

Life on the Front: Using Primary Sources to Create Secondary Sources

Class time: 50 minutes

Instruction level: Grades 10-11 History

Materials used: Brandeis University collection of Michael Lally letters
(<http://ir.brandeis.edu/handle/10192/28550>)

Objectives:

1. Students will learn and define the term Primary Source.
2. Students will read and analyze primary source material.
3. Students will practice good note-taking skills.
4. Students will write an analytical essay.
5. Students will practice organizational skills by creating an outline for their essay.

Massachusetts curriculum framework standards:

This exercise meets the following standards for **writing**, grades 9-11:

Standard 4: *Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.*

Standard 5: *Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.*

This exercise meets the following Massachusetts curriculum framework standards for **United States History I:**

Standard 36: *Summarize the critical developments leading to the Civil War.*

Standard 39: *Analyze the roles and policies of various Civil War leaders and describe the important Civil War battles and events.*

Lesson Components and Methods:

1. Review the time period with a basic timeline of events; hand out the Civil War Timeline so that they can follow along individually.
2. Introduce activity by telling students they will be reading letters written by a soldier during the civil war. Explain that a letter is considered a Primary Source, and define the term for them: *Primary sources provide first-hand testimony or direct evidence concerning a topic under investigation. They are often created by witnesses or recorders who experienced the events or conditions being documented. Often these sources are created at the time when the events or conditions are occurring, but they can also include memoirs, autobiographies, and oral histories recorded later.*
3. Ask students to give examples of different types of Primary Sources. Use the whiteboard/blackboard/overhead to generate a list of their responses.
4. Explain activity: students will read 4 letters, and using evidence from the letters, as well as their own background knowledge of the time period, write a 1-2 page

analytical essay about what everyday life was like for a soldier during the Civil War. Remind students that an analytical essay requires them to closely analyze textual documents and formulate a response to the textual documents that shows a solid understanding of them. Before students write their essay, they should draft an outline that includes a thesis statement, supporting body paragraphs, and a conclusion.

5. Hand out packets of the 4 letters students will be reading (transcriptions of **October 22, 1861; May 2, 1862; October 31, 1864; November 1, 1864**).
6. While they are reading the letters, tell students to take notes (underline or highlight important passages, etc.) on the details Lally provides about daily life on the front in his letters. Ask students to think about the following questions as they read through the letters: What was an average day like for Lally—how did he spend his time? What were the battles like? What were the camps like? How did Lally feel about being at war and away from home?
7. Students should use the remainder of class time to work on their outline and begin the essay; the essay should be completed for homework.