

Types of Sources: Primary, Secondary, and Non-historical

Historians use different kinds of sources to study the past. **Read the descriptions.**

Primary sources are accounts from people who witness historical events and are usually created when the events take place. So these are the main sources that professional historians study.

Examples: → speeches → newspapers → diaries → letters → photos → posters

Secondary sources are written by historians or other people who research historical events by studying primary sources and are usually created later in time.

Examples: → academic articles → history books → textbooks → documentaries

Non-historical sources are fictional stories set in the past. They may include details from history, but they are fiction and their purpose is to entertain rather than inform. So they are not used to study history.

Examples: → television shows → movies → historical fiction books

Use the descriptions above to answer the questions.

1. Which type of source from the descriptions above do historians usually write?

Historians usually write secondary sources.

2. What type of sources do historians usually research?

Historians usually research primary sources.

3. Why shouldn't we use non-historical sources to study history?

A non-historical source is made to entertain rather than inform. It might change historical facts in order to tell a better story.

4. Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence in 1776. How can you tell this document is a primary source on the American Revolution (1775–1783)?

The Declaration of Independence was written in 1776, when the American Revolution was happening. Thomas Jefferson was present to witness those events. So, it is a primary source.

5. A historian named Gordon Wood wrote *The American Revolution: A History* in 1982. How can you tell this document is a secondary source on the American Revolution (1775–1783)?

The American Revolution: A History was written in 1982, nearly 200 years after the American Revolution ended. Gordon Wood could not have actually witnessed those events. So, it is a secondary source.

6. A Hollywood action film called *The Patriot* was filmed in the year 2000 and released in theaters as a summer blockbuster. How can you tell this is a non-historical source on the American Revolution (1775–1783)?

The Patriot was a Hollywood action film that was released as a summer blockbuster more than 200 years after the American Revolution ended. So, it is not a primary source, and it was made to entertain its audience. It is a non-historical source.

- ★ **Bonus question:** Would you rather learn about a new history topic by reading a primary source or a secondary one? Why?