

**TITLE:** Evaluating postcards as primary sources

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS/ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:**

- How can we understand moments in history by “stepping into the shoes” of people from the past?
- How do the images chosen to be sent in communications reflect personal interpretations about important information about the current events of the time?
- How does an individual’s personal record of history reflect a larger history?
- How does the “everyman’s” writing style and content reveal information about local culture?

**ASSESSMENT:**

Students will use the information gleaned from these sheets to do the last group activity and culminating project. Teacher should evaluate these sheets as well, as well as evaluating [Student participation](#).

**SETTING THE PURPOSE:** Students will examine local primary sources (postcard samples) and national primary sources (postcard samples) to examine the history contained within the cards, and to spark discussion about the types of images that were used for postcards depending on the community context. Students will discuss how these images actually reflect the history of that region. Students will then examine local postcard samples that have script written on back (transcription provided). This examination will lead to a discussion as to how personal written communication reflects the history of the medium (postcard communication) as well as the era itself.

**DURATION:** 2 class periods

**PROCEDURE:**

- Start the class by writing on the board, overhead or white board: “Why are primary sources important?” Write down and discuss answers, highlighting the fact that primary sources are a more reliable form of historical evaluation than secondary source because a primary source is straight from the source and documented in the time period itself. Secondary sources involve perspective and opinion.
- Have students get into pairs. Depending on availability, distribute the national postcard samples as well as the local samples. (Not the ones written on back, yet). If available, have the students get on the computer and look at the digital version of these samples.

- Distribute the [Photo Analysis Worksheet](#) . (2 copies per group). Tell students to examine all the pictures, and to choose one postcard from each group to evaluate (one local, one national).
- After students finish this first step of analysis, collect them together as a group and discuss the following questions.
  - ✓ *What types of images were you seeing on the local postcards?*
  - ✓ *What types of images were you seeing on the national postcards?*
  - ✓ *How would you compare the images you see locally and nationally?*
  - ✓ *The national postcards found from this era were predominately from the West. Why do you think this is true?*
  - ✓ *Why do you think the postcard makers chose the images they did for these postcards?*
- Remind students about the last lesson around the history of postcards. Review images and the different types they saw.

## **PART 2**

- If you start this part a second day, review what you studied and learned the day before. Then have students get into the same pairs they were in for the photo analysis.
- Write on the board, overhead or white board: “How does personal written communication reflect the history of time?” Make sure to highlight the things that are discussed in communication, the style (word choice) it is written in, as well as the medium chosen.
- Distribute the [Written Analysis Worksheet](#). (4 copies per pair-you may choose to print these double sided).
- Distribute the Collection of Postcards from the Cattle Bank, with transcriptions. You may choose to give each pair a set, or choose 4 for each pair to look at. If you have a digital set of these photos, it is best to look at the digital version of the postcards, if possible.
- Have students pick and evaluate 4 postcards and their transcriptions. Tell students to be sure to divide the work up equally, and to answer the questions on the sheet carefully.
- After students finish this second step of analysis, collect them together as a group and discuss the following questions.
  - ✓ *What types of information did you find written on the postcards?*
  - ✓ *What evidence of the history of the time did you find in the writings?*
  - ✓ *Using this sample of postcards what types of things were communicated on postcards during this time period?*
  - ✓ *Many of the postcards that were read from this period (early 1900’s) were talking about sickness. Why do you think this was?*
  - ✓ *Why do you think the purchasers and senders of these postcards chose the postcards they did?*

- ✓ *How do these postcards look different from the national examples of postcards that we looked at?*
- Make sure to write student responses up on the board. Ask students to take notes as they will be helpful for tomorrow's activity, where they will compare postcards to email. Explain to students that since they do not have a lot of space to write, postcards were used to communicate quick, small bits of information (and still are). The illustration often helped the reader to visually connect to the area the sender was residing or visiting.
- Ask students what today's quick and popular form of communication is. (email). Tell students that tomorrow the group will be comparing postcard communication to email communication. For that reason, ask that students bring 2 to 4 copies of printed emails that they have had sent to them. Have them make sure they are school appropriate, and that they feel comfortable sharing these emails with others (in case someone forgets to bring copies in, or does not have email).

**ANALYSIS OF LOCAL PRIMARY SOURCES:**

Collection of Postcards from the Champaign Cattle Bank, Champaign, Il. One set is meant to show postcard styles only; the second has transcriptions of written content. Paper copies attached. Students will evaluate these items using the NARA analysis sheets.

**TIES TO NATIONAL PRIMARY SOURCE OR SOURCES:**

[Collection of Postcards](#) from the Library of Congress' "American Memory" archives website. Paper copy attached. Students will evaluate these items using the NARA analysis sheets.

**ANNOTATED LIST OF MATERIALS AND RESOURCES:**

[Collection of Postcards](#) from the Library of Congress' "American Memory" archives website. Paper copy attached.

Collection of Postcards from the Champaign Cattle Bank, Champaign, Il. Postcard Styles. Paper copies attached.

Collection of Postcards from the Champaign Cattle Bank, Champaign, Il. Postcards with transcriptions of written material. Paper copy attached.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

[Photo Analysis Worksheet](#). U.S. National Archives and Records Photo Analysis worksheet.

[Written Analysis Worksheet](#). U.S. National Archives and Records Written Analysis worksheet.

[Student Participation.](http://www.landmark-project.com/classweb/tools/printable.php?rbrc_id=64683) From the San Diego County Office of Education website. ([http://www.landmark-project.com/classweb/tools/printable.php?rbrc\\_id=64683](http://www.landmark-project.com/classweb/tools/printable.php?rbrc_id=64683))

**TIES TO ILLINOIS STATE LEARNING STANDARDS, HABITS OF MIND, AND VITAL THEMES OF HISTORY**