Locate Information in Primary Sources

1. Focus

Explain Primary Sources

Say: When you do research for your biography, one type of source, called primary, will be especially important to your study. Primary sources are any documents or other evidence created during the time that you are studying. They contain original information that has not been interpreted, or explained, by others. Primary sources give you an inside view to a time or person. For a biography, primary sources might include the subject's diaries, photographs, autobiographies, letters, and so on. Also, you might interview a person who knew your subject. Today we're going to practice locating information in primary sources together.

Model Locating Information in Primary Sources

As you think aloud, model writing interview questions using chart paper or the interactive whiteboard resources.

Sample Think-Aloud

Say: I am going to write a biography about my father. I have to think about primary sources I can use. I don’t think my father kept a diary, so that isn’t a possibility. But maybe my mother has some of his letters. I know we have photo albums, so I can look through those for good photographs. Photographs would help me know what he looked like when he was younger. I can interview my father and my mother. My grandparents can tell me about his life before and after he moved to America. It might be a good idea to interview some of Dad’s friends, too. They might give me a different perspective on his personality.

Say: Before I conduct any of these interviews, I should write down the questions I want to ask. I will want to ask different people different questions. I want to ask questions that will give me the information I need to write my biography. What would I want to ask my mother? I want to know how she and Dad met. Dad is a good athlete, so I want to ask about what sports he played. And he’s a musician, so I want to ask about that, too.

Interview with my mother:

Q: How did you and Dad meet?
Q: What sports did Dad play?
Q: Can you tell me about Dad and music?

Modeling Text
2. Rehearse

Practice Locating Information in Primary Sources

Invite students to use the subjects they decided on for their biographies and create a list of possible primary sources. If they are going to conduct interviews, ask them to list the people they want to interview and to write at least three questions. **Say:** Remember that primary sources are any documents or other evidence from the time that you are studying. They contain information that is the closest to the subject.

If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Ideas

Bring students together and invite volunteers to share the ideas they generated about possible primary sources to research. Discuss the importance of using primary sources for biographies.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** Today we learned about primary sources and about locating information in primary sources. Using primary sources is an important part of researching your biography subject because this information is the closest to your subject.

Encourage students to locate primary sources they can use to research their biographies during independent writing time. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite students to share the primary sources they used that provided them with relevant information for their biographies.

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**Strategies to Support ELs**

**Beginning**
Pair beginning ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity. Keep in mind that they will not be able to contribute many ideas orally. You will want to work with them individually to reinforce concepts while other students write independently.

**Intermediate and Advanced**
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the small-group activity.