

## Primary vs. Secondary Sources

**Goals:** Students will learn the difference between primary and secondary sources and will be able to identify materials as being either one or the other, depending on how they are used.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to identify whether a source is a primary or secondary source and will be able to find and retrieve examples of each.

**Materials:** Several examples of both types of sources and a handout for the assignment.

**Time Required:** 25 min.

### **Lesson:**

- The distinction between a primary source and a secondary source is simply a chronological one, first-hand versus second-hand information.
- A primary source is an original document or a product of original thinking. A secondary source analyzes or interprets a primary source.
- Questions the students can ask themselves to determine whether a source is a primary or secondary one:
  - How does the author know the details of the information presented?
  - Where does the author's information come from?
  - Are the author's conclusions based on a single source of information?
- Present examples of different types of materials (a play, an article, a photo, etc.) and have the students identify whether they are primary or secondary sources. If necessary, explain why.
- Primary sources are usually given preference over secondary ones, but secondary sources are useful in helping one to understand a primary source or to reinforce an argument or interpretation.
- Reiterate where students can find these sources: catalogs, indexes, databases, and bibliographies.

**Assignment (Due during the next information literacy sessions):** Utilizing the library skills they have learned so far, the students are to find two primary sources of any kind and, for each of these primary sources, a secondary source which pertains to it. Once the students have collected these two pairs of resources, the students should provide and answer the following for each pair:

- A citation for the primary source in Chicago format.
- What type of material is the primary source?
- A citation for the secondary source that pertains to this primary source.
- What type of material is the secondary source?
- What is the purpose of the secondary source?
- How did you find it?
- Do not forget to repeat these steps for the second pair of materials.

### Assignment – Primary vs. Secondary Sources

Librarian: \_\_\_\_\_

Due Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Professor: \_\_\_\_\_

Please perform ALL of the tasks on this list. For this assignment, you may not work in groups or share answers.

- ☐ Utilizing the library's print and electronic resources, find a primary source (keep in mind that it does not necessarily have to be a book, essay, or article).
- ☐ Again utilizing the library's print and electronic resources, find a secondary source that pertains to (i.e. analyzes, interprets, evaluates, draws a conclusion from, speculates upon) the primary source above.

For the PRIMARY SOURCE you have chosen,

- ☐ Provide a citation in Chicago format. For more information about how to cite properly, see your librarian, consult the *Chicago Manual of Style* (several copies are available in the library), or visit the library's website:  
<http://lis.dickinson.edu/Library/Research/CitingRes/index.htm>
- ☐ Identify (using a word or phrase) what type of material it is (i.e. book, scholarly article, painting, interpretive dance, etc.).

For the SECONDARY SOURCE you have chosen,

- ☐ Provide a citation in Chicago format.
- ☐ Identify what type of material it is.
- ☐ Identify its purpose (i.e. to interpret the primary source, criticize it, evaluate it, etc.) and in a few sentences, explain what it is about.
- ☐ Explain how you found this source.

REPEAT THE ABOVE steps with another pair of sources.