



EduTrend Contents

W4C · HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY · HIGH SCHOOL

Weighing the Evidence

Evaluate sources and build a historical argument

Ages 15–18

Level: Advanced

75 minutes

Teams of 3

Activity 05

Inside: activity at a glance · step-by-step session plan · facilitator notes · 3 student worksheets · assessment checklist

ACTIVITY 05 · AT A GLANCE

Weighing the Evidence

Teams receive six to eight short primary sources on one event, such as a strike, an epidemic or a migration. The sources disagree. Teams analyse provenance, purpose and reliability, corroborate claims and reach a supported judgement on a contested question, ending with a structured written argument.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session students can:

- analyse sources using provenance, purpose, audience and context;
- distinguish between the reliability and the usefulness of a source for a specific question;
- corroborate claims across several sources and handle contradictions;
- write a sustained, evidence-based argument that acknowledges counter-arguments.

KEY WORDS

provenance · reliability · utility · bias · perspective · corroboration · interpretation · historiography · judgement

CURRICULUM LINKS

History: source analysis and interpretation (upper secondary courses). C3 Framework, Dimensions 3 and 4. English: argument writing.

1

QUESTION

What do we want to know?

2

FIND

Gather sources

3

OBSERVE

Look closely

4

INFER

What does it suggest?

5

CHECK

Compare sources

6

EXPLAIN

Tell the story

Materials (per team)

- A source pack of 6–8 short extracts on one event: for example a newspaper report, a government record, a diary entry, a photograph, a memoir written later and a historian's interpretation
- Source analysis grid (Worksheet 1)
- Highlighters in three colours
- A contested question card, for example "What was the main cause of...?"
- Worksheets 1, 2 and 3

Before the session

- Choose an event your students study and select sources that disagree. Digital archives from national libraries and archives provide free primary sources.
- Check each source's provenance and write a short citation for it.
- Write one contested question that the sources can help answer.
- Prepare a model analysis of one source.

SAFETY

Some sources may be distressing or use language of their time. Preview the pack, warn students and set ground rules.

ACTIVITY 05 · SESSION PLAN

Step by step

The key shift is from “Is this source biased?” to “How useful is this source for this question, given who made it and why?”

Time	What happens	Say or ask
0–10 min Frame	Present the contested question and a model analysis of one source.	<i>“Can a biased source still be useful?”</i>
10–35 min Analyse	Teams complete the analysis grid for every source, highlighting claims, evidence and perspective.	<i>“Who made this, when, for whom and why?”</i>
35–50 min Corroborate	Teams map where sources agree and disagree and explain contradictions (Worksheet 2).	<i>“Why might these two accounts differ?”</i>
50–70 min Argue	Individuals write a structured argument answering the question (Worksheet 3).	<i>“What is your strongest evidence, and what is the best counter-argument?”</i>
70–75 min Review	Pairs swap arguments and give feedback using the success criteria.	<i>“Where is the judgement clearest?”</i>

CHALLENGE CARD (print or copy onto the board)

Answer a contested historical question in a structured argument, using at least four sources, evaluating their reliability and addressing a counter-argument.

ACTIVITY 05 · FACILITATOR NOTES

The history in brief

Historians evaluate sources by asking about provenance (who made it and when), purpose (why it was made), audience and context. Reliability describes how far we can trust a source's claims; utility describes how useful it is for a particular question. A source written to persuade may be unreliable about events but very useful as evidence of attitudes.

Corroboration means checking claims against other independent sources. Where sources contradict each other, historians explain why, for example different viewpoints, access to information or later memory. Historical interpretations also differ because historians ask different questions and weigh evidence differently; this debate is called historiography.

Common ideas to listen for

- "Primary sources are always more reliable than secondary ones." Reliability depends on the source, not the category.
- "A biased source is useless." Bias itself can be evidence of views at the time.
- "The truth is somewhere in the middle." Judgement must follow the weight of evidence, not a compromise.

Adapting the activity

Support

Reduce the pack to four sources and provide a paragraph frame: claim, evidence, evaluation, link.

Stretch

Students compare two historians' interpretations of the same event and explain how their use of sources leads to different conclusions.

WORKSHEET 1

Source analysis grid

Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

Complete one row per source.

Analysis

Source	Provenance	Purpose and audience	Key claim	Reliability / utility
A				
B				
C				
D				
E				
F				

WORKSHEET 2

Corroboration map

Where do the sources agree and disagree?

Agreement

Contradiction and possible explanations

Map of links between sources



Draw sources as boxes; join agreeing sources with solid lines and conflicting ones with dashed lines.

WORKSHEET 3

Historical argument

Answer the question with a clear judgement.

Judgement

Argument and evidence

Counter-argument and response

Conclusion

FOR THE TEACHER

Assessment checklist

Use during the session. One sheet covers up to eight students; copy as needed.

Student	Evaluates provenance and utility	Corroborates across sources	Sustains a supported judgement

Suggested codes: W = working towards · E = expected · G = greater depth

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Weighing the Evidence is a sample activity from the EduTrend Contents W4C History & Archaeology programme (high school, level: advanced). Every activity in the programme follows the same format: a practical challenge, a clear session plan, facilitator notes and ready-to-print worksheets, so that teachers, club leaders and parents can run it without extra preparation.

Full 15-, 20- and 32-week programmes are available from EduStore at edutrend.org.

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