



HOW TO READ A HISTORICAL SOURCE

Look for the context, purpose and what it tells you.



THE IDEA

Historical sources are texts, images or objects from the past.

They give clues about what happened, how people lived and what people thought.

Good readers look at who created the source, when it was created and why, and consider what it can and cannot tell us.



IN THE CLASSROOM

Show examples of different types of historical sources (e.g. letter, photograph, poster, map, diary).

Model how to ask questions about the source.

Ask students to find evidence in the source and link it to what they already know.

1

IDENTIFY THE SOURCE

Look at the type of source and the key details.

- What type of source is it? (e.g. letter, photograph, poster, map, diary, newspaper article)
- When was it created?
- Who created it?
- Where was it created?

Example: a wartime poster



2

WORK OUT THE PURPOSE

Think about why the source was created and who it was for.

- What was the creator's purpose? (e.g. to inform, persuade, entertain, record)
- Who was the intended audience?
- What message are they trying to give?

- Who might have seen this?
- What do the colours and images suggest?
- How does it make people feel?

3

USE THE SOURCE AS EVIDENCE

Look for clues in the source and think about what it tells you about the past.

- What can you learn from this source?
- What evidence does it provide?
- What does it suggest about people, places or events at the time?
- What might it not tell you?
- How could you link it to other sources or your own knowledge?

What this source suggests:

- People were encouraged to help with the war effort.
- Food was important.
- The government wanted people to be self-sufficient.
- It shows the attitudes and priorities of the time.



EAL UPGRADE

Pre-teach key vocabulary (e.g. source, evidence, purpose, audience, perspective, reliable, biased, primary source, secondary source).



TRY IT TOMORROW

Choose a historical source from your subject. Ask students to identify the type, purpose and two pieces of evidence, and explain what it suggests.



TEACHER LANGUAGE

"What type of source is this?"
 "What might be the purpose?"
 "Who might have seen it?"
 "What evidence do you see?"
 "What does this tell us about the past?"