



LS International History: Source Advice

SOURCE ADVICE

Sources are vital to the study of history; they are where historians find out about the past. Two of the key skills that you will develop in this course are the use and analysis of sources.

There are two types of source that historians use to gather information about the past; they are primary and secondary sources. **Primary sources** are objects created or written at the time being investigated; for example during an event or very soon after. Examples from the Ancient World might be writing from the time or artefacts. A **secondary source** is an account about the past which was created after the time periods being investigated. A secondary source from the Ancient World might be a historian's view about life at the time. Both types of source are very useful to historians and the study of history. When we are asking the question of how **useful** a source is, we are trying to work out how much information a source gives us.

How do we assess the value and limitations of sources?

We do this in two ways.

CONTENT

Firstly we look at the **content** of the source.

If this source is a picture or an artefact we would describe what we can see. If this was a written source we would quote from the source to say what the source is telling us. When we are looking at the content of the source we will look at three different questions.

1.What does the source tell us?

We use the detail from the source to describe what the source is showing us.

We might start our answer with:

In the source I can see...

The source says that...

2. What can we infer from the source?

We use detail from the source to answer a question, using information from the source and reason. For example, the question might be: what does the source tell us about belief in the Ancient World? In an image there might be an image of many Gods. From this we could infer that the religion is polytheistic.

We might start our answers with:

I can infer from this source that...

I can infer this because in the source I can see...

3. How useful is the source?

We can also use the content of the source to look at how useful a source might be to the study of a time period. For example a source showing the Colosseum would have value to historians as it would tell us the size of the building and the materials used but not how much it cost to build or what type of events took place there.

We might start our answers with:

This source is useful to historians as...

However, this source is not useful for...

PROVENANCE

The second form of analysis of sources is through the use of **provenance**. Provenance is made up of three parts. They are: Nature, Origin and Purpose. We can remember them as **NOP**.

Nature is what the source is. For example, a photograph, an artefact, a painting, a historian writing in a text book.

Origin is who created the source, and when they created it. You need to consider who created the source and when they wrote it, as this will help us to work out if it is a primary or secondary source.

Purpose is to look at why this source was created. Was it designed to entertain, persuade or argue a point? Does the creator have anything to gain personally from the source? What other events might have been happening at the time and might have influenced the author or the source?

When you analyse the source using NOP you can consider how reliable or useful a source is.

Reliability means how much you can trust the source and **usefulness** means how much information the source can give you. It is important to remember the source might not give you the whole picture or be reliable but they can still be very useful. For example, if the author of the source might not be very trustworthy, as they are putting forward a certain view point, this would still be a useful source as it is showing that point of view.

We might use the following sentence starters to answer questions on how useful a source is:

This source is useful as...

This source is not completely useful as...