to expand information.

What do you think is happening in this picture?

Writing About History

Historical Interpretations

- Sometimes historians disagree about their **interpretations** of the facts.
- For example, historians disagree about how to evaluate the historical figure of Genghis Khan.
- There are historians who argue that Genghis Khan was a fierce and bloodthirsty warrior.
- Some have expressed horror at the tremendous destruction that Genghis Khan's fierce soldiers brought as they conquered new lands.



- Yet some historians see Genghis Khan differently.
- They look at the way Genghis Khan ruled his great Mongol empire.
- Sources show that this was a time of peace, prosperity, and stability in a huge portion of central and eastern Asia.
- The people living in the Mongol empire enjoyed a remarkable degree of religious tolerance, higher learning, and consistent laws.

Writing About History

Historical Interpretations

- Which conclusion is correct?
- Was Genghis Khan a ruthless warrior or a strong, intelligent leader of a great land?
- A historian may rely on evidence to support either position.
- However, it is the job of the historians to evaluate the primary sources and explain why both interpretations can be argued.

Why do historians draw different conclusions about events of the past?



Genghis Khan and his warriors expanded the Mongol Empire. The violence of their invasions contrasted with the peace inside the empire.

Review This Lesson

Vocabulary

- evidence
- source
- primary source
- secondary source
- point of view
- bias
- conclusion
- scholarly

Key Ideas

- examples of primary sources
- examples of secondary sources
- importance of understanding point of view
- importance of being aware of bias
- identify and explain if a source is reliable