



THE MEMORY PROJECT

A Guide to Primary Sources

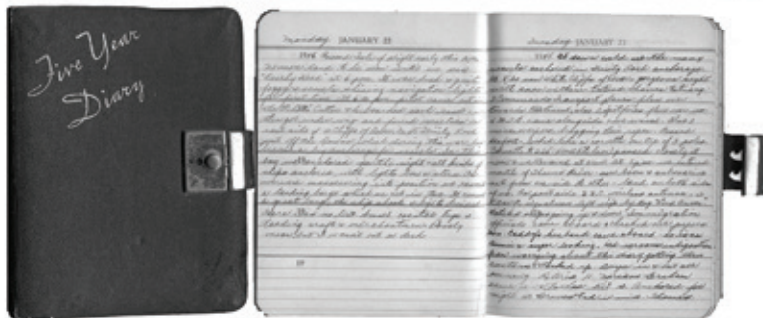


A MESSAGE TO TEACHERS:

This learning tool uses The Memory Project website, thememoryproject.com, to challenge students to rethink what it means to study history by using primary source analysis. The **Veteran Stories** and **Image Gallery** sections of the website contain a wide range of primary documents. The exercises in this guide invite students to develop their ability to analyze primary documents and other historical resources.

An initiative of **Historica Canada**, The Memory Project gives veterans and current Canadian Forces members the opportunity to share their stories of military service through an online archive and volunteer speakers bureau. The Memory Project is made possible through funding from the Government of Canada.

Historica Canada is the country's largest organization dedicated to enhancing awareness of Canada's history and citizenship. For more information, visit historicanada.ca.





INTERPRETING DOCUMENTS

Historians group documents into two categories: **primary** and **secondary** documents. **Primary** documents are items created *during* the time period being studied. This includes official documents (e.g., a government census, hospital records, and school records) and personal items (e.g., diaries, photographs, and letters). Working with primary documents is essential to the study of history. **Secondary** documents are created *after* the time period being studied and offer an analysis or opinion on that moment in time (e.g., textbooks or movies about historical events).

THE CHALLENGE OF BIAS

Historians can struggle with the concept of **bias** (favouring one side, person, or idea over another). When working with documents, historians tend to exclude materials they think are biased. However, individuals create documents for a particular purpose, which means that all documents are, in a sense, biased. Students and historians must read all primary documents critically. This can be done by asking **sourcing questions**:

- What type of document is it (e.g., official report, private letter, photograph)? How could its form influence what content was included or excluded?
- Who created this document and when did they do so? How might their position in society (e.g., gender, job) influence what they recorded? If describing a particular event, were they first-hand witnesses?
- Why was this document created? Who was the intended audience? How might this have influenced what was recorded in the document?

ANALYZING A NEWSPAPER VS. FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT

Go to **The Memory Project** website and select the box marked **Educator Resources**; from there select **Learning Tools** and then **Supplement – Primary Sources Guide** to find the primary sources described in this activity.

To find out more about D-Day, search **The Canadian Encyclopedia** at thecanadianencyclopedia.ca

Alone, or with a partner, read the article, “D-Day: Canada Has Proud Part In Invasion” by Charles Bruce, written for *The Globe and Mail* on June 7, 1944.

Listen to and read D-Day veteran Okill Stuart’s first-hand account of the invasion of Normandy.

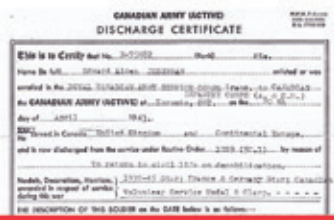
For each description of D-Day, answer the **sourcing questions** first. Then, working with a partner, answer the following questions:

1. What image of D-Day is put forward by each account?
2. Why might the two accounts of D-Day be different?
3. Which account would a historian rely on more if they were trying to find out what it was like to land on the beach on D-Day? Why?
4. Would you use just one of these accounts on its own when describing D-Day? Why or why not?
5. What other evidence might a historian gather to make sure their description of D-Day is accurate?

Remember:

Both primary documents were created for different purposes and tell us different things about D-Day. Which source is most useful depends on the question the historian is trying to answer.





ANALYZING OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

Official documents are created by an institution, like a business or a government, and can include health records, censuses, and even report cards. These documents are typically created *without* historical research in mind and rarely provide all of the information wanted by historians. However, official documents can still be used to answer many interesting historical questions.

There are many examples of official documents on **The Memory Project** website to explore. Visit the **Educator Resources** section and select **Image Gallery**. Search either by keyword (e.g., Korean War) or by category.

WHAT CAN OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS TELL US?

Type the name Bronson into the keyword search. This will return three items related to Harold Bronson, an airplane navigator in the Second World War.

Click on the middle of the three images for Harold Bronson's logbook page. Then select the **View Original** link.

This document does not tell us the day-to-day details of Bronson's life in the air force, but it can tell us things like where his squadron was bombing.

First, read through the whole document. Then, work with a partner to make a list of things the document tells us about the Royal Canadian Air Force in the Second World War. Be prepared to discuss your findings with your class.

For English Language Learners, teachers may want to identify difficult words in advance and provide simple definitions of these terms.

Next, conduct a search of the **Image Gallery** with your partner. You may choose to use the **Documents** category, a different category, or try your own keyword search. Identify an official document and make another list, as above, to share with your class.



ANALYZING IMAGES

Images are another excellent source of historical information, but they must be approached critically. For example, the image to the left captures the wedding of Ken and Ruby Fletcher in the United Kingdom on 20 September 1945.

With a partner, answer the following questions:

1. Describe the image in as much detail as you can.
2. How would you describe the mood of the people in the image?
3. What impression does the photo give you of love and marriage in wartime?
4. Who created this image? Why? How might this influence the contents of the image?
5. Is this a primary or a secondary document?

Now listen to or read the interview with Ruby Fletcher. Visit the **Educator Resources** section of **The Memory Project** website, select **Learning Tools** and then **Supplement – Primary Sources Guide** to find her story.

How does this new information change your perception of the photo?

In this case, the photo shows us how people living through a war managed to maintain marriage traditions and find joy during difficult times. This exercise should help you to recognize that a historian needs to gather data from many sources in order to develop a well-rounded and accurate depiction of the past.



FINDING YOUR OWN PRIMARY SOURCES

In the **Educator Resource** section of **The Memory Project** website, select **Learning Tools** and then **Supplement – Primary Source Guide** to find supplementary materials.

For English Language Learners, teachers can also find more activities and information on teaching the concept of primary sources to ESL students in this section.

1. Generate a class list of questions about the Second World War or the Korean War.*
2. Decide which question interests you the most and form a small group (two to four people per group) with others who are interested in the same topic.
3. Identify individuals (e.g., family members) whose life experience could answer some of the questions you have about the Second World War or the Korean War. Contact these individuals to see if they would be willing to be interviewed. **The Memory Project** can connect classrooms with veteran speakers. Contact us or visit the **Book a Speaker** section of thememoryproject.com to find out more.
4. Draw up a set of interview questions. Review the suggestions on how to conduct an interview found in the **Supplement - Primary Source Guide**.
5. Make a recording of your interview (be sure to ask permission) or take notes during the interview.
6. Take photos or make copies of any artifacts the individual is willing to share (e.g., letters, photographs, official documents).
7. Use these materials to create your own **Memory Project** file on this individual and share your findings with your class. This sharing could take many forms (e.g., a display, a presentation, a video) and could include submitting your file to **The Memory Project** staff to share on social media.
8. Discuss as a class the similarities and differences in the ways that the individuals experienced war.

** Students should avoid overly specific questions and focus on broader topics (e.g., what was it like on the home front?).*

This learning tool draws upon the work of the **Historical Thinking Project**, www.historicalthinking.ca



ANALYZING ORAL HISTORIES

Historians also make use of oral histories. Oral histories often provide details that other types of sources do not. However, **a historian needs to think about the accuracy of an individual's memory and the fact that the telling of a story can be influenced by the presence of an audience.** It is a good idea to compare oral histories with other accounts (such as those written in history books).