

# **Making Inferences about History Using Primary Sources 5<sup>th</sup> Grade**

**Developed for  
Library of Congress Midwest Region  
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## **Overview**

The purpose of this lesson is for students to look at parts of primary sources in order to make inferences and draw conclusions. They will learn that history is someone’s story about the past. It can change through interpretation and the discovery of new facts in the form of primary resources. Students will work in groups to make inferences about a primary source and learn about the interpretation of history. This is a set of three 45-60 minute lessons. The lesson plan can be suited to fit multiple grade levels and curriculum subjects.

## **Standards**

### **History**

Benchmark 4, Indicator 2: The student examines multiple primary sources to understand point of view of an historical figure.

Benchmark 4, Indicator 5: The student observes and draws conclusions.

### **Common Core ELA**

RI.5.7: The student will draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently.

## **Objectives**

### **Content**

- The student will use primary sources to make inferences about the past.

### **Skills**

- The student will make observations about a primary source.
- The student will use observations to make inferences.
- The students will compare and contrast their inferences with facts.

## **Essential Questions**

- How do historians know about the past?
- How do primary sources help us understand history?

## Resource Table

Image/Resources	Description	Citation	URL
	<p><b>The Great Omaha Pow-Wow Dance</b> of the Cheyennes in Montana</p>	<p>Copyright by Charles Wiley, Miles City, Montana. Wiley Bros., photographer</p>	<p><a href="http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/90710162/">http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/90710162/</a></p>
	<p><b>Indian Children</b> and their playhouses. Three Cheyenne girls, of the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation, posed at play with their small tipi dollhouses and dolls.</p>	<p>Source: Women and warriors of the plains. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.</p>	<p><a href="http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/98506632/">http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/98506632/</a></p>
	<p><b>Slave Auction</b> African American men, women, and children being auctioned off in front of crowd of men.</p>	<p>Sketch by Theodore R. Davis. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.</p>	<p><a href="http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/98510250/">http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/98510250/</a></p>
	<p><b>School Classroom</b> Wash., D.C. public school scene, ca. 1899: students studying the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth, Mass.</p>	<p>Caption card tracings: Colonial life Pilgrims; Geogr.; Schools.</p>	<p><a href="http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004668395/">http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004668395/</a></p>

## Lesson Plan

### Day 1

1. Start the lesson by asking the students to think of some ways that we can learn about our past. How do we know what really happened if there is no one left to tell us? Do we know everything about our past? Can we? Allow the students a chance to brainstorm with a partner or a group. After the students discuss, get them to share with the class. Write their ideas on large poster paper, or the board.
2. Have a student stand up with you in front of the class. Ask the students to tell you what they can infer about the student or environment by what he/she is wearing. What kind of weather would someone wear this type of clothing in? Does the clothing tell what the person is interested in (team or hobby)? What do their shoes say about the person? After this discussion, tell the students that the clothes that they are wearing are artifacts. Artifacts are primary sources and can help us learn about the past. Sometimes we only have bits and pieces and have to make educated guesses and inferences.
3. Divide the students into four groups. Tell them that each group is going to get only a portion of an old photograph. (For this example I am going to use the **School Classroom** from my resource table.) Use the **Photo Analysis Worksheet** (each group only needs one worksheet) and have the students analyze their portion of the photo. As the students are making their observations, go around facilitating their discovery. It is important that they don't share their observations with the other groups at this time.
4. Collect each group's **School Classroom** photo and **Photo Analysis Worksheets**. Tomorrow they will be looking at their photos again in order to build a picture of the past.

### Day 2

1. Review the concepts from **Day 1**. How do we know about our past? How can we use primary resources to learn more? Do we know everything about the past or will our perception change?
2. Divide the students into the same four groups from the previous day. Pass back their same portions of the **School Classroom** photo and their **Photo Analysis Worksheets**. Give them a blank piece of white paper. Make sure that it is larger than the photo. Have the students glue or tape their corner of the photograph onto their white paper. (This could already be done by the teacher prior to the lesson to save time.)
3. Tell the students that they need to work together to draw what they think the rest of the picture looks like. They can use the **Photo Analysis Worksheet** from the

previous day to guide their inferences. Ask them: Can you make an educated guess about what might be in the whole picture? What clues are you going to look for? Do you think you will be 100% correct?

4. After the students are finished drawing their picture. They will need to write a short paragraph (3-5 sentences) about what they think is going on in the picture. They can write this on the back of their drawings.
5. Remember that it is important that they do not share their inferences with the other groups. When students are finished collect their work to be shared as a group the following day.

### **Day 3**

1. Review the process from Day 1 and Day 2. Tell them that today they will share their photographs with the other groups. Remind them that if given only a small portion of a primary source regarding history, a person can only make interpretations. One person's interpretation might be different from someone else's; depending on the information they are given.
2. Have the groups take turns sharing their interpretations and inferences about the primary source.
3. After they are finished, discuss how their interpretations were different or similar. Why do they think some of their thoughts about the photograph were the same?
4. Show them the actual picture (**The Big Picture**). You can display this on a projector so every student can see or print one for every student. How were their pictures similar and different from the original? What clues helped them make correct inferences? Did one group's portion of the picture make it more difficult? How well did the groups do with the information given?
5. Talk about the original photo. Who do you think these people are? Where are they? What are they studying? How do you know? How is it different from today?
6. Talk to the students about what they learned from this assignment. Sometimes our interpretation of a historic even changes as we learn more about the past? You could relate it to how their interpretation of a new classmate might change as they learn more about them. What we know about history is not set in stone.

### **Assessment**

- On a piece of paper, have the students write a short summary. They will need to answer these questions:
  - How do we learn about things from the past?
  - How can what we know about the past change over time?

## For the Teacher

- Primary sources are the original items or records that have survived from the past - such as clothing, letters, photographs, and manuscripts. They were part of a direct personal experience of a time or event.
- Secondary Sources are created by documenting or analyzing someone else's experience. They may have been written long after an event took place and include items such as textbooks, encyclopedias, biographies, and documentaries.
- Quotes about the definition of history.
  - History is a narration of the events which have happened among mankind, including an account of the rise and fall of nations, as well as of other great changes which have affected the political and social condition of the human race.—John J. Anderson. 1876
  - History is not what you thought. It is what you remember. All other history defeats itself.—W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman. 1930
- Photographs used in this lesson plan can be from any content area. One photograph is used to represent this lesson but in the resource table there are three additional examples of appropriate photos that can be used. When choosing a photo, it is important that all portions of the photo can be used to make interpretations. Some photographs may have empty spaces that would make it hard for students to make inferences.

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Photo Analysis Worksheet

#### Observe

Study this portion of the photograph for 2-5 minutes. Make a list of the people, objects, and activities in the photo.

<b>People</b>	<b>Objects</b>	<b>Activities</b>

#### Inference

Based on what you observed list three things that you might infer from this photograph.

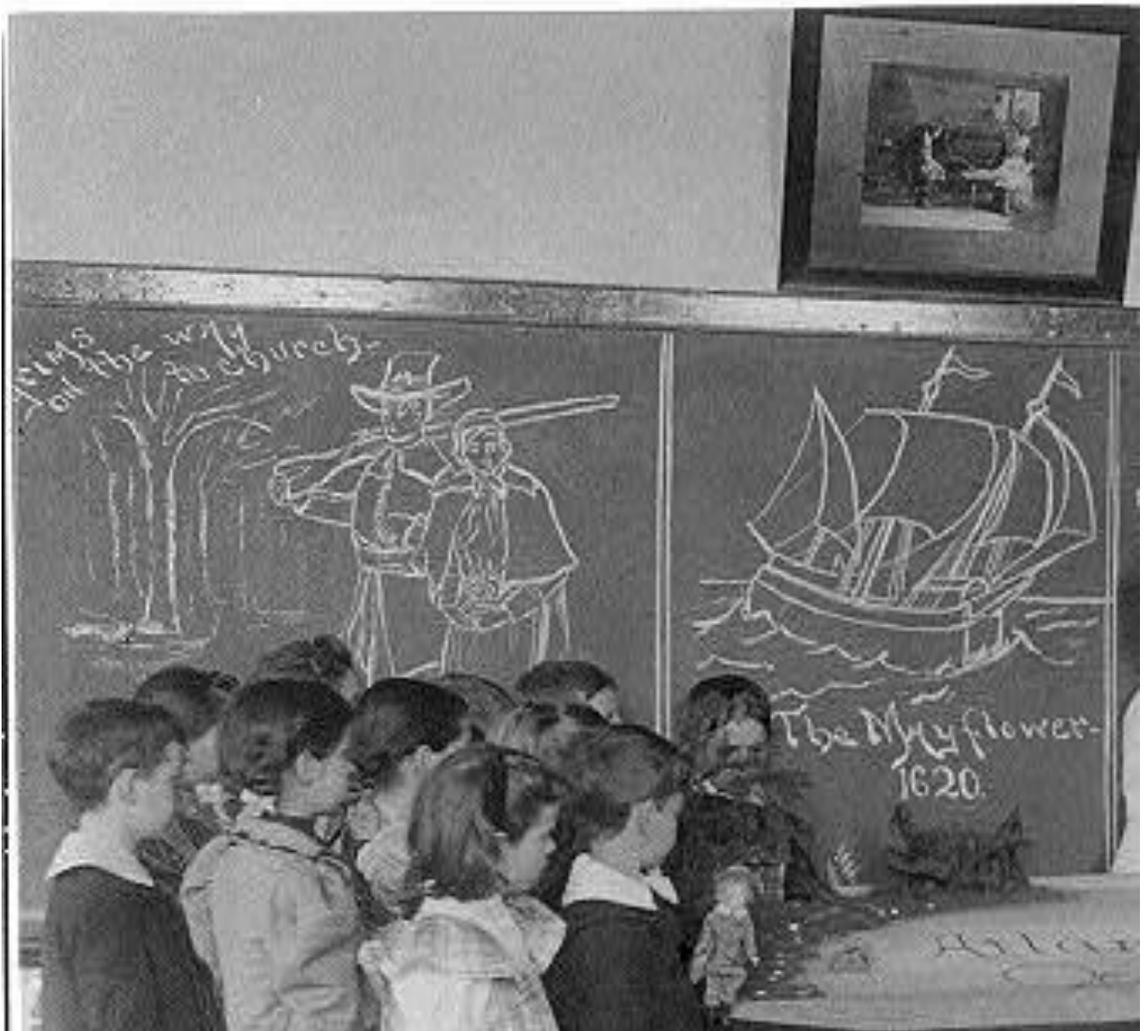
1.

2.

3.

#### Questions

What questions do you have about the photo?



Group 1



**Group 2**



**Group 3**



**Group 4**

## The Big Picture

