



GOAL - OPTIONAL | LESSON PLAN | MIDDLE SCHOOL  
**Transcribing**

**Grades:** Middle School

**Approximate Length of Time:** Approximately four 45-minute class periods

**Goals:** Students will understand how and why historians use text-based primary sources to research historical events.

**Objectives:**

1. Given a historical document, the students will interpret the meaning, historical context, and identify how the document can be useful for research.
2. Given a historical document, the students will correctly transcribe the content of the document.
3. Students will present their transcript and research orally to their peers.

**Common Core:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. RH. 9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

**NCSS STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES:**

- 1—Culture
- 2—Time, Continuity, and Change
- 3—People, Places, and Environment
- 4—Individual Development and Identity

**Materials:**

Download the lesson plan, along with the following text-based materials, at the bottom of this page.

- Civil War era primary sources. For many of these you can download and print the original document and give students the background information as you see fit. You can also begin with certain info on the documents and then provide additional info as the students begin their transcription. You can choose from the options below or find

- documents in your local archives. **Note:** many of the documents listed are already transcribed online, so be aware of your student's research, for this reason (we know your students are savvy) it would be best to find local documents.
  - Love letter  
<https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/civilwar/id/494/rec/13>
  - Missing soldier  
<https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/civilwar/id/469/rec/18>
  - Father to daughter  
<https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/civilwar/id/840/rec/21>
  - Lincoln to Sumner (click the document image) [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/mcc:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(mcc/079\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/mcc:@field(DOCID+@lit(mcc/079)))
  - Letter to mom <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mreynolds.002006/>
- Writing supplies and appropriate reference materials (dictionaries, maps, textbooks, etc.); word-processing and internet access.
- Magnifying glass for reading difficult print
- Transcription Procedure (PDF)
- National Archives Document Analysis Form (PDF)

### Anticipatory Set/Hook:

Ask your students - How do historians find answers to questions?

If you want to know what a relative looked like in the past, what do you do?

- Look for old photos

What if you wanted to learn about your birth weight and height?

- Look for birth announcement or hospital records
- Ask a relative

If you want to learn about what people thought about a certain historic event, maybe the election of the first African American president. What might you do?

- Look in newspapers from around that time
- Look online at what was trending on or around the dates of those events to see what people were saying
- Look at emails or letters sent between people at those times
- Interview family who lived through the event

These are all examples of asking historical questions and using primary sources to find answers. This is just what historians do when they want to answer a question.

**Procedure:**

This activity works best when students work in pairs; therefore, prior to starting this lesson determine how students will be paired for this cooperative learning activity.

**Period 1: Lesson Introduction; Start Transcriptions**

1. Provide folders for working pairs to store their primary source documents and all work/forms. Inside the folder include:
  - The Transcription Procedure (PDF)
  - The primary source document they will be transcribing
  - Any materials related to the primary source document
  - The National Archives Document Analysis Form (PDF)
  - Extra paper for note taking and transcription
2. Show students reference materials that are available for their use during the transcription process (dictionaries, maps, textbooks, online resources, etc.).
3. Go through The Transcription Procedure (PDF) and the Document Analysis Form (PDF)
4. Allow time for student pairs to begin their work.
5. Keep a record of the questions and issues students bring forward throughout the process. This will be a discussion at the end of the lesson.
6. Collect the folders of documents and save the transcriptions at the end of the period.

**Period 2: Finish Transcriptions; Interpretation**

1. Distribute folders to student pairs.
2. Allow time for student pairs to finish their transcriptions and fill in their Document Analysis Form.
3. Collect the folders and save all transcriptions at the end of the period.

**Period 3: Further Research; Prepare to Present**

1. Distribute folders.
2. Students should finish their research and prepare to give their presentation.
3. Collect folders.

**Period 4: Transcription Presentations/Evaluations**

1. Allow pairs of students to present.
  - Consider having students present their transcriptions in chronological order if their primary sources are part of a collection.
2. Discuss topics addressed in the primary sources that interest students or relate to classroom studies.

**Closure:**

Discuss the task of transcribing and issues that were brought-up throughout the process. How were the issues resolved?

Discuss why historians would take the time to transcribe documents. Might they find some evidence that others have not yet uncovered? Could transcribing something help support or refute their thesis? Why would this be important?

Ask, do you feel this was a daunting task or did it feel manageable? What did you discover about the writing of people from this time period?

**Assessment:**

Students will transcribe, interpret, and contextualize a primary source document, and complete an oral presentation.



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## Transcribing A Historic Document

When doing research historians always look for information in various sources, both **primary** and **secondary**.

For primary sources, **interpretation** and **provenance** of the source will always need to be done (What am I looking at and how can/can I use this for my research?). For written documents this can mean transcribing the document, if it is not already done.

For this project you are going to be given a document. It will be your job to

- Interpret the document
- Create a **transcription** of the document
- Identify how this source might be useful
- Present your transcription and interpretation



### Vocabulary

Primary Source – Source information that is created at the historic moment.

Secondary Source – A source that discusses information related to a certain historic event or time.

Interpret – Explain the meaning.

Provenance – The place of origin or earliest known history of something.

Transcription – A written or printed representation.

## Interpretation

Look at your document and any supporting materials that you may have been given.

Use the National Archives and Records Administration Document Analysis Form (PDF) to guide your interpretation of the document and to help determine the provenance of the document.

Most likely, you will be able to interpret the document further as you transcribe it; therefore, this form will not be filled in all at one time, but as you work.

## Transcribing

Write/type a verbatim transcription of the primary source.

1. Read what you can of the primary source aloud.
2. Write/type the primary source word for word and line for line. Transcribe words as they are written. Do not transcribe text that has been crossed out.
3. DO NOT CORRECT SPELLING, PUNCTUATION, CAPITALIZATION, OR OTHER GRAMMATCAL ERRORS YOU FIND.
4. If you encounter a word that is unclear, try the following:
  - Zoom in on the word with a magnifying glass (or the Adobe Reader program if your primary source is available online).
  - Look back in the source for other letter combinations that look similar to the one that is unclear, especially if you are certain about the transcription of the other word.
  - Consider context, read around the word and consider what word might fit best.
  - Ask your classmates for assistance. They may have encountered that word or phrase in their primary source and have a clearer copy.
  - If you just cannot figure out a word, you can use [illegible], or make your best guess and use a question mark with brackets [word?]

## Use of Source

Identify how and why this document is or could be important for historical research.

- How would it help in the study of the American Civil War?
- In what other historical contexts could this help us? Women's history, African American history, military history, agricultural history, food history, medical history, town history, state history, etc.
- What are some things you learned from this document?

## Present

For your presentation, be sure to:

- Give background information on your document, providing context to your audience.
- Read your modern transcription aloud to the class.
- Discuss what you learned from this source (did you learn about cooking, relationships, the postal service, or details about a battle).
- Discuss how this document could be useful for historical research.



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# Analyze a Written Document

## Meet the document.

Type (check all that apply):

- |   |                                    |  |  |  |
|---|------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letter                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Speech    | <input type="checkbox"/> Patent                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegram      | <input type="checkbox"/> Court document        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chart                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement           | <input type="checkbox"/> Press Release | <input type="checkbox"/> Memorandum            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Report                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Email     | <input type="checkbox"/> Identification document |  | <input type="checkbox"/> Presidential document |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Congressional document |                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Other                   |  |  |

Describe it as if you were explaining to someone who can't see it.

*Think about: Is it handwritten or typed? Is it all by the same person? Are there stamps or other marks? What else do you see on it?*

## Observe its parts.

Who wrote it?

Who read/received it?

When is it from?

Where is it from?

## Try to make sense of it.

What is it talking about?

Write one sentence summarizing this document.

Why did the author write it?

Quote evidence from the document that tells you this.

What was happening at the time in history this document was created?

## Use it as historical evidence.

What did you find out from this document that you might not learn anywhere else?

What other documents or historical evidence are you going to use to help you understand this event or topic?

