Primary Sources in Lessons: A Checklist

The goal of the checklist is to assist teachers in developing and creating a positive learning activity. The Checklist is a resource that assists teachers in developing a lesson plan with using primary sources. This checklist asks teachers questions about the primary sources and walks them through incorporating the primary sources into the lesson plan. The questions are developed so that the participants do not just drop a primary source into a lesson plan without giving the individual resources the proper scaffolding. This scaffolding will allow the resource to be appropriately incorporated into the lesson theme and goals. If the individuals use the guided questions on the checklist it can help teachers with a successful integration of primary sources into the lesson plan.

Some criteria for identifying effective use of primary sources in a lesson

Are the sources well-chosen?

- Clearly support the lesson aim
- Are accessible to students, with support.
- Interesting for students - offer mystery or puzzle

Are students given a method for analyzing the sources?

- Effective question prompts
- Analysis guide
- Analysis tailored to a specific kind of source

Are appropriate literacy supports included?

- Vocabulary aids, glossaries
- Opportunities to summarize
- Making personal / sensory connections

To what extent is the historical context of the primary source shared with students?

- Time period created
- Author / audience
- Purpose of source

Are students given whatever background knowledge they need to make sense of the sources?

- Info about events or processes referred to
- Info about the creator
- What else was going on at the time

Are students helped to think critically about the sources?
- Identify motive and bias
- Look for corroboration in different sources
- Identify evidence for/against
- Consider “what if” questions