

# TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

## *Why Study History?*

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Grade: 6-12

Length of class period: One 84 minute block

**Inquiry:** Students often enter the history classroom in the beginning of the school year having preconceived notions about United States history. Many kids believe that history is boring, or that it has no relevance to their everyday lives. Why should they have to remember “stupid dates?” The purpose of this lesson is to illustrate the significance of studying history. It is designed to excite students about the upcoming school year, as well as scaffold some of the necessary skills of the subject area. The lesson lays the groundwork and sets norms for both classroom and historical procedures. The students will explore the questions of “what is history” and “why study history,” as well as examine the historian’s process of studying history. It is the goal of this lesson to engage the students into the historical process.

**Objectives:** Students will know and be able to:

- Evaluate their role as student-historians in the history classroom
- Differentiate between primary and secondary sources
- Identify bias and perspective in sources
- Apply core strategies in analyzing primary resources

**Materials:**

- PowerPoint Presentation
- Primary vs. Secondary Sources Handout
- Historical Bias and Perspectives Handout
- Homework

**Activities:** (Lesson will be based around PowerPoint Presentation)

- Grabber: Slide #2-Class will draw their own interpretation of a historian. Teacher led discussion will follow. What are the students’ stereotypes? Why do they have these stereotypes?
- Slide #'s 3-7: What is history? Teacher led discussion of slides. Be sure to stimulate student involvement through active questioning. Slide #6 illustrates the influence of media on historical perspective. The famous Iwo Jima flag raising photo is actually the second time the flag was raised. The raising did not denote the end of the battle, as three of the soldiers depicted never made it off of Iwo Jima. Slide #7 shows the inaccuracies in portrayal that the painting presents. The first circle denotes a female, the second an African-American, and the third a large iceberg. Washington would not be standing in such treacherous conditions.

- Slide #'s 8-11 help students to examine why they are studying history. The child on Slide #10 took civic service to a very high level. He met with his representative and was able to help pass a bill forbidding adults to smoke in a car occupied by minors. A discussion should coincide with each slide, discussing student input and opinions on why history is studied.
- Slide #12 introduces primary and secondary sources. The two handouts should be passed out at this time. Have class read handouts. Answer any student questions. Be sure students are clear on the difference between a primary and secondary source.
- Slide #13 explains the homework assignment. Be sure students are aware that the assignment is due the following class. Each student will be required to present their primary sources to the class, as a way to continue to build a solid learning community.
- Exit Slip: Students should complete an exit slip giving two examples of a primary source and two examples of a secondary source.

**Assessment:**

*Informal-*

- Check and Monitor Progress
- Participation in Discussion

*Formal-*

- Completion of Primary Source Homework Assignment
- Personal Primary Source Presentation
- Exit Slip

**Connecticut Framework Performance Standards:**

Educational experiences in **Grades 9-12** will assure that students:

- formulate historical questions and hypotheses from multiple perspectives, using multiple sources;
- gather, analyze and reconcile historical information, including contradictory data, from primary and secondary sources to support or reject hypotheses;
- use primary source documents to analyze multiple perspectives.
- describe relationships between historical subject matter and other subjects they study, current issues and personal concerns.

# Primary vs. Secondary Sources

<u>Primary Sources</u>	<u>Secondary Sources</u>
<p><b>Primary Sources</b> are actual records of events that have survived from the past. Examples of primary sources include letters, photographs, diaries, poems, newspaper accounts, and interviews.</p>	<p><b>Secondary Sources</b> are accounts of the past created by people who are not first-hand witnesses of the event. Secondary sources offer an analysis or a restatement of primary sources. Examples of secondary sources include: dictionaries, encyclopedias, books and articles that interpret or review research works.</p>

## Examples of Primary and Secondary Sources

	Primary Source	Secondary Source
<b>Aging</b>	Census data by age and state	Essay on the aging population
<b>History</b>	<i>Mein Kampf</i> (Hitler's Autobiography)	Book about the Third Reich
<b>Medicine</b>	Study of cancer treatment	Article in Prevention about the study
<b>Music</b>	Beatles <i>White Album</i>	<i>The Ultimate Beatles Encyclopedia</i>
<b>Political Science</b>	Treaty of Versailles	Essay on Native American land rights
<b>Psychology</b>	Civilization and Its Discontents	Biography of Freud
<b>Sports</b>	Game Program from Superbowl XL	Hollywood Movie about Superbowl XL



# Historical Bias & Perspective

## Discussion Questions:

How do these two articles demonstrate different examples of bias and perspectives on Columbus's arrival in the New World?

Please cite at least one specific example of bias or perspective from each source?

## First Encounters in America

In 1492, Spain sponsored a voyage headed by Italian mariner **Christopher Columbus**. Columbus hoped to reach the Indies of East Asia by sailing westward across the Atlantic. However, he underestimated the size of the world and had no idea that the Americas were there to block his ships.

Columbus explored several Caribbean islands. Convinced that the islands were the Indies, he called the natives "Indians." (See the Witness History at the beginning of this section.) Columbus and those who followed worked to convert the Indians to Christianity. Europeans also took Indians' lands and enslaved Indians.

on gold and other precious things. They lack all manner of commerce, neither buying nor selling, and rely exclusively on their natural environment for maintenance. They are extremely generous with their possessions and by the same token covet the possessions of their friends and expect the same degree of liberality. . . .

In Book Two of his *History of the Indies*, Las Casas (who at first urged replacing Indians by black slaves, thinking they were stronger and would survive, but later relented when he saw the effects on blacks) tells about the treatment of the Indians by the Spaniards. It is a unique account and deserves to be quoted at length:

Endless testimonies . . . prove the mild and pacific temperament of the natives. . . . But our work was to exasperate, ravage, kill, mangle and destroy; small wonder, then, if they tried to kill one of us now and then. . . . The admiral, it is true, was blind as those who came after him, and he was so anxious to please the King that he committed irreparable crimes against the Indians. . . .

Las Casas tells how the Spaniards "grew more conceited every day" and after a while refused to walk any distance. They "rode the backs of Indians if they were in a hurry" or were carried on hammocks by Indians running in relays. "In this case they also had Indians carry large leaves to shade them from the sun and others to fan them with goose wings."

Total control led to total cruelty. The Spaniards "thought nothing of knifing Indians by tens and twenties and of cutting slices off them to test the sharpness of their blades." Las Casas tells how "two of these so-called Christians met two Indian boys one day, each carrying a parrot; they took the parrots and for fun beheaded the boys."

The Indians' attempts to defend themselves failed. And when they ran off into the hills they were found and killed. So, Las Casas reports, "they suffered and died in the mines and other labors in desperate silence, knowing not a soul in the world to whom they could turn for help." He describes their work in the mines:

. . . mountains are stripped from top to bottom and bottom to top a thousand times; they dig, split rocks, move stones, and carry dirt on their backs to wash it in the rivers, while those who wash gold stay in the water all the time with their backs bent so constantly it breaks them; and when water invades the mines, the most arduous task of all is to dry the mines by scooping up pansful of water and throwing it up outside. . . .