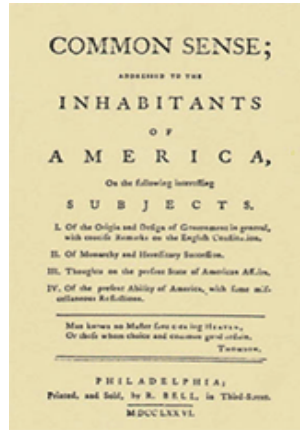


## Primary and Secondary Sources

To craft our understanding of the past, historians use two kinds of sources: primary and secondary.

### Primary Sources

Primary sources are generally first-hand accounts or records. They may have been written or created during the time period under investigation, or perhaps were written by someone who lived during that time period. Most crucially, they have not been interpreted by anyone else, though they may offer interpretations of the events they describe. Below are four examples of primary sources: a political cartoon, a page of correspondence, the title page of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, and a wartime poster encouraging women workers. As you can imagine, however, there are many more types of primary sources.



## Primary and Secondary Sources

### Primary Sources, continued

Countless items can be used by historians as primary sources. Almost anything you can imagine could be used as a primary source in some type of historical research. A fun exercise to help you understand the immensity of available primary sources is to look around the room you're in and ask yourself, "what would historians view or study one hundred years from now to understand the way we live and what we think today?"

The list below includes only a few of the types of primary sources utilized by historians. How many more can you add to the list?

letters • **diaries** • autobiographies • **plays** • novels • **short stories** • poems

**scholarly journals** • newspapers • **popular magazines**

official memoranda • **government documents** • census data

**religious tracts** • song lyrics

**photographs** • cartoons • **posters** • paintings • **murals**

films • television shows • performing arts recordings • **email** • musical recordings

**clothing** • political campaign signs • **pottery** • religious icons • **tools** • furniture

## Primary and Secondary Sources

### Secondary Sources

Secondary sources analyze, interpret, or comment upon primary sources. A secondary source says something about a primary sources, often illustrating patterns of recurring themes.

Perhaps the best example of a secondary source is your textbook. Open it to any chapter and read a couple of paragraphs and you will find that the authors have conducted extensive research utilizing primary sources. They have likely consulted other secondary sources as well. They have then written those paragraphs to explain what they have learned and how they understand the people and ideas of the past. The authors have interpreted the sources for you.

The list below includes some of the primary sources we've already identified accompanies by secondary sources which might, analyze, interpret, or comment upon them.

<b>Primary Source</b>	<b>Secondary Sources</b>
Abraham Lincoln's personal letters	a biography of Abraham Lincoln
A popular magazine from 1910	an article about print advertising in the early twentieth century
The 1860 U.S. Federal Census	a PowerPoint presentation concerning U.S. population distribution before the Civil War
The lyrics "We Shall Overcome"	a book examining the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s
Grant Woods' <i>American Gothic</i>	an essay on American art and artists
An episode of <i>I Love Lucy</i>	a made-for-t.v. movie on the life of Lucille Ball
A Sioux blanket	a photo essay comparing Native American textiles

## Primary and Secondary Sources

### Secondary Sources

Secondary sources analyze, interpret, or comment upon primary sources. A secondary source says something about a primary sources, often illustrating patterns of recurring themes.

Perhaps the best example of a secondary source is your textbook. Open it to any chapter and read a couple of paragraphs and you will find that the authors have conducted extensive research utilizing primary sources. They have likely consulted other secondary sources as well. They have then written those paragraphs to explain what they have learned and how they understand the people and ideas of the past. The authors have interpreted the sources for you.

The list below includes some of the primary sources we've already identified accompanies by secondary sources which might, analyze, interpret, or comment upon them.

<b>Primary Source</b>	<b>Secondary Sources</b>
Abraham Lincoln's personal letters	a biography of Abraham Lincoln
A popular magazine from 1910	an article about print advertising in the early twentieth century
The 1860 U.S. Federal Census	a PowerPoint presentation concerning U.S. population distribution before the Civil War
The lyrics "We Shall Overcome"	a book examining the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s
Grant Woods' <i>American Gothic</i>	an essay on American art and artists
An episode of <i>I Love Lucy</i>	a made-for-t.v. movie on the life of Lucille Ball
A Sioux blanket	a photo essay comparing Native American textiles