Colonial America Lesson Module
by
Fran O’Malley

Abstract
In this lesson, students will participate in an exercise in which they will be asked to describe an event from the standpoint of either observers or non-observers of events in order to develop an understanding of the difference between a primary and a secondary source. This lesson also helps student understand the interpretive nature of historical accounts. Although the entire module can be used in grades 4-11, lessons 1 & 3 address history standards written for the grade 4-5 cluster in Delaware. Lessons 2 & 3 focus on history standards written for grades 6-11.

Standards Addressed
• History 2 – Analysis [Gr. 4-5]: "Identify artifacts and documents as either primary or secondary sources of historical data from which historical accounts are constructed."
• History 3 – Interpretation [Gr. 4-5]: "Explain why historical accounts of the same event sometimes differ and relate this explanation to the evidence presented or the point-of-view of the author."

Materials Needed
Class set of 4"x6" index cards

Lesson 1 Procedures

Preconception Probe: Begin the module with the following open ended question and ask students to write down their responses. How do we know what happened in the past? How do we know what happened in the past? Categorize & save common responses.

1. Prior to class use a marker to place the numbers 1 or 2 on a class set of index cards. Label 3/4ths of the index cards with the number 1. The remaining quarter should be labeled with a 2.

2. Group Students: Place students in groups of four. Give three students in each group index cards labeled number 1. One student in the group gets a card labeled number 2. [Alternatively, give the students in the back row or rows the number 2 cards and the rest of the class the number 1 cards]

3. Ask each student with the card labeled 1 to put their heads down, leave the room, or face the back of the room. The students with the number 2 cards should face the front of the room.

4. Create or present an event without alerting the students as to what their task will be. Once the students with the number 1 index cards are facing the front of the room, you have three options to continue the lesson.

   a. Spend 30 seconds or so doing as many things as you can such as erase the board, put a transparency on the overhead, knock over an object, rearrange a bulletin board, tap a desk, look out the window and yawn, etc.
b. Show a segment of a video in which there is uncertainty regarding what happened.
c. Flash a drawing of a complex scene or set of diagrams on the overhead projector.

5. After the 30 seconds have elapsed. Ask the "Number 1" students to write down on the index card everything they witnessed from the moment the "Number 2" students put their heads down in as much detail as possible.

6. Give the "Number 1" students a few minutes to complete their accounts. Once they have finished, have them pass their index cards to the "Number 2" students and ask them to construct an account of what happened while their heads were down. Give the "Number 2s" a few minutes to write down their version of what happened.

7. Invite each of the "Number 2s" to share their accounts. Record the similarities and differences between the "Number 2" accounts on the board.

8. Ask the students to respond to the following questions:

- What made the "Number 1" accounts different from the "Number 2" accounts?
- How would one explain why the accounts pieced together by the "Number 2" students were different?
- Were all of the "Number 1" accounts exactly the same? If not, why not?
- Which accounts should be considered the "best" sources of information by those who are given the task of describing the events of the past? Why?
- What does this exercise help us to understand about the nature of historical accounts?

Debrief and Conclude
Tell the students that information such as that found on the "Number 1" cards are called primary sources while that found on the "Number 2" cards are called secondary sources. Ask students why they might be called primary or secondary sources. Clarify the definitions and invite students to give examples of each.

Assessment
Ask students to turn over their index cards and write down the definitions of primary source and secondary source and give an example of each.
Lesson 2
The Cheating Scandal

Lesson Description (Abstract): In this lesson students analyze a “scandal” in which a student stands accused of cheating on a test. Students will be given descriptions of four sources [witnesses] who might be used by teachers to determine whether the cheating actually occurred. The student’s task is to analyze for credibility and recommend “good” sources for the teacher to consider. The lesson “teaches for transfer” by asking students to apply their understandings to a similar context.

Rationale: This lesson attempts to nurture skills associated with historical analysis [Delaware History Standard 2] and to show students how those skills might transfer to other contexts. The ability to analyze sources of information has practical application throughout life (e.g. who should I trust, which claims can I believe).

Grades: 6-8

Lesson Content: The road to “knowing,” one might suggest, is paved with questions. Sam Wineburg’s “Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts” offers a neat courtroom metaphor to contrast how historians and students approach sources. Whereas most students (“novices”) reading historical sources are like jurors – passively receiving information from “authoritative” attorneys and witnesses i.e. sources, the historian (“expert”) approaches sources as an attorney would a witness i.e. via questions and interrogation. Both attorney and historian focus on pealing away the layers of evidence in the hope of uncovering, if not “what really happened,” at least a credible account.

As compelling as it is, even this courtroom analogy falls somewhat short as both attorneys and historians have motives and biases that, themselves, require analysis. Nevertheless, we might see our task as educators as taking the students out of their seats in jury boxes and placing them in the role of interrogators.

The Clarification document for History Standard 2 presents no less than 15 questions as examples of the kind that historians use as they examine sources. They include:

- Is this source credible? How do I know?
- What questions should I ask before I use this source? After I use it?
- Did he graduate? What major?
- What is the genealogy of this document?
- How did it come to be located in this archive or collection?
- Is the path from its creation to its location believable?
- Could it have been planted?
- Is the document out of character with other documents?
- Could your document source be forged? How would you know?
- For whom was the document intended?
- How many eyes were meant to see it?
- Are there any corroborating documents or sources?

This lesson encourages students to think about the questions investigator must ask of any source.
Concepts Addressed:

- Credibility – the quality, capacity, or power to elicit belief.
- Transfer - the ability to use what one learns in one context/situation and apply it or solve problems in new but similar contexts/situations.

Benchmark[s] Addressed:

- History 2b – Analysis [Gr. 6-8]: Students will examine historical documents, artifacts, and other materials, and analyze them in terms of credibility, as well as the purpose, perspective, or point of view for which they were constructed.
- History 3 – Interpretation [Gr. 6-8]: Students will compare different historians’ descriptions of the same societies in order to examine how the choice of questions and use of sources may affect their conclusions.

Essential Questions Addressed:

- What questions should I ask before I use a source?
- How does one know if a source is credible?
- Why might a particular source be considered not credible? And for whom?
- How might a historian’s use of sources affect his or her conclusions?

Student vocabulary:

- Credibility - the status of being believable or trusted; the extent to which something can be believed or trusted.
- Credible – offering reasonable grounds for being believed.
- Incredible – too extraordinary and improbable to be believed; hard to believe.

Time Required: 1-2 class periods.

Materials:

1. Overhead projector or LCD projector.
4. Handout 1: Analyzing for Credibility. (class set)
Procedures:

1. Present (project) the following visual to the students (large copy available as Visual 1):

   **The Scandal**

   A social studies teacher has strong suspicions that a student named Bob cheated on a test. The social studies teacher plans to investigate the alleged act of cheating by questioning some of the other students in the class. The social studies teacher has asked the science teacher on his middle school team to help out with the investigation.

2. Tell the students that the teachers have identified a list of 4 sources or “witnesses” who he thinks might prove valuable as he investigates the alleged act of cheating. Present (Visual 2) the following list to the students and read each source description – one at a time - to the students.

   **Witnesses**
   - **Erin**: sits in front of the room. Likes Bob very much.
   - **Katie**: sits next to Bob in the back of the room.
   - **Sean**: sits next to Bob in the back; dislikes Bob greatly.
   - **Ryan**: sits in the middle of the room.

3. **Mapping Activity**: ask students to take out a blank piece of paper and map the scene of the “Classroom Cheating Scandal” (i.e. where Bob, Erin, Katie, Sean, and Ryan would have been sitting).

4. **Think-Pair-Share**: Ask students to work with their partner to analyze the quality of the witnesses or sources. Which ones appear most credible? Which ones appear least credible? Ask the students to create a list of “good” (credible) and “bad” (incredible) sources for the teachers. Tell them that they must be able to explain why they considered each source “good” or “bad.” Allow a few minutes for the pair to complete the tasks then, starting with “Erin,” ask volunteers to explain their analyses and conclusions about each witness (a.k.a. source).

5. **Whole Group Discussion**: Ask the students the following questions:
   - A. What would the social studies teacher conclude if he used Sean as his only source of information? [Probably response: Bob cheated]
   - B. What would the science teacher conclude if he used Erin as his only source of information? [Probably response: Bob did not cheat]
C. Why might two different teachers arrive at two different conclusions about the same event? [Response: they relied on different sources]

D. Can you think of other situations in which two people might [or did] arrive at different conclusions because of a reliance on different sources?

6. Mini-Lecture: Making Transfer Explicit. Explain to students that transfer is one of the important aims of education. Transfer refers to the ability to use what one learns in one situation and apply it or solve problems in a new but similar situation. For example, a student who learns to drive a car uses that understanding to drive a truck. Note that a student who can analyze the quality of sources in a hypothetical situation like that presented in “The Cheating Scandal” can provide solid evidence of learning or understanding by transferring that skill successfully to similar investigations or tasks. Ask students if they can think of other examples of transfers.

7. Formulate Analytic Questions: Distribute copies of Handout 1 - Analyzing for Credibility. Ask students to reflect on their thinking as they analyzed potential witnesses for the cheating scandal. Tell them to work with their partners and use Handout 1 to create a list of questions that they might ask about any witness or source when faced with the task of deciding which source might be best or most credible. [Do not share all of these with the students but reasonable questions might include:]

   a. Was the witness there when the event occurred?
   b. Is it likely that the witness was attentive to the event?
   c. Was the witness in a position to observe the event?
   d. Did the witness have any significant biases? If so, what were they?
   e. Which witness appears to have had the least bias…the most bias? Why?
   f. Were the witness’s recollections consistent with the recollections of others?
   g. If the source did not witness the event, did he or she have other information that should be considered?

   Ask each group to share one question and continue moving from group to group until you have exhausted all of the questions [or have groups share their best question]. Ask the students to record any questions that do not appear on their list.

   Then, ask the students to work with their partners to eliminate or rephrase any question that could not be used to evaluate any source. In other words, you want them to develop questions that generalize or apply to a wide range of sources [i.e. are transferable], not just the “Cheating Scandal” task. After a few minutes, ask volunteers to share questions that they either eliminated or rephrased.
Lesson 3
The Landing

Abstract: In “The Landing,” students analyze historical materials associated with the arrival of the Puritans in America to deepen their understanding of the nature of history, historical evidence, and historical interpretation.

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Essential Questions
• Which historical source is best? [4-5]
• How could there be different representation of the same event in history?
• Is this source credible? How do I know? [6-8]
• To what extent does history change?

Materials Needed
- **Appendix 1:** Images of the Landing of the Pilgrims (1 copy for every two students in the class. You will want to make copy of the entire page but cut the page in half so that half the room will get one Image while the other gets the second image. Do not tell students that they are getting different images. See “Activity 1” explanation below under “Procedures.”). There are additional images in Appendix 4 if you want to have students analyzing 4 separate images instead of two.
- **Appendix 2:** Our History of the Landing (1 copy for every two students).
- **Appendix 3:** Excerpt – Of Plimouth Plantation (1 copy for every student).
- **Appendix 4:** Story Map (1 copy for each student).
- **Appendix 5** (extensions): additional images of “The Landing of the Pilgrims.” Only need copies if you wish to have the class working with 4 images rather than 2.

Procedures

Introduction: Relay the following information to the students –

“One might suggest that the story of American freedom began with events that happened nearly 400 years ago when a group of people from England sailed to America on a ship named the *Mayflower* to find a place where they could practice their religion freely, that is, in a manner that they believed God wanted them to. These people were called “separatists” because they were separating from the Church of England. They have also come to be known as “Pilgrims,” a term used to describe a person who travels to a foreign land, usually a holy place.

The Pilgrims landed in the area that is now known as Massachusetts in 1620.

In this lesson, we will investigate the moment when the Pilgrims set foot in the New World.”

Activity 1: Image Analysis
Distribute Copy of “The Landing of the Pilgrims.” Give half the room Image 1, the other half Image 2 but don’t let them know that they have different images.

Ask students to work with a partner, analyze the painting that they have been given, and write a brief history of the landing based on the evidence presented. Encourage them to use details from the painting.

Circulate around the room and look at what the students are writing. Try to find one pair from each painting group (i.e. Image 1 and Image 2) that includes different details in their sketches (e.g. one pair mentions the presence of Indians and weapons, the other does not).

Have two pairs with contrasting “histories,” share their historical accounts. Once the differences in the historical accounts become apparent ask:

**How do you explain the differences in the accounts of the Landing?**  
[students may already realize that they used different sources or pieces of evidence as the bases for their accounts]

Reveal Image 1, then Image 2. Then ask…

- Are the paintings primary sources or secondary sources? Explain why.
- Is either source credible? Are either accurate representations of what happened in 1620?
- When were they painted? Did the painters witness the landing of the Pilgrims in America?
- How did the artists know what happened 150 years before they were even born?
- How might we know whether the painting is credible or accurate? [students may suggest corroborating i.e. comparing to different sources or looking for eyewitness accounts]

**Activity 2: Document Analysis**

Begin by telling students that one of the people on board the Mayflower actually kept a journal. His name was William Bradford – a man who went on to become a leader in the Pilgrim colony for many years. Tell them that they are going to read an excerpt from William Bradford’s *Of Plimouth Plantation*. But, first, we are going to try to predict what the story will be about.

**Pre-reading prediction:** post the following words on the chalkboard, overhead, or smartboard. Ask students to use some or all of the words from the Bradford excerpt to predict what Bradford said happened in 1620.

- arrived
- spotted
- sixteen
- savages
- explore
- fled
- armed
- rested

Distribute Appendix 2 - excerpt from William Bradford’s *Of Plimouth Plantation*. Explain that it is a written description of the landing of the Pilgrims. Have students read.

**Story map [optional]:** Have student complete a story map to demonstrate their understanding of the passage. Students draw key scenes from the passage and write a sentence describing the scene.
Questions

- Is Bradford’s *Of Plimouth Plantation* a primary or secondary source? Explain why.
- Is there any reason to doubt the credibility of William Bradford’s description of the Landing?
- Did Bradford’s journal suggest that either of the paintings was more credible or accurate than the other?
- So, if you are not there to witness an event, is there any way that you can “know” what happened? Explain.

Debrief – address preconceptions. Discuss the following with students…

1. Primary sources date back to the time of the event being studied. A source may be primary or secondary based on the question one asks about an event (e.g. what happened in 1620 versus what were people’s impressions of what happened on the anniversary of the landing?).
2. We can “know” what happened without having witnessed an event. Sources provide information about the past. If sources collaborate one another, we can have more confidence that an account of the past is credible.
Appendix 1: Images of the Landing

The Landing of the Pilgrims
Painted in America by Henry Sargent (1818-1822)

The Landing of the Pilgrims.
Anonymous artist, England, 1820
Appendix 2
Our History of the Landing

Authors: ____________________________________  
___________________________________________
Appendix 3
Excerpt from Of Plimouth Plantation

Arrived at Cape Cod on the 11th of November and a few people volunteered to look for a place to live. It was thought there might be some danger but sixteen people were given permission to explore. They were well armed and led by Captain Standish. They set off on the 15th of November; and when they had marched about a mile by the seaside, they spotted five or six people with a dog coming towards them, who were savages; but they fled from them and ran up into the woods; and the English followed them, partly to see if they could speak with them, and partly to discover if there might be more of them lying in ambush. But the Indians left the woods and ran away on the sands as hard as they could so they followed them by the track of their feet for several miles. When it was night they set up a guard and rested in quiet that night; and the next morning followed their track till they had headed a great creek and so left the sands and turned another way into the woods. They followed them by guess, hoping to find their dwellings; but they soon lost both them and themselves. At length they found water and refreshed themselves, being the first New England water they had drunk.

Of Plimouth Plantation
William Bradford 1622-1650
Appendix 5
Additional Representations of the Pilgrim Landing

The Landing of the Pilgrims
by Henry A. Bacon (1877)

Painted in Salem, MA, by Michel Felice Corne (1803-1806)