

## Analyzing History

The people of the ancient world didn't build skyscrapers, invent the automobile, or send spaceships to Mars. But they still had some amazing achievements. They built huge temples, invented writing, and discovered planets. Every step we take – in technology, science, education, government, and everywhere else – builds on what people did long ago. We are who we are because of the people of the past.

### What is History?

**History** is the study of the past. A battle that happened 5,000 years ago and an election that happened yesterday are both parts of history.

**Historians** are people who study history. They want to know how people lived and why they did the things they did. Historians try to learn the problems people faced and how they found solutions.

Historians are interested in how people lived their daily lives. How and where did people work, fight, trade, farm, and worship? What did they do in their free time? What games did they play? In other words, historians study the past to understand people's **culture** – the knowledge, beliefs, customs, and values of a certain group of people.

### How do Historians Find Information?

Historians do a lot of reading, thinking, and problem-solving. They have to read and analyze different types of texts and materials. You will practice being a historian throughout the year, meaning reading, thinking, and problem-solving are skills you must possess to be successful.

There are three main types of materials that historians look at in their work: Historical Readings, Artifacts, and Art. By looking at these materials and asking questions about them, historians can gain a solid understanding of the past.

### Historical Readings:

There are two types of Historical Readings: **Primary Sources** and **Secondary Sources**.

**Primary Sources** are historical documents that are written by a firsthand witness or they can be objects that have survived from the past. Examples can include: letters, government documents, diaries, art, or other materials.

**Secondary Sources** are accounts of past events written AFTER the time an event happened. An example could be a textbook, a historical website, as well as others.

Sometimes, historians do not always agree on everything. As they conduct their research of primary sources, they form different opinions on an event or a person in their secondary sources. However, historians are always looking for more information and new discoveries. As historians review and analyze evidence from the past, their interpretations can and do change.

## Primary Source:

Here is an example of a **Primary Source** that an archaeologist discovered. He uncovered this particular text while digging in what he believes was a government building in Ancient Mesopotamia. It is a text called “Hammurabi’s Code.” Here is a short translation:

- If anyone is committing a robbery and is caught, then he shall be put to death.
- If a son strikes his father, his hands shall be cut off.
- If a man puts out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out.
- If he breaks another man’s bone, his bone shall be broken.
- If a man knocks out the teeth of his equal, his teeth shall be knocked out.

1. What is a primary source?
2. What do you think this text is?
3. Who wrote this text and why was it created?
4. What does this text tell you about the people who lived during this time period? (Examples: What do they believe, what do they value, what are some characteristics of these people, or what are some problems this group of people faced?)

## Secondary Source:

Here is an example of a **Secondary Source**. It is a description of the Public Baths of Ancient Rome written by a history teacher around the year 2005.

The public baths in Rome were extremely popular. In the beginning of the Roman Republic, the baths were strictly for rich men. The main purpose of the baths was to provide a meeting place to conduct business. Typically, rich men saw no reason for women or for poor citizens to have access to the baths on a daily basis as they had no business to conduct.

1. What is a secondary source?
2. Do you think this author should be writing about Roman Public Baths? Why or why not?
3. Is this information fact or opinion?
4. Why do you think the author wrote this?