



“A Pocket Guide to Writing in History”

Mary Lynn Rampolla

Ilze Abersone

Topics

- Why and how to study history
- Primary sources
- Secondary and Web sources
- Critical reading
- Scope's Trial – an example

Why and How to Study History?

- A way to see ideas and realities that shaped the lives of people in early societies
- The roots of modern institutions, ideas, values and problems
- Examining history can tell us how we became who we are

- Main questions – **WHO? WHAT? WHEN? WHY?**
- Understand the context
- Construct and support arguments

Primary sources

- Materials produced by people or groups **directly involved in the event** under consideration, either participants or witnesses
- For **recent history** – oral sources
- Pro – bring us into direct contact with the world of the past
- Cons – often lie, mislead, are biased

- **Written:**

- letters,
- diaries,
- newspaper and magazine articles,
- speeches,
- autobiographies,
- treatises,
- census data,
- marriage, birth and death registers

- **Non-written:**

- artworks,
- films,
- recordings,
- clothing items,
- household objects,
- tools,
- archeological remains

Primary sources – an example

- Napoleon's letter to Sheik El-Messiri in which Napoleon expresses a hope that Qu'ran based government will be established in Egypt.

“Those principles alone are true and capable of bringing happiness to men”

- Evaluate the statement:
 - Is there any evidence for Napoleon's attitude towards Islam? Did he believe in it?
 - What do other primary sources tell us about Napoleon's attitude towards religions in general?
- Actually he didn't believe in Islam
- Ask additional questions:
 - Under what circumstances Napoleon wrote it?
 - What was Sheik El-Messiri relationship to Napoleon?
 - Did Napoleon want to use religion to his political advantage?

Secondary and Web sources

Secondary sources:

- Books and articles of scholarly journals that comment on and interpret primary sources
- Pro – can provide broader perspective on the event, since the outcome is known and more materials available
- Con – may contradict each other
- An 2000s article might have more recent ideas than 1964

Web sources:

- Always check **CREDIBILITY**
- Determine if it's primary or secondary and ask the same questions as for a printed source

Critical reading

- Become an **active** reader
- Understand **context**, evaluate **usefulness**, analyze **significance**
- **HOW** to read?
 - “**pre-read**” the text
 - **Identify** author's **thesis**
 - Read with the **thesis in mind**
 - Ask **questions**
 - **Write** as you read
 - **Review** your notes

Tips for active reading

Underline or highlight important points, including the thesis and topic sentences

Look up unfamiliar words in a dictionary and write their definitions in the margins of the text

“talk back” to the text by **writing notations in the margins**. Make a note of questions you want to answer, places where you disagree with the author’s argument, and cross-references to other materials you have read on the subject.

Write summaries of your reading to ensure that you have understood the material

Copy out, in quotation marks, any particularly striking **phrases or statements** that you might want to quote directly in your work, and note complete bibliographic information

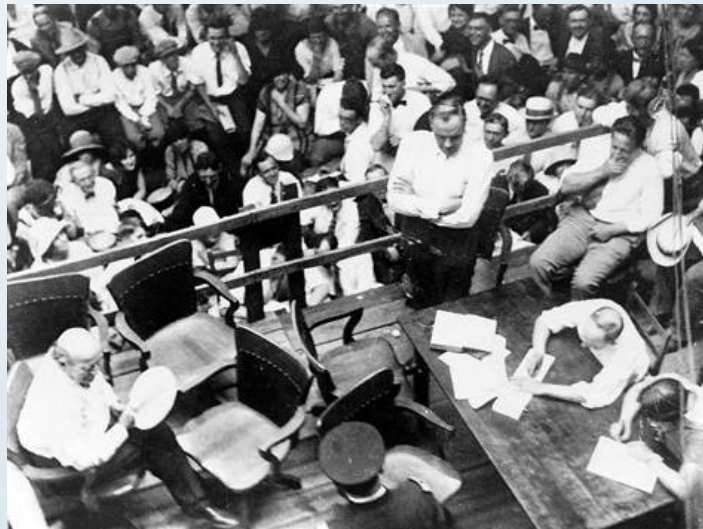
Keep a journal in which you can record any ideas, insights or questions that occur to you as you read.

“Scopes Monkey Trial” – example

- Trial in 1925 in Dayton, Tennessee
- Officially: *John Scopes v. State of Tennessee*.
- John Scopes violated the “Butler Act” by teaching the theory of evolution.
- Why It’s Remembered: Clarence Darrow versus William Jennings Bryan
- Actually: The town hoped the trial would put Dayton “on the map.”
- ACLU defended John Scopes (Clarence Darrow)
- Bryan: Christian evangelical, also former presidential candidate of Democratic and Popular parties.
- Irony: Back in the 1890s Darrow had also been a Populist stump speaker.
- Scopes was found guilty and fined \$100.
- The state “won the case, but lost the argument.”
- 5 primary sources and a secondary source, *Summer for the Gods* by Edward J. Larson.

5 Primary sources of Scope's trial

- Written text 1 – an excerpt from the trial transcripts
- Written text 2 – excerpt from *The New York Times* coverage
- Eyewitness account transcribed from a film
- A photograph
- A cartoon



[13] "There Ain't No Santo Claus!" (Ward in Judge.)

Source 1 – written text from the 7th day of trials

[Darrow:] Do you think the earth was made in six days?

[Bryan:] Not six days of twenty four hours.

[Darrow:] Doesn't it say so?

[Bryan:] No, sir.

[Prosecuting attorney A. Thomas Stewart:] I want to interpose another objection. What is the purpose of this examination?

[Bryan:] The purpose is to cast ridicule on everybody who believes in the Bible, and I am perfectly willing that the world shall know that these gentlemen have no other purpose than ridiculing every Christian who believes in the Bible.

[Darrow:] We have the purpose of preventing bigots and ignoramuses from controlling the education of the United States and you know it, and that is all...

[Bryan:] ... I am simply trying to protect the word of God against the greatest atheist or agnostic in the United States! (prolonged applause.) I want the papers to know I am not afraid to get on the stand in front of him and let him do his worst! I want the world to know! (Prolonged applause.)

Source 2 – a text from *The New York Times* (July 21, 1925)

...So-called fundamentalists of Tennessee sat under the trees of the Rhea County Court House lawn today listening to William J. Bryan defend his faith in the “literal inerrancy” of the Bible, and laughed... The greatest crowd of the trial had come in anticipation of hearing Messrs. Bryan and Darrow speak, and it got more than it expected. It saw Darrow and Bryan in actual conflict – Mr. Darrow’s rationalism in combat with Mr. Bryan’s faith – and forgot for a moment that Bryan’s faith was its own... There was no pity for the helplessness of the believer come so suddenly and unexpectedly upon a moment when he could not reconcile statements of the Bible with generally accepted facts. There was no pity for his admission of ignorance of things boys and girls learn in high school. ... These Tennesseans were enjoying a fight. That an ideal of a great man, a biblical scholar, an authority on religion, was being dispelled seemed to make no difference. They grinned with amusement and expectation... And finally, when Mr. Bryan, pressed harder and harder by Mr. Darrow, confessed he did not believe everything in the Bible should be taken literally, the crowd howled...

Source 3 – eyewitness account transcribe from a film

“The courtyard was packed. There were not enough seats to hold all of the people and they were standing around. The benches had been set up all in front of the stand so we had a seat right in front of Darrow and Bryan. And I was all set to hear the great trial going on... William Jennings Bryan was sitting there with a big palm fan and a handkerchief in his hand. Darrow is in his shirtsleeves with red suspenders, which he wore. He jumped up right in front of him, took hold of his red suspenders and flipped them, and said, “Do you really believe that the whale swallowed Jonah?”... He just kept pushing him and pushing him. You know I wanted to get up off of that bench and go up there and kick him. It was just, I imagine people out there in the audience felt the same way to make him hush. The thing was, he was attacking the Bible. Finally the judge said to him, “Well, what do you mean. You are harassing your own witness. What you are asking him has nothing to do with the issue of this trial. We want you to put a stop to it.”

Questions for written primary sources

Who is the **author**?

How does the author's **gender and socioeconomic class** compare to the people about whom he or she is writing?

Why did he or she **write the source**?

Who was the **intended audience**?

What **unspoken assumptions** does the text contain?

Are there detectable **biases** in the source?

When was the **source composed**?

What is the **historical context** in which the **source was written and read**?

Are there **other contemporary sources to compare** against this one?

Questions for nonwritten primary sources (1)

Artifacts	When and where was the artifact made ?
	Who might have used it , and for what ?
	What does the artifact tell us about the people who made and used it and the period in which it was made?
Artworks (paintings, sculptures etc.)	Who is the artist and how does the work compare to his or her other works ?
	When and why was the work made ? Was it commissioned ? If so, by whom?
	Where was the work first displayed ? How did contemporaries respond to it, and how do their responses compare to the ways in which it is understood now?
Photographs	Who is the photographer ? Why did he or she take this photograph ?
	Where was the photograph first published or displayed ? Did that publication or venue have a particular mission or point of view ?

Questions for nonwritten primary sources (2)

Cartoons	What is the message of the cartoon? How do words and images combine to convey that message?
	In what kind of publication did it originally appear (newspaper, magazine etc.)? Did that publication have a particular agenda or mission ?
	When did the cartoon appear and how might its historical context be significant?
Maps	What kind of map is this (topographical, political, military etc.)?
	Where and when was the map made , and what was its intended purpose ?
	Does the map contain any extraneous text or images ? If so, what do they add to our understanding of the map itself?
Sound recordings	Who made the recording and what kind of recording is it (music, speech, interview etc.)?
	Where and when was the recording made ?
	Was the recording originally intended for broadcast ? If so, why was it broadcast and who was the intended audience ?

Questions for secondary sources

Who is the **author**? What are his or her **academic credentials**? (in the preface of the book or first page of an article)

Who is the **publisher**? (scholarly press or popular one)

Who is the **intended audience** for the text? (scholars, students, general reading public etc.)

When was the text written?

Do the **footnotes/endnotes and bibliography** reference other important works on the same topic?

Does the author **contradict or disagree** with others who have written on the subject, and if so, does he or she acknowledge and effectively address opposing arguments or interpretations?

Does the author **use primary sources** as evidence to support his or her thesis? Is his or her interpretations of the primary sources persuasive?

Is there a primary source evidence that you are aware of that the author does not consider?

Does the author build his or her argument on any **unsubstantiated assumptions**?

Questions for web sources

Is the **author's identity** clear, and, if so, what are his or her **academic credentials**? Is he or she **affiliated with a college or university**? Are there other websites that provide **additional information** about the author?

Does the author **provide** evidence for his or her assertions, such as **citations, bibliographies**, and so on? Are the **sources up to date**? Are the **sources for statistics** included?

Is the site **affiliated with an academic institution, press or journal**? The web address (URL) can provide some clues to such affiliations (**.edu .gov** = the information has been posted by an educational or governmental institution = can trust more to the information provided)

Is the site **sponsored by a particular organization (.org)**? Do you know anything about the interests and concerns of the person or group that publishes the site? (check **"about"** or **"mission"** section) Does the organization seem biased?

What is the **purpose of the site**? Is it designed to **inform? Persuade? Sell a product?**

Does the information on the site coincide with what you have learned about the subject from other sources?

Has the site been **updated recently**?

Does the site contain **useful links** to other sites? Are the linked sites affiliated with reputable institutions or persons?

Resources

- Rampolla ML. A pocket guide to writing in history. 5th ed. Boston, New York: Bedford/St.Martin's; 2007:1-29
- <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/scopes/evolut.htm>

Thank you!

