

Historical Thinking Skill 2: Analyze sourcing and situation of primary and secondary sources

Historians use primary sources and the arguments of other historians (secondary sources) as the foundation for creating an understanding about historical events—in short, a historical argument. Sources need to be closely evaluated so that they can be used properly to support, refute, or even modify an argument. By using these skills, students will build an understanding of source analysis that they can later use in developing their own historical arguments. Good analysis requires a critical evaluation of the source’s limitations.

Skill	Tasks/Questions	Sample Activity	Instructional Strategies
2.A: <i>Identify a source’s point of view, purpose, historical situation, and/or audience.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the author. Identify their perspective. Identify their purpose. Identify the intended audience. Place the source within its historical situation. 	Lead students on a guided reading of an excerpt from Simón Bolívar’s “Letter from Jamaica.” Ask them to identify the author and his perspective (point of view). Then ask students to identify the historical situation during the time it was written.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critique Reasoning
2.B: <i>Explain the point of view, purpose, historical situation, and/or audience of a source.</i>	<p>Explain the many different variables that impact a source’s:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content Tone Interpretation Audience Purpose 	Ask students to examine and discuss the factors that led Simón Bolívar to respond to colonial control in the way he did.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Socratic Seminar Questioning a Text
2.C: <i>Explain the significance of a source’s point of view, purpose, historical situation, and/or audience, including how these might limit the use(s) of the source.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why does the source’s point of view, purpose, historical situation, and audience matter? How could a historian use this source to develop an argument? What does the source not tell you? How does the point of view, purpose, historical situation and/or audience of a source affect its value to historians? 	Ask students to assess the impact of Simón Bolívar’s point of view on the tone and content of the “Letter from Jamaica” and explain how his point of view might cause the letter to present an incomplete picture of the historical developments of the time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion Groups