

WHAT DO PRIMARY SOURCES TELL US ABOUT LIFESTYLE? (U.S. HISTORY)

Most research for school projects involve secondary sources, often described as scholarly investigations or interpretations of a document or artifact. School textbooks, for example, are typical secondary sources. A primary source, on the other hand, is a document or artifact created near the time period being researched, usually by someone with first-hand knowledge of the topic being researched. Using primary sources encourages the researcher to form his/her own conclusions, rather than relying on the conclusions expressed by others in secondary sources.



Domestic Felicity, c. 1845–50
William E. Winner, American
Oil on canvas
20 x 26 5/8 inches (50.8 x 67.6 cm)
The W. P. Wiltach Collection, bequest of Anna H.
Wiltach, 1893
W1893-1-125

Curricular Areas

Social Studies

Grade Level

For grades 7–9, with modifications for elementary and high school

Common Core Academic Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.9](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.4](#)

Art Images Required

Click on the titles below to view high-resolution photographs on the Philadelphia Museum of Art website. Images that are available in the ARTstor

Digital Library are indicated by an ID number or search phrase. Entering that number or phrase into the ARTstor search bar will direct you to the corresponding image in that database.

- [Domestic Felicity](#), c. 1845–50, by William E. Winner
ARTstor search: W1893-1-125
- [Portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin \(Sarah Morris\)](#), 1773, by John Singleton Copley
ARTstor search: EW1999-45-1
- [Landscape, the Seat of Mr. Featherstonhaugh in the Distance](#), 1826, by Thomas Cole
ARTstor search: 2004-115-4
- [“The Fox and the Grapes” High Chest of Drawers](#), 1765–75, America (Philadelphia)
ARTstor search: 1957-129-1
- [Chest](#), 1861, by Henry Shuker
ARTstor search: 1994-20-42

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Background

Works of art (in this case, including hand-crafted furniture) are viewed as a kind of primary source, particularly when investigating a culture or period in history.

Lesson Process

1. Consider the scene portrayed in *Domestic Felicity* by William E. Winner
2. Break the class into small groups (three or four students) and give each group a large sheet of drawing paper. Have them divide the paper in half to form two columns. The first column should be labeled “inferences” and the second column should be labeled “evidence.” (Perhaps discuss the meanings of these words.)
3. Students in their groups should examine the painting and make a list of inferences on such topics as the people’s lifestyle, interests, and social standing. They should indicate also their evidence for forming these inferences.
4. Follow the same process for the painting *Portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Mifflin (Sarah Morris)* by John Singleton Copley.
5. Follow the process for a third time with the painting *Landscape, the Seat of Mr. Featherstonhaugh in the Distance* by Thomas Cole.
6. Consider the dates of these paintings: Winner, 1840s; Copley, 1770s; Cole, 1820s. What inferences can you add to or adjust from your lists, knowing the approximate dates of their creations?
7. Pull the groups together to form class-lists of inferences re: the lifestyles of the people in these paintings.
8. These are primary sources, and therefore lack the interpretations of historians or cultural investigators. How, then, could you check on the accuracy of your inferences? List ways of further researching these works to focus on your inferences about lifestyle. What other primary sources might be helpful? What secondary sources can you think of?

Assessment

1. Elementary students should continue in their groups to further research and either support or refute some of their inferences—noting the secondary sources used in their research.
2. Middle school students should follow this same process individually, and high school students should list their additional sources using MLA (or APA, depending on school policy) style.

Enrichment

1. Hand-crafted furniture can also be viewed as a primary source when considering the lifestyle of the owner or user of the piece. With this in mind, follow the same process for forming inferences using *The Howe Highboy* by Nicholas Bernard and Martin Jugiez.
2. Compare this piece to *Chest (furniture)* by Henry Shuker. Use a Venn Diagram to organize your inferences on these two pieces.
3. Discuss whether researching furniture is more or less difficult than researching paintings. How would further research to validate or refute inferences proceed when working with objects such as furniture?

For more information, please contact Division of Education and Public Programs: School and Teacher Programs by phone at 215-684-7580, by fax at 215-236-4063, or by e-mail at educate@philamuseum.org.

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Alternative Follow-up and Summative Assessment

Bring pictures of your family, or photographs of furniture in your home. Consider what an outside observer (from another culture or another time) might conclude from your family's "primary sources." Write a paper describing your lifestyle, based on evidence from your photographs.