



MetaMetrics®



# Understanding Primary and Secondary Sources

## Common Core and Primary Sources

The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (2010) emphasize the importance of informational texts for all students in all courses in order to be prepared for college and careers. As students become more proficient readers, they should develop skills for analyzing, evaluating, and differentiating primary and secondary sources.

To evaluate primary and secondary sources, it is important to understand *how distant the author was from the event* he or she is discussing. This is often communicated by describing a source as primary or secondary.

## Primary Sources

A primary source is one that the author created based on personal experience or first hand observations. Common primary sources include, but are not limited to, diaries, autobiographies, letters, newspaper articles, photographs, videos, interviews, speeches, raw data, government documents and oral histories.

The Common Core State Standards also emphasize the need for students to study foundational documents, such as primary source documents essential to the development of a nation, culture or institution. Some documents that are considered foundational for the United States of America include **President George Washington's Farewell Address**, **The Emancipation Proclamation** and **the Nineteenth Amendment to The Constitution**.

## Secondary Sources

A secondary source is one written by someone who is removed from the time or event being studied. Some typical secondary sources include textbooks, biographies, case studies, scientific articles, or literature reviews. Authors of secondary sources generally have used many primary sources during the research stage.

Many types of documents can be either primary or secondary depending on the purpose, author and context. A speech may convey the speaker's own position on an issue (primary) or may focus on how foundational documents illustrate underlying positions of American colonists on that same issue (secondary). Authors often blend primary and secondary points of view. For example, a single newspaper article may include the reporter's account of a school board meeting (primary) and parent responses to decisions made at that meeting (secondary). Even a document as personal as a diary often contains the author's personal experiences (primary) and retellings of events the author did not experience, but may have learned about through a friend or colleague (secondary).

MetaMetrics has measured many of these types of documents. To help teachers understand the demands of such texts, we created a chart that has example texts and their Lexile® measures. The examples provided are linked to their full text, but different versions of the text can be found online and in textbooks. The link to the chart is below.

[https://www.lexile.com/m/cms\\_page\\_media/135/List%20of%20Primary%20Sources\\_3.pdf](https://www.lexile.com/m/cms_page_media/135/List%20of%20Primary%20Sources_3.pdf)



## Additional Resources

The National Archives Experience: Docs Teach through Foundation for the National Archives.  
<http://docsteach.org/>

Princeton's Reference Librarians keyword guide.  
<http://www.princeton.edu/~refdesk/primary2.html>

Constitution: Primary Source Set (Teacher's Guide) (n.d.) from The Library of Congress.  
<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/constitution/>

Distinguish Between Primary and Secondary Sources (2012), by University of California Santa Cruz.  
<http://library.ucsc.edu/help/howto/distinguish-between-primary-and-secondary-sources>

The Nature of Evidence (1997) by Thomas Percy, Ph.D. and Mary Dickson/W. W. Norton & Co.  
<http://www.wwnorton.com/college/history/ralph/research/prisec.htm#primary>

Primary v. Secondary Sources (n.d.) by Southeastern Louisiana University.  
<http://selu.libguides.com/content.php?pid=115796&sid=1039398>

Teaching with Primary Sources.  
<http://barat-tps.org/>

## Measure a Document

### **Have a primary or secondary source you want measured?**

Click [here](#) to fill out a request. Please enter "Primary" as the publisher.

### **When will my book be added?**

The speed with which the primary or secondary source you requested is added to our list of measures depends on locating the document and its original text. We use the information you submit to prioritize which documents to measure, and once measured, we add the requested primary or secondary source to the [list](#) of measured sources.

### **Is there anything I can do?**

While your request is being processed, you can use the [Lexile® Analyzer](#) to get an estimate Lexile measure for your requested document. This online tool determines the estimated Lexile® measure of edited, conventional prose text. Just follow our guidelines for preparing a text, upload it, and the Lexile measure will be displayed.