

Source Sense-Making – Teaching Strategy

Quick Overview

An inquiry-based strategy that invites students to closely observe a historical source, reflect on its meaning, and generate questions. By moving intentionally from observation to interpretation to curiosity, students practice critical thinking, evidence-based reasoning, and historical inquiry.

Skill Objective

Students will...

- Make careful observations about visual or text historical sources.
- Distinguish between observation and interpretation.
- Ask relevant, thoughtful questions grounded in evidence.
- Support interpretations using details from the source.

Content Objective

Students will...

- Describe what a historical source reveals about a specific time period or event.
- Explain how evidence from a source supports inferences about the past.
- Identify gaps in knowledge that require further investigation.

Civics Skills Connection

Inquiry Skills:

- **Inquiry based learning:** Student involvement and question asking, self-expression, inquiry learning encourages construction of knowledge for selves

Prep ahead

- Select compelling visual or text sources that invite close observation and multiple interpretations.
- Decide whether students will respond individually, in pairs, or as a whole class.
- Prepare a recording format (chart paper, graphic organizer, or digital document) with three columns: Notice, Interpret, Ask.

Strategy Steps

1. Present the source to students without background information.
2. Notice: Students observe the source closely and list only what they can directly see (no interpretations).
3. Interpret: Students explain what they think is happening or what the source suggests, using evidence from their observations.

4. Ask: Students generate questions about the source, the people involved, or the broader historical context.
5. Facilitate discussion, prompting students to clarify observations, justify interpretations, and build on peers' questions.
6. Use student "ask" questions to guide further research or instruction.

Customizations

- **Option 1: Share it**
 - Students share their Notice, Interpret, and Ask. responses with peers. The class compares observations and interpretations to highlight how evidence can lead to multiple understandings.
- **Option 2: Extend it**
 - Students select one "ask" question to investigate using additional sources, turning curiosity into formal inquiry.
- **Option 3: Assess it**
 - Collect student responses and assess careful observation, evidence-based thinking, and question quality rather than factual correctness.
- **Option 4: Write it**
 - Students use their Notice, Interpret, Ask notes as a prewriting activity for a paragraph, reflection, or short argument.
- **Option 5: Connect it**
 - Students link the source to a modern issue, local history, or personal experience to strengthen relevance and engagement.