

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

The National Archives contains originals and copies of *federal* records, including ship's passenger lists, census records, and military records, dating back as far as 1775. Though many people think the National Archives keeps copies of all federal records, they only keep those they believe are important to American history, or that they believe citizens will need access to in the future. Most of the documents in the National Archives are public domain, and many people go to their local branch or the main center in Washington, D.C. to *research* family history. The National Archives hold copies of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights. The National Archives is important because it represents *democracy* – citizens have the right to access information about their government and how it works.



Photograph of Socrates visiting the National Archives



National Archives in Washington, D.C.

Vocabulary

archive: a collection of records or documents, or the act of collecting records or documents. “We have an archive of comic books dating back to the 1930s.”

federal: related to the government of a union of states. “The federal government makes mistakes sometimes, too.”

research: to study or learn about a subject. “I’m currently researching the possibility that dogs can understand English.”

democracy: a type of government where the people have a say in the law-making process. “I aim to make this party-planning committee a democracy, so that everyone may have a say in what kind of pizza we will serve.”

Answer the questions below on a separate piece of paper.

1. Why does the government let people search their documents?
2. Name something the National Archives would not be likely to have a copy of.
3. What would you look up in the National Archives?