

# MODERN HISTORY

## Evaluating Sources – History

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- Source; gives information which can be used to draw a conclusion, may not be considered evidence
- Primary source; from the period part of the event or issue
- Secondary source; written after the historical period
- PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES ARE EQUALLY RELIABLE

### Key Questions

- **Who?** Who wrote it, drew it, took the picture?
  - **When?** Significance of the date?
  - **What?** What sort of information is in the source?
  - **Why?** Was there a purpose in writing it? Who was the audience?
  - **Tone?** Biased, reasonable, emotional, propagandist etc?
  - **Support?** Is the source supported by other sources?
  - **What Use?** A source may provide good evidence for one issue but be unreliable for another.
1. Type of document
    - E.g. a government document for internal record/external publication, private correspondence...
  2. Author
    - What was the author's position when the document was written? How close was the author to the events described? Would the author's position affect his/her view of events? Does any obvious partisanship emerge from the biographical data?
  3. Date
    - How much time has passed between events described & creation of the document
    - Things are always changing, e.g. detail lost, change of attitude, how things are interpreted
    - Was it written close or at a distance from the events? If close, would this have helped or hindered the author gain an overall view of the events described? If distant, how great of a distance? What happened to the author or to the world since the events that might colour his/her views?

#### 4. Author's purpose

- The purpose of the document emerges from the type of document; PERSUASIVE and INFORMATIVE
- Persuasive purpose→less reliable
- Does presence of argument/ information suggest a persuasive purpose? Does the choice of words suggest a persuasive purpose?

#### 5. Audience

- Mass audience→persuasive purpose
- What audience did the author have in mind? Was the audience sympathetic/hostile to the author's information? Would the audience have required persuasion? What would have been the audience's assumptions about the subject? Has the author's awareness of these assumptions coloured his/her interpretation?

#### 6. Factual content

- Fact or opinion, must separate probably facts e.g. details, statistics, names, places, dates
- Presence of a great deal of opinion →low reliability

#### 7. Partisanship

- Authors are usually physically or emotionally involved in the events described, the author allows his/her own sympathies to affect the document
- Does the author of the document declare a party-political preference? Does the biographical data reveal a potential partisanship? If a book, does the title, preface or dedication reveal partisanship? Do you suspect bias, prejudice, falsification of facts and suppression of facts? Is the author particularly scathing or harsh toward one side in a conflict and particularly charitable toward another?

#### 8. Choice of words

- Loaded words (emotive words, exaggerated expressions, sweeping statement, strong partisanship)
- Does the author use loaded words in his/her descriptions? Does the author use exaggerated expressions or measured the straight forward prose? Does the author choose pejorative words describe persons or parties or flattering words ahead of more obvious neutral words?

#### 9. Tone

- Overall tone can reveal persuasive intention, partisanship and even prejudice
- Is the tone neutral, even-handed, detached, calm, cool? Or is the tone committed, passionate, involved and excited?

## 10. Verifiability

- If the claims made in a document are sufficiently detailed, they can be checked or verified against other sources
- Sufficient detail, verification is easy and the author is confident about the truth of the content
- Detail is vague; sources of evidence that verification is impossible
- Are the claims made and evidence given in the document verifiable? Are names, places, dates and other details sufficiently specific in order to enable verification? Or is the evidence based on 'private' knowledge which cannot be verified? Are other witnesses named? Are their accounts available?

## 11. Degree of specific detail

- A detailed account > generalized account
- How much specific detail does the author give? Are names, places, and dates given specifically? Are actual exchanges of conversation given or only summaries of them? Are actual documents cited? Or is the subject treated with sweeping generalization and vagueness?

## Analysing Visual Sources

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### Political Cartoons

- Aim; to express an attitude/opinion about a political event as briefly, clearly and powerfully as possible
  - A number of symbols (for countries...etc.)
  - Individuals drawn to accentuate their most outstanding feature (e.g. baldness)
1. Who drew the cartoon?
  2. Where was it drawn?
  3. What is the subject?
  4. What is the main idea?
  5. What is in the foreground/background?
  6. What is the main action? Who are the main characters? Can you work out the individuals or countries the main characters represent? Are they caricatures, or symbols? Are they represented by animals? What are their expressions?
  7. Are there any objects?
  8. What is the caption? Are there any words being spoken?

9. What is the main point? Is the cartoon mocking, criticizing, or sympathizing with a person, group or country?
10. On whose side is the cartoonist?