

25 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PRIMARY SOURCE

(adapted from the [All History is Local](#) lesson plan)

Before you begin to examine primary sources, learn some essential questions that you must ask about any item you find in an historical archive. Not all questions work with all primary sources, and you may discover other questions as you go along!

What . . . ?

- What is it?
 - What are the people doing in the story or the document?
 - What do the words say? What do they mean?
 - What appears unusual about the image or the language?
 - What is the bias of the source of this information?
 - What is the point of this particular photograph, story, etc. . . .or this archive as a whole?
 - What changes can be seen in this photograph or artifact?
 - What might have caused the changes?
- What Else . . . ?
 - What else could it be or could it mean?
 - What else does this item remind you of?

When . . . ?

- When did the events happen?
 - When was this item made or story told or document written?
- When was it collected?

Where . . . ?

- Where did these events happen?
- Where was the item made? found?
- Where could you find more background information on this?

Who . . . ?

- Who is the story/document/picture about?
- Who is saying/writing this story/document/picture?
- Who still knows about this event or this artifact? Who else knows about this event or this artifact?

Why . . . ?

- Why did this happen?
- Why is this important?

How Many . . . ?

- How many more items like this one can I find?
- How many people were affected by this event?

Which . . . ?

- Which of these items is most important?
- Which of these items is related to something in your textbook or other secondary source?

Other . . . ?