

SOURCING—INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Sourcing—the act of understanding who wrote a document, where they wrote it, and why they wrote it, for the purposes of analysis or interpretation—is integral to the work of a historian. Without properly understanding an author’s purpose and perspective, it’s difficult to properly interpret a document. In this first activity on sourcing, you’ll learn how an author has framed that event, and how that then impacts your interpretation of it.

Practices

Reading, claim testing

It’s nearly impossible to source something without reading it first. Not all sources are based on text, so in this course we consider reading more broadly and include video, artifacts, infographics, photographs, art, and other data representations all part of reading. In order to adequately make sense of a source, it’s important to understand the author, their background, and how this might have impacted what they produced. This connects to one of our claim testers—authority. Understanding what kind of authority the author has helps us interpret their point of view and also assists us in determining if their account is credible or trustworthy.

Process

In this activity, you’re going to read a collection of documents related to a high school located in Anytown, USA, that recently changed its off-campus lunch policy. As you can probably imagine, changing a school policy such as this one garnered a lot of reactions from both the local and school community. Everyone—from the administration, to students, to local business owners—had an opinion about this change. Now, you are being asked to examine everyone’s reactions to this policy change to determine why this was such a significant moment in time. This is something historians do all the time to understand the past: they look at the past from different people’s perspectives to understand the historical importance of that event. This is typically referred to as *sourcing*.

You will source documents throughout the course, something that is not easy to do. Sourcing can be hard because sometimes people have to interpret old documents that are written in less-modern English, or that are translated from other languages. As part of sourcing work, you’ll also be asked to look at images and other types of documents to try to interpret the creator’s intention. Because this can be tricky, we’ve created a tool you can use to help you source documents. Review the Sourcing Tool, which is included in the Sourcing—Introduction worksheet, with your class. One way to remember what to think about when sourcing is by using the acronym HAPPY. Review each section of the tool with your class and be sure to pay attention to the questions being asked in each section.

Once you’ve reviewed the tool, you’re going to learn more about it by using it to review some source documents from when the off-campus lunch policy change took place.

Get into groups of four and look at the excerpts, also included in the worksheet. Each person in your group should pick one excerpt to read and then share about with the rest of the group. Then, decide which document is the best fit for each of the first four sourcing categories of HAPPY: historical context (H), audience (A), purpose (P), and point of view (P). Be sure you can explain your category decisions and be prepared to share your answers with the class.

Once you’ve discussed the documents as a class, pick out one of the sources and answer the questions in the WhY (Importance) row of the Sourcing Tool. Hand in your answers to your teacher before leaving class.



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Excerpts

Transcript from Local News Story

News Anchor: Good evening and welcome to tonight's top story. A local high school has recently made a controversial decision to ban off-campus lunch for its students. This decision has sparked a debate among the school administration, local businesses, and the student body. Our reporters have been on the scene, gathering opinions from all sides.

Reporter: We spoke with the school administration about their reasoning behind this decision. They explained that there have been concerns about students leaving campus and not returning on time for their afternoon classes. They also cited safety concerns, as some students have been involved in accidents while driving to and from lunch.

Reporter: We also spoke with a local business owner who operates a lunch restaurant close to the high school. He expressed concern about the impact that this decision will have on his business, as many of his regular customers are high-school students who come to his restaurant for lunch. He's worried that the ban on off-campus lunch will lead to a decline in his business and may even force him to close his doors.

Reporter: Finally, we spoke with some high school students about their thoughts on the ban. They expressed disappointment and frustration, stating that they enjoyed the freedom of being able to leave campus for lunch and explore the surrounding community. Some students also mentioned that they will miss the opportunity to socialize with their friends at local restaurants.

News Anchor: As you can see, this decision has sparked a range of reactions from different stakeholders. It's clear that there are valid concerns from all interested parties, and it will be interesting to see how this situation develops in the coming days and weeks. Stay tuned for more updates on this story.

Letter from the Principal to the School Community

Dear School Community,

I am writing to inform you about a recent decision that has been made by the school administration regarding off-campus lunch for high school students. Starting with the next school term, students will no longer be permitted to leave the school premises during lunchtime.

This decision was not made lightly, and the school administration carefully considered the reasons behind it. We recognize that off-campus lunch has been a long-standing tradition for our high-school students, and many of them have enjoyed this privilege for years. However, there have been several incidents in recent months that have prompted us to reevaluate this practice.

First, we have noticed an increase in disciplinary issues associated with lunch breaks, including tardiness, truancy, and misconduct. Many students have failed to return to class on time or have skipped class altogether after lunch, leading to disruptions in their academic progress. Additionally, there have been instances of students engaging in risky behaviors or consuming substances that are not permitted on school grounds.

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Furthermore, allowing students to leave campus during lunch has presented safety concerns, particularly with the ongoing traffic congestion in our community. We want to ensure that our students are safe at all times, and by keeping them on campus during lunch breaks, we can better monitor their well-being and ensure their safety.

We understand that this decision may be disappointing for some of our students, but we hope that they can appreciate our reasons for making this change. Our primary goal is to create a safe and supportive learning environment for all our students, and we believe that this decision will help us achieve this objective.

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation as we implement this new policy.

Sincerely,

Principal Jennings

Student Council President's Speech

I know that many of us are disappointed by the recent decision to ban off-campus lunch. It is a change that affects us all, and it's understandable to feel frustrated and upset. I want to encourage you to take action and work together to combat this decision.

We can make our voices heard by expressing our concerns and opinions to the school administration. As your student council president, I am committed to representing our interests and advocating for our rights as students. We can gather feedback and suggestions from our peers and present them to the administration in a constructive and respectful manner.

We can work together to find alternative solutions that meet the needs of both the school administration and the student body. We can brainstorm ideas and propose alternative policies that address the concerns that prompted this decision. By collaborating and compromising, we can find a solution that works for everyone.

In conclusion, I want to remind you that we have the power to make a difference. We can work together to combat this decision, make our voices heard, and find a solution that meets the needs of both the school administration and the student body. Let us take action and create a positive change that benefits us all.

Thank you.

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Letter from Local Business to the School Administration

Dear School Administration,

We were disappointed to hear about the recent decision to ban off-campus lunch for high-school students. As a local lunch restaurant that has been serving the community for years, we are concerned about the impact that this decision will have on our business.

Many of our customers are high-school students who have been coming to our restaurant during their lunch breaks for years. They enjoy the quality of our food, the affordability of our prices, and the convenience of our location. For some students, our restaurant has become a second home, a place where they can relax and socialize with their friends.

With the ban on off-campus lunch, we anticipate a significant decrease in the number of high-school students who visit our restaurant. This will have a negative impact on our business and our ability to provide quality service to our community.

We understand the reasons behind the school's decision to ban off-campus lunch. However, we believe that there are alternative solutions that can address the concerns of the school administration without hurting local businesses like ours. We would appreciate the opportunity to work with the school administration to find a solution that meets everyone's needs.

In conclusion, we urge the school administration to reconsider the decision to ban off-campus lunch for high school students. We value the relationship that we have built with the students and the community, and we hope that we can continue to serve them in the future.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Local Restaurant Owner

All documents in this activity were created using ChatGPT.

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Name:

Date:

Sourcing Tool

Directions: Answer each of the questions below. If you are sourcing more than one document, provide responses for each.

Name of document and/or source: _____

Author's name: _____

Location and date source was written: _____

Historical Context	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What was happening in the author's location that might have influenced the document's creation (for example, the location's geography, demography, or the region's political situation, religious influences, or industry)?2. What was happening at the time that might have influenced the document's creation?3. What information that you've learned in this unit helps you understand this document?
Audience	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Who was this created for (that is, was this written for anyone to read or was it private, for one specific person or group)?2. What were the readers of this source supposed to do or think once they read it?

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Name:

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Purpose	What was the author's goal, and what evidence supports your answer?
POV (Point of View)	Can you identify anything about the author that might explain why they wrote this? For example, their economic class, occupation, religion, nationality, political group, ethnic group, or gender?
Why (Importance)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What is the main idea of the source?2. What parts of this document are most valuable and why?3. What are the limitations of this document? In other words, where does it fall short?