

How do we know what we know? *Advanced*

Unit 1: Natural Texas and Its People

Name: Date: Period:

Has this ever happened to you? You're sitting in your social studies class, listening to your teacher tell you something that happened hundreds of years ago. You think, "But, how do we really know?" Your teacher wasn't there. Where did we get the information?

How do you think we discover information about the past? Write your answer below.

Artifacts

History is a record of human activities. For thousands of years, people have walked the earth doing normal, great, or even terrible things. Over the course of their lives, people create evidence of their actions. Whenever someone painted on a stone, carved a wooden bowl, or made a tool, they were leaving clues for future generations to learn from. We call these objects that they created **artifacts**. These items could be used in many different ways, like for meals, self-defense, or even art. No matter how they were used, we can learn about past people from the **artifacts** they left behind.

1. The best definition of an **artifact** according to the passage is
2. Circle **all** items that would be considered **artifacts**.
 - a. Paintings on a cave wall
 - b. Animal bones
 - c. A shell necklace
 - d. A raspberry bush
 - e. A deerskin blanket
 - f. A child's toy
3. Think about the types of things you make, buy, or use now. Future people might study these objects to learn about our society. Give an example of an artifact that **you** might leave behind. What could future people learn about you from that object?

Primary Sources

What is a primary source?

One really helpful type of artifact we can learn from is called a **primary source**. Primary sources provide us with a firsthand account of an event from the past. They are materials created by people who were actually alive during the time the event took place. In contrast, **secondary sources** are secondhand accounts. They are materials created by people who were not alive at the time to experience the event. Often, secondary sources are created by referencing, or using, primary sources.

Directions: Read each example of a source below. Write **P** next to examples of primary sources, and **S** next to examples of secondary sources.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A textbook in your classroom about Texas history | <input type="checkbox"/> A student book report on ancient Egypt |
| <input type="checkbox"/> An autobiography about Abraham Lincoln | <input type="checkbox"/> A local newspaper article from 2024 about the 100 th anniversary of a town festival |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A letter from George Washington to his wife | <input type="checkbox"/> A journal entry from a Spanish explorer sailing to North America in 1585 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A newspaper article from 2001 about the events of 9/11 | <input type="checkbox"/> Notes from an interview of someone who lived through the Great Depression in the 1930s |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A photograph taken by a soldier serving in World War Two | |

Using Primary Sources to Understand an Event

Primary sources can help us understand what happened in the past, what people in that situation thought and how they felt at the time. Primary sources are like small windows into the past. While primary sources offer a lot of benefits in helping us understand the past, we should be aware that they aren't perfect.

Imagine this: you're walking down the hall on your way to your next class period. Suddenly, you hear shouting farther down the hall, and you see a lot of sudden movement. You can't tell what's going on, but it looks like there's a problem between some students.

When you get to your next class, you hear your classmates talking about what happened. Someone says there was a fight, and a student you know started it. Another student says actually, a different student started it. A third student says there wasn't really a fight, they were just messing around. All three students were there, but they each have their own point of view about what happened.

Maybe one of them had a better view than the others. Maybe one of them didn't like the student they accused of starting the fight. When our own opinions influence our point of view, that is called **bias**, and it can affect the story we tell.

Directions: Answer the following questions based on the passage on the previous page.

1. What is the best definition for the term **bias**?

2. How did **bias** influence how the students talked about the incident in the hall?

3. How could we get the most accurate account of what happened in the hall?

Directions: Read each statement about primary sources. Place a checkmark in the correct box demonstrating whether each statement is a **benefit** or **drawback** of using primary sources.

Statement	Benefit	Drawback
1. Primary sources usually present only one person's point of view of an historic event		
2. Primary sources give us a firsthand account of an event		
3. Primary sources help us understand past peoples' experiences		
4. Primary sources often contain biases that don't reflect the whole truth		




Writing Exercise:

Directions: Using the statements above, or your own statement about primary sources, write a complete sentence explaining the benefits and drawbacks of using primary sources.

Example sentence structure: **Primary sources are beneficial because** they provide us with a firsthand account of an event, **however we should be aware that** they also might present only one point of view.

Evaluating Primary Sources

Directions: Complete the chart below by using the images of Native American artifacts to make inferences about the early Texas people.

Primary Source Artifact	What can we infer about the artifact or the people who created it?	What questions do we have about the artifact or the people who created it?
 <p><i>Figure 1: Indian petroglyphs, The Portal to Texas History</i></p>		
 <p><i>Figure 2: Elongated, rectangular buckskin beaded Indian bag, The Portal to Texas History</i></p>		
 <p><i>Figure 3: Indian Artifacts from the Buddy Webb Family, The Portal to Texas History</i></p>		

Important Note:

Most early American Indian tribes of North America passed down information **orally**, or by word of mouth. For this reason, there is not much written information from the past to tell us their story from their own point of view. We have learned some of what we know from artifacts like the ones pictured above.

Question to consider: What do you think is one of the difficulties of only using artifacts to study past people?