

# Decades Mural Project

## What are primary sources?

Primary sources are materials that are firsthand evidence of historical events, usually recorded by someone who participated in, witnessed, or lived through the event. These materials may be printed, visual (film, video, etc), or audio. They serve as “raw material” to understand, interpret, and analyze the past. There are several, broad categories of primary sources:

- **Printed materials** – journals, letters, newspapers, interviews, speeches, transcripts, medical records, blueprints, maps
- **Objects** – artifacts, tools, weapons, clothing, inventions, personal possessions such as glasses,
- **Images** – photographs, film, video, and paintings
- **Audio** – Radio shows, oral histories, interviews

## Research tips using primary sources

### I. Source Type – Printed Materials

- If you have any journals/diaries of your own, consider using them as the basis for a personal memoir. Otherwise, consider asking older members of your family, such as a grandparent, if they kept diaries. You may wish to compare and contrast their version of a particular event with other accounts from people who were present at the time.
- Choose an important political event from the past, such as an election or a war. Find newspaper accounts of the event, then compare and contrast those versions with each other.

### II. Source Type – Objects

- Ask your family or someone in your community for an article of clothing (dress, suit, or a hat) from the past. Is the piece of clothing representative of fashion styles from that time? How has fashion changed this then? How does the piece of clothing reflect job, societal roles (i.e. working woman vs. housewife), or personal tastes?
- Find a phone, television, or VCR from at least 10 years ago. How has the technology changed since then? How are those changes evident in the design of the object?

### III. Source Type – Images

- Look through family photo albums. Select one picture from the past. If you were present in the picture, describe verbally the sights, sounds, smells, and feelings that surrounded that moment captured on film. If the photograph is one where you were not present, ask someone who was there for the same details as above.
- Find an image of a piece of fine art or architectural building from the twentieth century. Research the artist, the date, and the medium. What does that information tell you about the time period? Is the painting representative of a style or school of painting (such as American Regionalism, Abstract Expressionism, and Pop Art)?

### IV. Source Type – Audio

- Research your family history by interviewing relatives. Take notes on differing accounts of the same events. Compile differing accounts into an oral report of your family.
- Find an audio recording of a famous political speech. What is the speaker’s key message? What is his/her style of speaking, and how does that affect the impact of the message?