

Learning Activity – Secondary Level

Leadership and Alliances in the American Revolution

Overview

This activity helps students apply the skill of gathering information from multiple sources to the visual arts. The activity should be used with students who are familiar with the power of primary sources and practiced at primary source analysis using the Primary Source Analysis Tool. This activity, used in a social studies course, provides an opportunity to collaborate with the art teacher.

Objectives

Analyze the value of gathering information from a variety of sources.

Time Required

Two 45 minute blocks

Grade Level

9-12

Topic/s

Art works as primary sources
Primary source analysis

Subject

American history

Standards

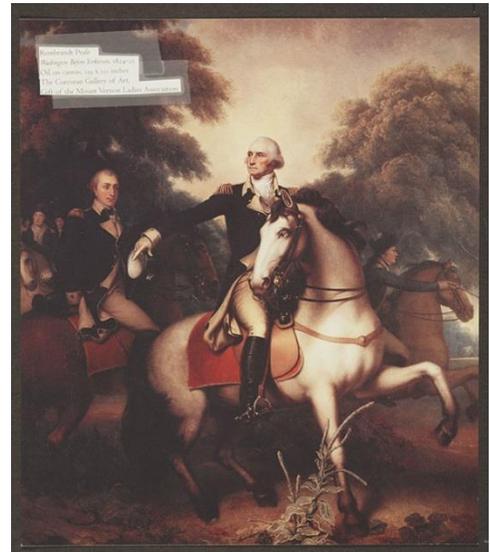
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.7](https://www.illustrativemathematics.org/HS-ELA-RI-9-10-7)

Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7](https://www.illustrativemathematics.org/HS-ELA-RI-11-12-7)

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.



Washington before Yorktown
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2011645192/>

CREDITS

R. Newland.

PREPARATION

Print or prepare to project

- *Washington before Yorktown* by Rembrandt Peale <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2011645192/>
- Political cartoon - Count de Rochambeau - French general of the land forces in America reviewing the French troops <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/cpbr/item/2004673388/>
- George Washington letter to Francois Joseph Paul, Comte de Grasse, October 16, 1781 (Transcript available) <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mgw3&fileName=mgw3d/gwpage001.db&recNum=371>
- George Washington journal entry <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mgw1&fileName=mgw1b/gwpage812.db&recNum=31>

Review these Teacher's Guides and select questions to help focus and deepen students' thinking:

- [Analyzing Print and Photographs](#)
- [Analyzing Political Cartoons](#)
- [Analyzing Manuscripts](#)

Primary Source Analysis Tool:

- Online <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/primary-source-analysis-tool/> or
- Printable [http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Primary Source Analysis Tool.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Primary_Source_Analysis_Tool.pdf)

PROCEDURE

Washington before Yorktown

1. Distribute a [primary source analysis tool](#) or direct students to the online version and ask them to focus on the "Observe" column. (Students using print copies might fold it so only that column is showing.)
2. Allow them a "30 second look" at *Washington before Yorktown*, and then allow time for recording what they observe after only looking for a full 30 seconds.
3. Tell students: We are interested in both the source and context of this painting. Complete this sentence prompt "I think the point the creator of this painting is making is _____ because _____." Have students share.
4. Display or redistribute the image. Prompt closer observation by asking these or other questions from the Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Prints and Photographs.
http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Photos_and_Prints.pdf
 - What do you notice first?
 - What people and objects are shown?
 - How are they arranged?

5. Ask students to look again and add to their observations and “Reflect” on the painting. Questions to help students reflect might include
 - Why do you think this image was made?
 - When do you think it was made?
 - What’s missing from this image?
6. What “Questions” do the students have about the painting? Allow time to record them. Distribute or display the political cartoon. Complete a primary source analysis, focusing on the portrayal of the French troops in particular. Prompt the analysis by asking these or other questions from the Teacher’s Guide: Analyzing Political Cartoons.
http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Political_Cartoons.pdf
 - What do you notice first?
 - What do you see that might be a symbol?
 - What’s happening in the cartoon?
 - Who do you think was the audience for this cartoon?
 - What issue do you think the cartoon was about?
7. Offer the sentence prompt “I think the point the creator of this cartoon is making is _____ because _____.”
8. Introduce the bibliographic information for both the painting and the political cartoon. What questions are answered? What questions are raised?
9. Direct students to consider the source and the context of both items. How does the portrayal of the French differ in the two items? Ask them to point to specific details from each item as evidence to support their answers. What are some possible explanations for the differences?
10. Ask students: What types of primary sources would you seek to corroborate or refute the portrayal of the French in the painting and political cartoon. Answers may include, but are not limited to: letters, newspapers, and journals.
11. Provide students with both Washington’s letter and journal entry**. Ask: What perspective on the role of the French is offered by these items?

****Note on the items:** Students may find it difficult to access the language used by George Washington. They may also struggle with the script used in the journal entries for which there are no transcriptions. It may be helpful to read the transcription of the letter as a class or in small groups and complete a primary source analysis tool focusing especially on questions they have about the language, both vocabulary and style. By beginning with the item for which handwriting is not an issue, students will build confidence with the language they can transfer to reading the journal entries.

There are a few possible ways to make the journal entries more accessible:

- Transcribe them before asking students to read them.
- Project them to decipher as a class.
- Pair students to decipher as best they can, then bring them back together to share their transcriptions. This may result in some lively, yet productive debate.

- Show the originals of both the letter and journal entries in order to begin building facility in working with difficult handwriting. If you use primary sources frequently, or will ask students to work with them independently, this can help them build skills in reading historical handwriting.
12. With this additional information ask students to revise: “I used to think the point the creator of this painting is making is _____ but now I think _____ because _____.”
 13. Discuss the practice of modifying thinking when new information is acquired.
 14. Ask: Do the details in the letter and journal support or refute our reflections about the point the creators of the painting and cartoon are making? Why do you think that?
 15. Consider the items as a whole: What “story” is told by the items when analyzed together.
 16. As an exit ticket/short writing prompt, ask students: In what way have these items illustrated the importance of consulting multiple items when working with primary sources? Support your answer with specific references to the items.

EVALUATION

The exit ticket serves as an evaluation. By the end of the activity, students should be able to articulate the importance of gathering multiple perspectives when studying historical events or eras. It might also be valuable to engage students in a discussion (verbal or in a written assignment) about the dangers of assuming/believing that any set of items, no matter how varied can ever get the whole truth.

How do/can historians do their work knowing they cannot ever truly get to the whole story, or the “real” truth about an event, person, or era?