

Reading and Interpreting a Primary Source: A Dispatch Sent by George Washington

Grades: 6-8

Time Allotment: 30 minutes

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.2	Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1	Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2	Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.9	Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

Objectives

Students will:

- Define the term “primary source”
- List examples of primary sources
- Interpret the message written in a dispatch from George Washington

Materials

- A copy of George Washington’s dispatch written from McConkey’s Ferry Inn in his handwriting
- A copy of George Washington’s dispatch written in a modern font
- Chart paper
- Markers
- Highlighters
- Paper
- Pencils
- ‘76 Seconds of History Video: “Where Did Washington Stay Before the Crossing?”
 - <https://www.washingtoncrossingpark.org/education/76-seconds/>

Anticipatory Set

- The teacher will call the students’ attention to the ‘76 Seconds of History video. The teacher will state that the class is about to watch a short video. The students will be asked to look for answers to the following questions as they watch the video:
 - What type of document is shown in the video?

- Who wrote the document in the video?
- The teacher will then show the video to the students. Students will record their responses to the questions above as they watch.
- After the video is over the teacher will instruct the students to turn and talk to a partner about their recorded responses.
- The teacher will circulate and listen as the students share with each other.

Teacher Presentation and Modeling

- The teacher will display a copy of the dispatch from George Washington on the Smart Board. Instruct the students to read over the displayed dispatch as copies of the original and modern font are distributed.
- The teacher will read the dispatch aloud as the students follow along. Instruct the students to follow using the modern font copy.
- Distribute the highlighters. Instruct the students to read over the dispatch again. As they read, the students will highlight words that they do not understand.
- Using the chart paper, the teacher will record any words the students identify.
- The class and teacher will briefly work together to define words written on chart paper.
- The teacher will explain that this dispatch is a *primary source*.
 - A primary source will be defined as *something that is written by a person who witnessed or experienced an event first hand. In other words, the person was actually there.*
- The teacher will write this definition on the board.
- The teacher will give examples of primary sources and list them on the board (letters, speeches, interviews, transcripts, newspaper articles, newsreels).
- The teacher will stress that in order for a document to be a primary source it must be an original document.
- Return the students' attention to Washington's dispatch. Ask the students if the document is a primary source.
- List all the reasons why this document is a primary source on the chart paper.

Guided and Independent Practice

- The teacher will ask the students what they can learn from reading this primary document.
- Begin reading the dispatch aloud again. By reading the first line at the top of the letter we can learn that this dispatch was sent from the McConkey's Ferry Inn.
- Break students into pairs. Instruct the students to continue reading the dispatch and discover what else can be learned through close examination.
- Tell the students to record their findings by writing them under the copy of the dispatch on the handout.

Closure

- The teacher and students will come back together to compare their findings as a group.

- The teacher will list the findings on chart paper. The findings should include the following:
 - The dispatch was written from McConkey's Ferry Inn.
 - It was written on December 25, 1776.
 - It was written at 6:00 pm.
 - It was written (or dictated) by George Washington.
 - George Washington states that he is going to go forth with his plans for the attack on Trenton in the morning.
 - George Washington tells Col. Cadwalader that he should create a diversion if he can do nothing real.
- The teacher will help students to clarify the meaning of any of the statements listed in step 2.
- The teacher will then ask the students to turn to their partner and restate the letter using their own words.
- The teacher will ask volunteers to come to the front of the room and restate the letter. Classmates will listen to be sure that all the important facts are in the restatement presented.
- The teacher will then ask the students why this dispatch is a primary source. The students should state that it is a primary source because it is a letter and it was written by George Washington himself.

Assessment

- The teacher will assess student understanding of what a primary source is by asking them to write their own definition of the term primary source.
- The students will be asked to write a paragraph explaining why George Washington's dispatch is a primary source. The students will be instructed to give at least three supporting details to support this fact in the paragraph.

Extension of the Lesson

- The teacher can provide a lesson to define and use secondary sources.
- Primary and secondary sources can be sorted and compared.
- Students can research additional papers written by George Washington and interpret them.
- Students can construct venn diagrams to compare and contrast primary and secondary sources related to a particular topic.