

# Reading like a Historian

Historians use paintings along with many other tools to help understand the past. The famous painting on the next page, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, captures the determination of Patriot leaders and soldiers to endure brutal conditions in the hope of winning their struggle for liberty. As you study United States history, you too will learn how to use different historical sources to **Read like a Historian**.



# What Does It Mean to Read like a Historian?

In your history class you will be doing a lot of reading, thinking, and problem-solving. Much of your reading and thinking will center on different types of texts or materials. Since you are in a history class reading all sorts of things, a question to consider is, “What does it mean to think, read, and solve problems like a historian?”

Historians work with different types of sources to understand and learn from history. Two categories of sources are **primary** and **secondary** sources.

**Primary Sources** are historical documents, written accounts by a firsthand witness, or objects that have survived from the past. A study of primary sources might include letters, government documents, diaries, photographs, art objects, stamps, coins, and even clothing.

**Secondary Sources** are accounts of past events created by people some time after the events happened. This textbook and other books written about historical events are examples of secondary sources.

As you learn more about your work as a historian, you will begin to ask questions and analyze historical materials. You will be working as a detective, digging into history to create a richer understanding of the mysteries of the past.

# How to Analyze Written Sources

## Primary Sources

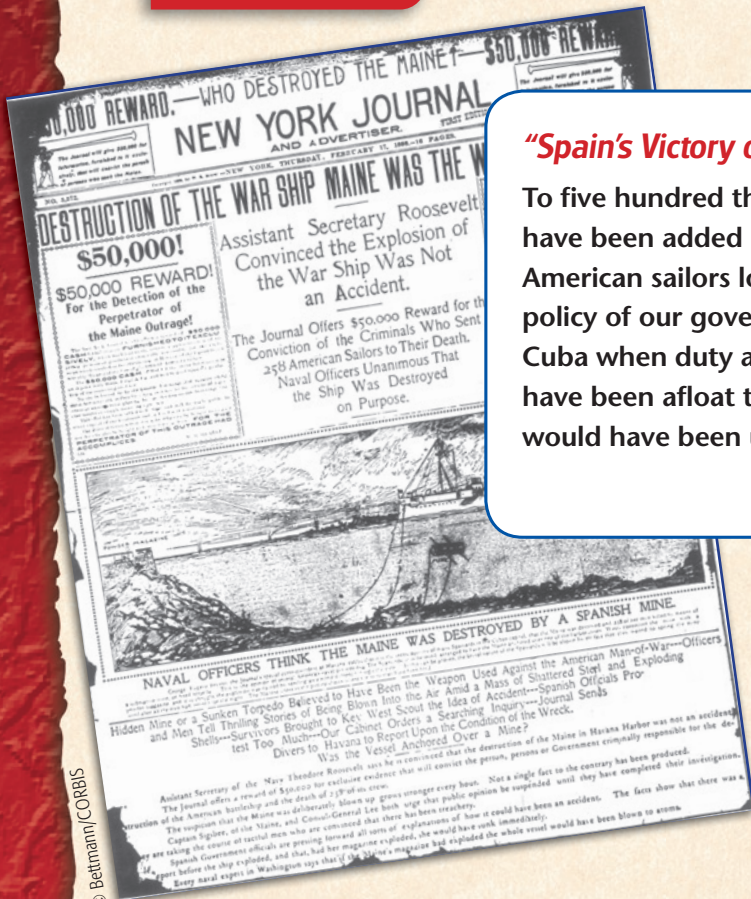
### *"Spain's Victory of Peace"*

To five hundred thousand Cubans starved or otherwise murdered have been added an American battleship and three hundred American sailors lost as the direct result of the dilatory [delaying] policy of our government toward Spain. If we had stopped the war in Cuba when duty and policy alike urged us to do so, the *Maine* would have been afloat today, and three hundred homes, now desolate, would have been unscathed [safe from harm].

—*New York Journal*, February 17, 1898

Asking questions can help you determine the relevance and importance of written primary sources, such as this newspaper editorial about the sinking of an American warship. As you analyze the primary source above and the primary and secondary sources included in this textbook, ask yourself questions like the ones below.

- Who created the source and why?
- Did the writer have firsthand knowledge of the event, or does he report what others saw or heard?
- Was the writer a neutral party, or did the author have opinions or interests that might have influenced what was recorded?
- Did the writer wish to inform or persuade others?
- Was the information recorded during the event, immediately after the event, or after some lapse of time?



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## Secondary Sources

### The Attack on Lawrence, Kansas

"Sheriff Jones, again at the head of an army of Missourians, marched into Lawrence. In broad daylight, they threw the printing presses of two newspapers into a river. They burned down the Free State Hotel and other buildings. Antislavery Kansans seethed with rage. Here is how one eyewitness described the attack: *Sheriff Jones, after gazing on the flames rising from the hotel, and saying that it was 'the happiest day of his life,' dismissed his 'posse,' and they immediately commenced their lawless pillage.*"

—John A. Garraty, from *The Story of America*, 1994

When reading secondary sources, such as the description of the attack on Lawrence, Kansas, historians ask additional questions to seek understanding. They try to source the text, build evidence, and interpret the message that is being conveyed. For historians, reading is a quest to find evidence to answer or challenge a historical problem. As you study secondary sources, ask questions like the ones below.

- Who is the author? What do I know about this author?
- Did the author have firsthand information? What is the author's relationship to the event?
- What might be the author's motivation in writing this piece?
- What type of evidence did the author look at?
- Are any assumptions or biases present?
- How does this document fit into the larger context of the events I am studying?
- What kind of source is it?
- Is the source an original?
- Is the content probable or reasonable?
- What does the date tell me about the event?
- What do I already know about this topic that will help me understand more of what I am reading?

# How to Analyze an Artifact



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Artifacts, such as this phonograph invented by Thomas Edison, take many forms. They might be coins, stone tools, pieces of clothing, or even items found in your backpack. As you study artifacts in this textbook, ask yourself questions like the ones below.

- Why was this object created?
- When and where would it have been used?
- What does the artifact tell me about the technology available at the time it was created?
- What can it tell me about the life and times of the people who used it?
- How does the artifact help to make sense of the time period?

# How to Analyze a Historical Map

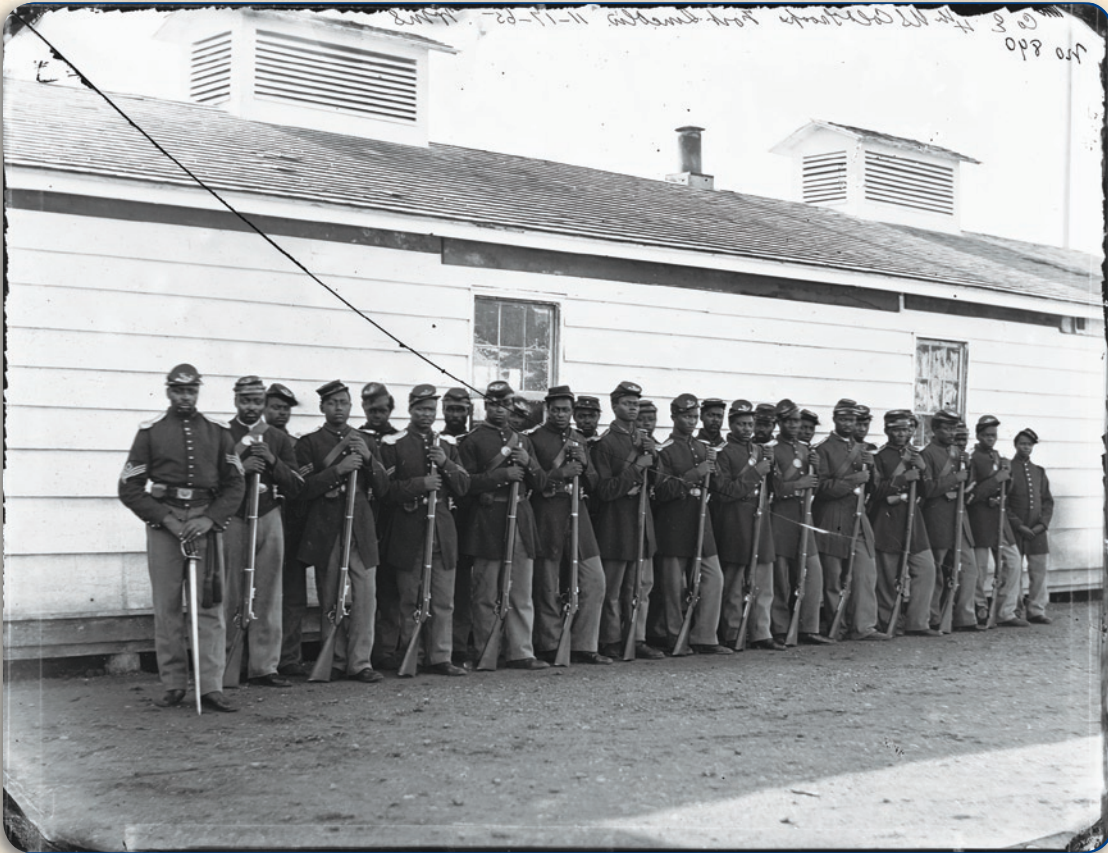


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Maps, such as this one from 1719 of New France, are symbolic representations of places shown in relation to one another. All maps necessarily include some details and leave out others. As you study maps in this textbook, ask questions like the ones below.

- When and where was the map produced?
- What details has the mapmaker chosen to include (or exclude) on this map?
- Why was the map drawn?
- How can I determine if the map is accurate?
- How are maps used to analyze the past, present, and future?

# How to Analyze a Photograph



Courtesy of the Library of Congress, (LC-B8171-7890)

Photographs, like the one above of African American soldiers during the Civil War, are another important source for historians. One way to study a photograph is to write down everything you think is important about it. Then divide the image into four sections and describe the important elements from each section. As you study photographs in this textbook, ask questions like the ones below.

- What is the subject of the photograph?
- What does the image reveal about its subject?
- What is the setting for the photograph?
- What other details can I observe?
- When and where in the past was the photograph created?
- How can I describe the photographer's point of view?



# How to Analyze a Political Cartoon



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In 1871 Thomas Nast published this cartoon—“Who Stole the People’s Money?”—poking fun at corruption in politics. As you study political cartoons in this textbook, use the following helpful tips and questions.

- List the parts of the political cartoon and the importance of each part.
- Describe the focus or significance of the political cartoon.
- Do the captions and call-out boxes clarify the political cartoon’s purpose?
- Does the cartoon help me understand the information that I am studying in my textbook better?