



Primary Document Analysis Organizer:

Working in a small group you are going to complete a critical challenge: finding evidence to support a theory or case about why Thomas Widd's story was lost. You are going to start by analyzing a series of historical documents. These documents all reflect the life and education of deaf people in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Once you have read and analyzed all of the documents your group will then decide which ones best support your assigned theory as to why Thomas Widd's story was lost.

You will present this theory to your class in the form of a poster. Each poster will contain a brief (2 sentence maximum) explanation of your theory. It will also identify four or five pieces of evidence from the primary documents that support your theory.

Supporting your case.

A key part of this critical challenge is to support your group's theory as to why the Thomas Widd Story was lost. It is suggested that a good case will:

1. Use several different pieces of evidence.
2. Use evidence that is clearly and directly connected to the case.
3. Use evidence that is credible.
4. Draw logical inferences from the evidence.

Working with Documents: Analyzing Sources for Credibility & Drawing Inferences.

As you remember from the previous lessons you have completed, no primary source on its own – not even eyewitness accounts and photographs – provides “the whole truth” about history. Every source comprises a piece of the puzzle that needs to be interrogated or interpreted before its possible meanings can be assessed. The more you know about why, where, when and by whom the document was created, the better job you will do of interpreting it. In order to help you analyze your assigned documents you are asked to answer all of the questions on the organizers below for each docu-

ment. The first organizer asks you a series of questions about the context in which the primary documents were created. These “sourcing” questions should help to ensure that you think about the credibility of the documents. The second organizer builds upon the first and will assist you to identify different types of evidence within the documents.

A note on “bias”.

As you look at some of the documents you may be tempted to argue that a particular document is not useful because the author was “biased” in some way. Please try to ignore this temptation. In reality, we all have biases, such as the desire to present ourselves in a favorable light, and many of the documents we create are biased in some way. So, for example, the pictures and details you share on social media are likely to be “biased” as they try to depict your experiences in a particular way. Future historians will look at documents from social media and recognize that their format (e.g., a picture shared publically) and purpose (e.g., to make you look interesting) influenced their content, but this does not preclude these traces from telling historians about you. In fact, just the opposite is the case: the assumptions, beliefs and ‘biases’ revealed in the document tell historians a great deal about people's attitudes at the time. The more you know about how the document was created – when, where, why the document was created, and by whom - the better you will be able to surmise what it is telling you about the time and place. This is to say, you have to approach all documents carefully and critically, much like you might have to consider the motives of friends, family, and strangers that you converse with on a daily basis.

	Who Wrote this Document? What role or position did this person play (e.g., gov- ernment official, concerned citizen)?	Do you know for whom it was written? Or, what its intended audience was?	Do you know, or can you guess, why the author wrote it? What might be the goal or purpose?
Document 1			
Document 2			
Document 3			
Document 4			

	Claims	Inferences & Interpretations
Document 1		
Document 2		
Document 3		
Document 4		

“**Claims**” are the “**facts**” or statements you find in the documents. So, for example, Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Widd both make many statements about marriage between deaf individuals (e.g., how many of these marriages have occurred).

“**Inferences & Interpretations**” are the conclusions that you draw based upon your interpretation of the evidence in the documents. So, for example, the fact that there are several documents discussing the public’s concern about deaf people marrying and having deaf children can lead to the inferences that: 1. The public was concerned about the deaf population getting bigger. 2. The public had a negative opinion of deafness. 3. The public wanted to help solve what they saw as the ‘problem’ of deafness