

History 12 Skills

Primary and Secondary Sources

What is a Primary Source?

A primary source is a document that was created **at the time of the event** or subject you've chosen to study or **by people who were observers of or participants** in that event or topic.

If, for example, your topic is the experience of workers in the Chicago meat-packing houses during the first decades of the twentieth century, your primary sources might be:

- Chicago newspapers, c. 1900-1920, in a variety of languages.
- A short film, such as an actualité, made during the period that shows the yards.
- Settlement house records and manuscripts.
- Novels about the packing yards, such as Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906).
- U.S. census records concerning neighborhood residents for 1900 and 1910.
- A mechanical conveyor system, used to move carcasses from one room to another at the time and place you are researching.
- Autobiographies of meat packing executives, workers, etc., published even many years later.
- Maps that show the location of the packing house plants, made during the period you are studying.
- Music, such as work songs or blues ballads, made or adapted during the time you are researching.
- oral histories of packing house employees' experiences, though a historian's comments on those oral histories would be a secondary source.

The medium of the primary source can be anything, including **written texts, objects, buildings, films, paintings, cartoons**, etc. What makes the source a "primary" source is **when it was made**, not what it is.

Primary sources would not, however, include books written by historians about this topic, because books written by historians are called "secondary" sources. The same goes for historian's introductions to and editorial comments on collections of primary documents; these materials, too, are secondary sources because they're twice removed from the actual event or process you're going to be writing about.

So while a historian's introduction to Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* (1906) is a secondary source, the novel itself, written in 1906, is a primary source.

Exercise: Read the following documents and classify them as primary or secondary sources. Justify your answer.

Document	Document Type	Explanation
Excerpt 1		
Excerpt 2		
Excerpt 3		
Excerpt 4		

History 12 Skills
Primary and Secondary Sources
HI12 – The Munich Putsch
Document Analysis

Read the following documents and answer the questions:

(1) In 1923 Ernst Hanfstaengel took part in the Beer Hall Putsch. He wrote about the experience in his book, Hitler: The Missing Years (1957)

Kahr was sending us off to sleep. He had just said the words "and now I come to the consideration" which, for all I know, was to be the high spot of his speech, when the door behind us which we had come through flew open and in burst Goering with about twenty-five brownshirts with pistols and machine-guns.

Hitler began to plough his way towards the platform and the rest of us surged forward behind him. Tables overturned with their jugs of beer. On the way we passed a major named Mucksel, one of the heads of the intelligence section at Army headquarters, who started to draw his pistol as soon as he saw Hitler approach, but the bodyguard had covered him with theirs and there was no shooting.

Hitler clambered on a chair and fired a round at the ceiling. It is always maintained that he did this to terrify the gathering into submission, but I swear he did it to wake people up. Anyway, on home ground at last, Hitler barked an impromptu proclamation: "The national revolution has broken out. The Reichswehr is with us. Our flag is flying on their barracks."

(2) Adolf Hitler, speech made at the Burgerbraukeller, (8th November, 1923)

The Bavarian Ministry is removed. I propose that a Bavarian government shall be formed consisting of a Regent and a Prime Minister invested with dictatorial powers. I propose Herr von Kahr as Regent and Herr Pohner as Prime Minister. The government of the November Criminals and the Reich President are declared to be removed. I propose that, until accounts have been finally settled with the November criminals, the direction of policy in the national Government be taken over by me. Ludendorff will take over the leadership of the German National Army, Lossow will be German Reichswehr Minister, Seisser Reich Police Minister.

(3) Rudolf Olden, Hitler the Pawn (1936)

Hitler wanted "to make himself scarce," to retreat with the fighting leagues to Rosenheim. This simply meant flight. The General had another plan. He was certain of success. No German, at any rate no German in uniform, would shoot at the "General of the World War," at the national hero. At about noon a procession of 2000 National Socialists marched, twelve abreast, through the town. At first shot Hitler had flung himself to the ground. He sprained his arm, but this did not prevent him from running. He found his car and drove into the mountains.

(4) Official biography of Adolf Hitler published by the Nazi Party (1934)

Hitler shouted. "Close the ranks," and linked arms with his neighbours. The body of the man with whom Hitler was linked shot up into the air like a ball, tearing Hitler's arm with him, so that it sprang from the joint and fell back limp and dead. Hitler approached the man and stooped over him. Blood was pouring from his mouth. Hitler picked him up and carried him on his shoulders. "If I can only get him to the car," Hitler thought, "then the boy is saved."

From: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/GERbeer.htm>