

What Does a Historian Do?

Lesson 2 How Does a Historian Work?

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How do we learn about the past?

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. *What types of evidence do historians use to understand the past?*
2. *How do we write about history?*

Terms to Know

evidence something that shows proof or an indication that something is true

primary source firsthand evidence of an event in history

secondary source a document or written work created after an event

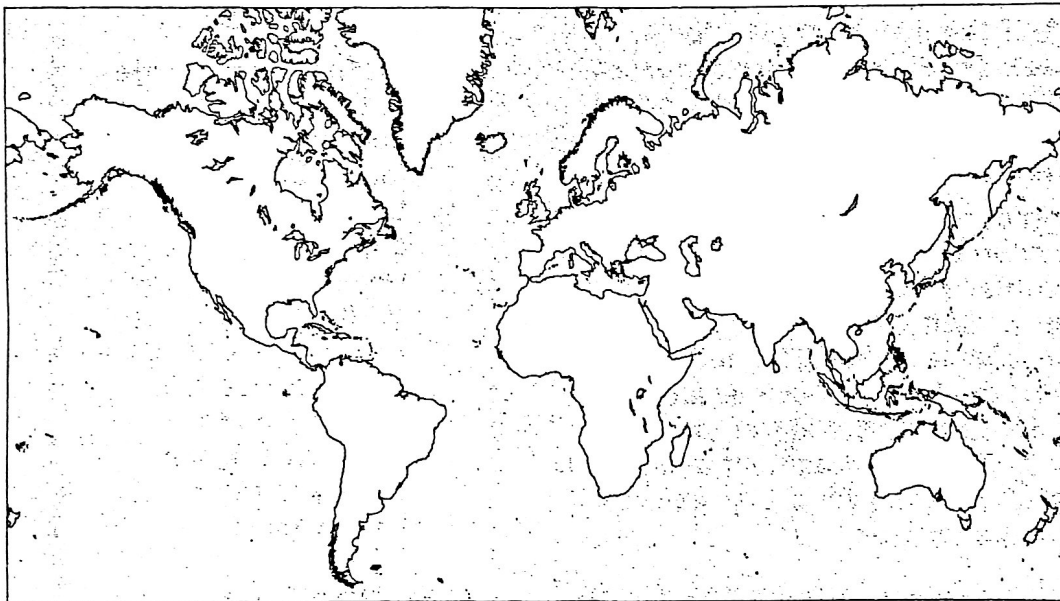
point of view a personal attitude about people or life

bias an unreasoned, emotional judgment about people and events

scholarly concerned with academic learning or research

conclusion a decision reached after examining evidence

Where in the world?



What do you know?

In the K column, list what you already know about how a historian works. In the W column, list what you want to know. After reading the lesson, fill in the L column with the information that you learned.

K	W	L

What Does a Historian Do?**Lesson 2** How Does a Historian Work?, *Continued***What Is the Evidence?**

Historians look at **evidence** to find out about the past. Evidence is proof that something is true. Evidence might be an object, such as a soldier's uniform or a scrap of pottery. Evidence might also be a document or book that was written during a historical event.

A **primary source** is a kind of evidence. Primary sources are created by people who saw or were part of an event. Letters and diaries are primary sources. Tools and clothing are also primary sources. Historians use primary sources to learn what people were thinking at the time of the event. Primary sources can help historians explain events that happened long ago.

A **secondary source** is also evidence. Secondary sources are created after an event. They are created by people who were not part of the event. Your history textbook is a secondary source. Encyclopedias are also secondary sources. Secondary sources can give a broad view of historical events or people. However, new information can only come from primary sources.

Historians analyze the information in their sources. They look for reasons that the source was created. Then historians decide if the source is reliable when it comes to its facts. Each source was written with a **particular point of view**, or attitude about people or life. The author of a source uses his or her point of view to decide what to include in the document. Sometimes a point of view is based on feelings and not on facts. A judgment based only on feelings is called a **bias**. Sources with a bias cannot always be trusted to be factual or true.

Sources That Historians Use

Primary Sources	Secondary Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written at the time of the event • Eyewitness to history • Reliable source for historians • Includes letters, diaries, tools, clothing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written after an event • Author did not witness the event • Contains facts about an event • Includes textbooks and encyclopedias

FOLDABLES®**Comparing and Contrasting**

1. Place a three-tab Venn diagram Foldable along the dotted line. Label the top tab *Primary Source*, the middle tab *Both*, and the bottom tab *Secondary Source*.

On the reverse sides of the top and bottom tab, list facts about each that are unique or different. On the reverse side of the *Both* tab, list similarities of both sources. Use this information to determine which source is the most trustworthy.

**Reading Check**

2. What is a historian's job when looking at primary sources?

What Does a Historian Do?

Lesson 2 How Does a Historian Work?, *Continued*



Paraphrasing

3. In your own words, explain how to make an inference.



Marking the Text

4. Underline the text that explains what a scholarly journal is.



Explaining

5. Explain why it is important for historians to read articles in scholarly journals.

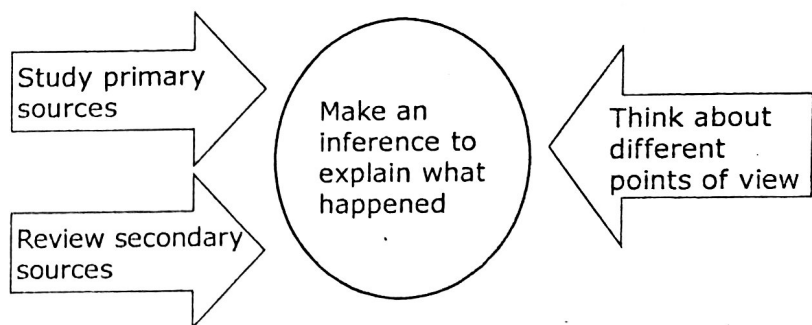
Writing About History

Historians interpret information from primary sources to make inferences. Making an inference means choosing the most likely explanation for the facts. Sometimes the inference is simple. When you see someone with a wet umbrella, you can make the inference that it is raining. Making inferences about historical events is not so easy.

To make an inference, historians start with primary sources. They use sources they already know are trustworthy. Next, they read secondary sources. They think about the different points of view. Finally, they make an inference to explain what happened.

Many historians write articles about their inferences. Most articles are published in **scholarly** journals, or magazines. Scholarly magazines are concerned with learning. Usually, other historians read the articles to make sure the facts are correct. They decide whether they agree with the inferences in the article. Historians must be careful to make inferences based on facts. They do not want to show a bias in their writing.

How Historians Make Inferences



Historians can write and review scholarly articles because they become experts on a historical subject. They focus their research. Some historians focus on a very narrow area of study. Someone might study a particular historical person, such as Queen Elizabeth I of England. Someone else studying the past might focus on the events of a single place and time.

Other historians may have a very broad focus. For example, they may study the economic history of many places in a certain period of time. Others may study the history of an idea, such as medicine or technology.

What Does a Historian Do?**Lesson 2** How Does a Historian Work?, *Continued*

A **conclusion** is a final decision that is reached by reasoning. It is like an inference. Historians draw conclusions about events of the past. They look for facts and evidence in their sources. Then, they use reasoning to draw a conclusion.

Sometimes historians disagree in their conclusions. For example, some historians say that Genghis Khan was a brutal warrior. They tell how he would destroy cities and kill people when he came to a new land. Other historians disagree. They say that Genghis Khan was a good ruler. His empire had a time of peace. Traders were safe to trade goods. People were protected by good laws.

Which conclusion is correct? Was Genghis Khan a cruel warrior or a good leader? A historian may use evidence to explain his or her conclusions. If both conclusions are supported by evidence, they both can be correct.

Examine primary sources.



Use already-known facts.



Read secondary sources.



Use facts to make an inference or draw a conclusion.



Write article about inference or conclusion.

Check for Understanding

Explain how historians use different sources to draw conclusions.

1. _____

How are a person's point of view and bias related?

2. _____

**Marking the Text**

6. Underline the definition of *conclusion*.

**Reading Check**

7. Why do historians draw different conclusions about events of the past?



8. Place a one-tab Foldable along the dotted line. Label the anchor tab *Historians*. Label the Foldable *Evidence*, *Inferences*, and *Conclusions*.

Make a memory map by drawing three arrows below the title and writing three words or phrases that you remember about historians and their work. Use your memory notes to help you complete the activity under the tab.