



Using Primary Sources

Using primary sources—both written and visual—can be a powerful way to immerse students in the past and bring history to life. Documents, photographs, cartoons, receipts, etc., offer insights into the experiences of ordinary people while encouraging students to think critically about point of view. Primary sources illuminate nuances of political, social, and cultural history, tell untold stories, and give students a way to understand what people in the past lived through, thought about, fought over, and hoped for.

Students sometimes have trouble understanding or analyzing primary sources. The following questions will help students feel more comfortable using such sources.* When reading or analyzing primary sources, students may find it useful to underline answers to specific questions within each document or image. You can use the questions below as a model for examining other primary sources.

1. Getting started: *What are primary sources?*

- What is a primary source? What are some examples from history?
- What are examples of primary source documents, images, or artifacts that you encounter every day? (Answers could include newspapers, magazines, e-mail messages, family photos, advertisements, receipts, and ticket stubs.)
- What is the value of studying primary source documents, both written and visual?
- Brainstorm a list of questions you might ask in examining these documents and images.

2. Descriptive questions: *What does it say?*

- Who produced this text or image? When?
- Who was supposed to read, see, or hear it?
- What does it say? What story does it tell?

3. Analytical questions: *What does it mean?*

- Why was this document produced? What purpose or purposes was it intended to serve?
- What does it tell us about the values, beliefs, institutions, and problems of the individual, group, or society that produced it?
- What questions does this document raise but leave unanswered? Where can we look for answers to these questions?

4. "So what" questions: *Why do we care?*

- Why is what we learn about the past from this document important?
- What importance does it have for our own world?

* Adapted from Christine Michelmore, as used in *Africans in America Teacher's Guide*, WGBH, 1998.

WORDS OF THUNDER Teacher's Guide

Analyzing Primary Sources

Below are four representative documents from **Words of Thunder**: an artifact, a photograph, a written record, and an illustration. To demonstrate how these documents can immerse students in various aspects of the abolition movement, we have included sample discussion questions, along with suggestions for extension activities.



Weekly Contribution Box for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society [ENLARGE]

ARTIFACTS

Collection Box

To raise funds for lectures, libraries, petitions, newspapers, and pamphlets, the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society developed an elaborate weekly contribution system. Boxes like this one were placed prominently in the homes of abolitionists for donations from household members and sympathetic visitors.

In Focus

1. What is represented on this box? What do the words say? Who is pictured, and what action is taking place?
2. Why do you think the artist chose to depict a man in chains? What do the chains symbolize? Do we know the name of the man on this box? Why is that significant?
3. Who was the audience for this box? What response was the box intended to evoke? Do you think it was effective?
4. The directions on the back of this box say that “contributors should be punctual, to drop into the box, every Sabbath morning, the amount of their weekly contribution.” Why do you think abolitionists selected “every Sabbath morning” as the time for donors to make contributions?
5. If you saw a collection box for a cause in a friend’s home, would you make a contribution? Why or why not? What would you want to know before you did?

Activities and Investigations

1. Do you raise money for any cause? Does your school or class? Design a contribution box for your favorite cause.
2. Using the resources listed on pages 11 and 12, research abolitionist fund-raising efforts and find out what the money was used for.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Lewis Hayden

Lewis Hayden, born in Kentucky in 1811, survived the heartbreaking loss of his family when Senator Henry Clay sold his first wife and child. Hayden escaped slavery with his second wife, Harriet, and her son. Their home on Beacon Hill, where they hosted Harriet Beecher Stowe, John Brown, and Massachusetts Governor John Andrew, served as a safe house on the Underground Railroad. Lewis, a clothes dealer, died first. When Harriet died, she left more than \$4,000 to Harvard College for a scholarship for black medical students.

In Focus

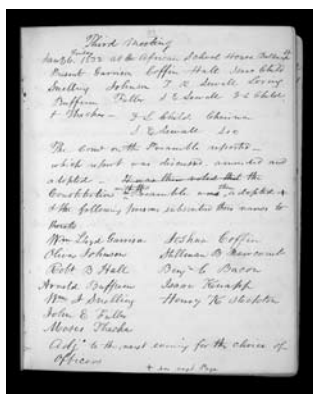
1. Study the photograph of Lewis Hayden. How would you describe him? What does his posture suggest about him?
2. Does anything in the picture reveal the circumstances of his past?



Lewis Hayden [ENLARGE]

Activities and Investigations

1. Write a letter to Lewis Hayden requesting an interview for your school newspaper. Then plan the interview: what questions would you ask him?
2. In 1966, Lewis and Harriet Hayden's house was named a National Historic Landmark, a distinction awarded to places that have "outstanding national significance." Why do you think the Haydens' house is significant in American history? (If you are in the Boston area, you can visit the Haydens' home at 66 Phillips Street, part of the Black Heritage Trail®. You can also find more information about them at <http://www.afroammuseum.org/trail.htm>.)
3. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 allowed slave catchers to arrest any self-emancipated person, even in the North. However, Lewis Hayden, who sheltered self-emancipated people in his home, placed gunpowder under his front stoop and threatened to blow up his house rather than let "slave catchers" in. Why do you think Hayden risked his life to save self-emancipated people from slave catchers?



Excerpt from the New England Anti-Slavery Society Record Book, January 6, 1832
[ENLARGE]

WRITTEN TEXTS

New England Anti-Slavery Society

This record book documents the meetings that established the New England Anti-Slavery Society (NEASS). This page of the book contains handwritten notes taken during the third organizational meeting of the NEASS, held in the African Meeting House on Beacon Hill. At this meeting, William Lloyd Garrison and 11 associates signed the preamble and constitution of the NEASS.

In Focus

1. What was the purpose of this document? When and where was it created?
2. What does this document tell you about the New England Anti-Slavery Society?
3. What questions does this document raise but not answer about the NEASS?

Activities and Investigations

When we think of historical documents, we often think of "official" texts, such as the Constitution. But other kinds of texts, such as these meeting notes, can reveal a great deal about a moment in history. Think about the documents and images that you encounter on a typical day. These could include family photos, advertisements, ticket stubs, bills, licenses, or e-mail messages. Select two of these documents to share with classmates. What does each one reveal about you? What would a historian in the year 2106 learn about American society by looking at these documents?

DRAWINGS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Tremont Temple Riot

Tremont Temple was one of the principal gathering places for abolitionists in Boston. In this drawing, which appeared in *Harper's Weekly* on December 10, 1860, the American artist Winslow Homer depicts a riot that occurred at Tremont Temple a few days earlier. (Engravings were often used in newspapers to illustrate current events.)



Expulsion of Negroes and Abolitionists from Tremont Temple on December 3, 1860
[ENLARGE]

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The riot broke out after a group of angry Bostonians disrupted a service to honor the memory of John Brown, an abolitionist who had been executed in December 1859, after leading an unsuccessful attempt to liberate a group of slaves in Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Several noted abolitionists, including Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison, were at Tremont Temple that night to address the gathering. Following the disruption, one group of Bostonians stayed at Tremont Temple and condemned Brown's actions, while the abolitionists moved their event to the African Meeting House on Beacon Hill.

In Focus

1. Identify all the different groups of people in this image. What action is taking place? What details help establish the atmosphere?
2. Note that the caption refers to "Negroes and Abolitionists." Why do you think the writer made this distinction? Is it accurate? What are some other captions that could be written for this image?
3. What does this illustration reveal about Boston's political climate in 1860? Is it fair to assume that most, if not all, Bostonians were abolitionists who supported the work of William Lloyd Garrison and his allies? Why or why not?

Activities and Investigations

1. Learn more about Frederick Douglass, John Brown, or Winslow Homer by choosing one to research and report on. Identify the event or achievement for which each man is best remembered, as well as one lesser-known fact about his life or work.
2. Write your own news story or editorial to accompany this illustration.
3. Read "On the Death of John Brown," a speech that William Lloyd Garrison delivered in Boston soon after Brown was executed. (The text is online at www.bartleby.com/268/9/18.html.) What is Garrison's main point? Quote the one sentence that you think best sums up his argument. Do you find his reasoning convincing? Explain.