



Document Skill

Identifying Sources of Evidence

A good starting point for working with historical documents in an AP course is developing an understanding about the sources of evidence upon which the historical record is based. History is recreated by looking at the records that are left from the past. It is useful to recognize and establish the broad categories of data you are likely to work with throughout the year. Later, in Chapter 3, you will expand this skill by examining the differences between a primary and secondary source in determining the credibility of information. In this chapter, you will be introduced to three broad sources of evidence that are used to reconstruct the past.

Categories of Historical Evidence

1. **Direct evidence** — This is written information that comes from eyewitnesses to an event. This type of evidential material comes from a participant who actually saw the action or took part in the event. It is highly valued by historians and is likely to be the most reliable in reconstructing an event.
2. **Indirect evidence** — This is written information created some time after the event happened and is generated by individuals who were not directly involved in the actual happening. The author may have lived through the event but did not directly participate in it.
3. **Artifact evidence** — These are objects and images that may have been created at the time the event took place or after the fact. They are the author's renditions of the action and/or represent an interpretation of what happened. These sources are of value to the historian but may not have the same accuracy and reliability as direct evidence.

Practicing the Skill

Below is a list of ten sources of evidence, followed by headings for a chart. Copy the chart into your notebook. Then place each one of the sources of evidence in the proper category in the chart. For example, newspaper stories are written after the fact and are indirect sources.

Now you should place the other nine sources of evidence in the chart. When you have completed the chart, share your answers with your classmates.

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| 1. newspaper stories | 6. conquistador's letters |
| 2. a ship captain's log | 7. local arrest records |
| 3. tombstones | 8. stamps |
| 4. soldier's uniform | 9. person's will |
| 5. recipes | 10. minutes from court |

Direct Evidence	Indirect Evidence	Artifact Evidence
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