



PRIMARY SOURCES AT THE POE MUSEUM

6th-12th grade | 30 min

<p><u>Program Description:</u></p> <p>This teaching guide and activity seeks to introduce primary sources to students. Students will understand how to analyze, evaluate, and interpret primary sources to make conclusions about the past. The primary sources featured are from The Poe Museum's collection. This primary source activity can be used as a guided teaching plan or as an independent reading activity.</p>	<p><u>Student Objectives:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Students will understand the various ways history is recorded and remembered (artifacts, writings, oral history) and the role of the historian in preserving and communicating history.2. Students will identify, analyze, evaluate, and interpret primary sources to draw historical conclusions using historical thinking techniques such as context, causation, continuity & change, and compare & contrast.3. Students will consider their own history and discuss in what ways they or their family's history is remembered.	<p><u>Virginia Standards of Learning:</u></p> <p>4th grade: Virginia Studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skills VS. V.6 <p>5th grade: U.S. History to 1865</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skills USI, UIS.8 <p>11th grade: Virginia and U.S. History</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skills VUS
<p><u>Materials and Resources Included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Primary source lesson plan• Primary source worksheet• Poe Museum collection item info sheets		

PRIMARY SOURCE LESSON PLAN

WHAT IS A PRIMARY SOURCE?

Primary sources are firsthand accounts of the past, meaning they directly witness the past. Examples of primary sources include letters, diary entries, newspapers, clothes, buildings, photographs, or any object or document created by a person who witnessed a past event. An example of a written primary source is Edgar Allan Poe's letter to his wife. An example of an object as a primary source is Poe's key.

Primary sources are different than **secondary sources** which use primary sources to write about the past. Examples of secondary sources include articles, biographies, and books that are written about the past from a later time. An example of a secondary source is a biography of Edgar Allan Poe's life.

WHY ARE PRIMARY SOURCES IMPORTANT?

Primary sources are our direct connections to reconstruct the past. Without them, we would not know what daily life or great historical events were like. Objects and architecture can show us how items were made in the past, how they were used, and who would have used them. Objects can be especially useful when no written records of an individual exist. Written primary sources highlight a person's perspective of how they viewed the time they lived in.

Both types of primary sources can show **bias** (a perspective that is skewed in favor or disfavor). It is important to analyze primary sources and acknowledge any biases in them. Looking at multiple sources can provide varying perspectives of the same event. Additionally, it is equally important to acknowledge your own bias in how you analyze a source.

By analyzing, evaluating, and interpreting primary sources, we can see how a simple key or letter can not only tell us about who used these objects, but can also tell us about the larger cultural and historical events happening at that time.

ANALYZING, EVALUATING, AND INTERPRETING PRIMARY SOURCES

To **analyze** a source, begin by noting what you already know about an object. Examine the source closely and look at every detail. Use guiding questions such as: what is this source? Who used it? When and where was it made? You may not be able to answer all of these questions with a given source and that is okay! A primary source may not always give us all the answers we might want.

When analyzing a source, it is also helpful to look through the lens of **historical themes**. Historical themes are certain categories or perspectives you can view history from. They include gender, race,

social status/job, economic, political, culture (food, art, etc.), family, technology/science, and preservation. When analyzing a source, see if you can identify any of these themes within that source. You will likely not find a source that has all of these themes but try to identify two to three. Ask questions such as: Is this source used by a specific gender and why? Can anyone use this source or only people of certain status or wealth? Is this object used by a person of a certain age? How does this source show the change of technology? Why was this object preserved but not others?

While you analyze a source, you will also **evaluate** it. As we learned, sometimes sources will show bias. It is important to identify any bias in the source to discover one-sided arguments or incorrect information. All sources have bias, because all people have bias, but it is important to acknowledge that bias before interpreting your source.

After you analyze and evaluate a source, you'll **interpret** it. Interpreting a source means explaining the bigger picture of the source—how or why this source contributes to history. To do that, we are going to use the Four C's of Interpretation to learn more about analyzing primary sources.

Context

First and most importantly, is **context**. Looking at the context means seeing what big events or trends are happening within the time period of your source and how your source can represent those events/trends. Context should be applied to every source you analyze. For example, a yellow and purple ribbon from the 19th century may just seem like a piece of fabric. However, by using the context of other historical events happening in the late 19th century, you can interpret this ribbon as possibly a symbol of the women's suffrage movement that used yellow and purple to symbolize their movement.

Causation

Causation determines causes that led to the source's creation and the reasons for those causes. To find the causes of a source, ask questions such as: What event(s) led to this source being created? What relevant event(s) took place when this source was used/created?

Compare & Contrast

Another interpretation technique is **compare & contrast**. To compare and contrast a source you will need to find another similar source from the same time period of your original source. Ask questions such as: What is similar about these sources? What is different? Why are these similarities and differences important?

Continuity & Change

Lastly, **continuity & change** is another technique you can use to interpret a source. Much like compare and contrast, you will need to look at another primary source(s) for this technique. This other source(s) can be from before or after when your original source was made. What has stayed the same between the two sources? What has changed and how significant are these changes?

CONCLUSION

Now compile your findings from analyzing and interpreting your source to make an educated conclusion about the past! Primary sources are essential to historians to piece together individual's stories from the past. Even today, objects and writing can represent who we are and the world we live in. Take a look around your room, your classroom, your community, and think about what objects and documents might be left behind for historians to learn about you and the world today.

ACTIVITY DIRECTIONS:

Take a look at the PRIMARY SOURCES AT THE POE MUSEUM document. It contains five sources from the Poe Museum's collection. Individually or in groups, students will analyze, evaluate, and interpret these sources using the provided information and guiding questions. Students will then fill out the PRIMARY SOURCE WORKSHEET for their corresponding source. Not all of the questions will be able to be answered and that is okay! Primary sources do not always give us all of the information we need. This activity encourages students to see what information they can gather from primary sources first before they move on to additional sources.

PRIMARY SOURCES AT THE POE MUSEUM

EDGAR ALLAN POE'S KEY (365.b)

(See 3D version at: <https://skfb.ly/N7Sn>)



Object Info: Iron key found in Edgar Allan Poe's pocket at the time of his death (c. 1849). This key opens Poe's traveling trunk (365.a). Poe left the trunk in Richmond at the time of his death.

Guiding Questions: How has this object changed over time? What does this key tell us about Edgar Allan Poe?

ELMIRA ROYSTER SHELTON'S ENGAGEMENT RING (2021.1.2)



Object Info: Elmira Royster Shelton was Edgar Allan Poe's first and last love. Edgar and Elmira's first engagement was broken off by her father when they were teenagers. They rekindle their love years later in 1849. Poe proposed shortly after with this ring, however, the couple would never marry. Poe passed away just ten days before their wedding. Elmira gave this ring to Poe's sister Rosalie, after Poe's death. It stayed in the Poe family until 2012.

Guiding Questions: Why might have Elmira preserved this ring after Poe's death? What keepsakes do you have from your family?

EGDAR ALLAN POE'S POCKET WATCH (2021.1.1)



Object Info: This is an 18k gold key-wound, open-face pocket watch owned by Edgar Allan Poe. It is engraved "Echappement A Cylindre En / Aiguilley / Edgar A. Poe / Pierre Huit Trous En Rabis." Poe used this watch until 1843, when he sold it to pay off his debts.

Guiding Questions: How does this watch show Poe's change of Poe's wealth over his life? How does this object show the advancements of technology from Poe's time to today?

EDGAR ALLAN POE'S WAISTCOAT (1995.46.1)



Object Info: This is a silk, cream color waistcoat owned by Edgar Allan Poe. It is embroidered, buttoned, and has one pocket on the right side, and two on the left. The underarm areas are stained. It is unknown when he purchased this waistcoat.

Guiding Questions: What image might Poe have wanted to convey by wearing this waistcoat? Is this waistcoat similar to clothes people wear today? Why or why not?

EDGAR ALLAN POE TO EDWARD VALENTINE (NOVEMBER 20TH, 1848) (2019.30)

New-York - Nov. 20 - 1848

Dear Sir,

After a long and bitter struggle with poverty, and the thousand evils which attend it, I find myself at length in a position to establish myself permanently, and to triumph over all difficulties, if I could but obtain, from some friend, a very little pecuniary aid. In looking around me for such a friend, I can think of no one, with the exception of yourself, whom I see the least prospect of interesting in my behalf - and, even, as regards yourself, I confess that my hope is feeble. In fact, I have been so long depressed that it will be a most difficult thing for me to rise - and rise I never can without such aid as I now entreat at your hands. I call to mind, however, that, during my childhood, you were very kind to me, and, I believe, very fond of me. For this reason and because I really do not know where else to turn for the assistance I so much need at this moment, I venture to throw myself upon your generosity and ask you to lend me \$200. With this sum I should be able to take the first steps in an en-

Object Info: This letter is written to Edward Valentine from Edgar Allan Poe in 1848. Edward Valentine was Poe's foster mother's cousin.

Guiding Questions: What is Poe's perspective of Valentine? What might be Valentine's perspective of Poe?

Transcription: New-York — Nov. 20 — 1848. Dear Sir, After a long and bitter struggle with illness, poverty, and the thousand evils which attend them, I find myself at length in a position to establish myself permanently, and to triumph over all difficulties, if I could but obtain, from some friend, a very little pecuniary aid. In looking around me for such a friend, I can think of no one, with the exception of yourself, whom I see the least prospect of interesting in my behalf ... I call to mind, however, that, during my childhood, you were very kind to me, and, I believe, very fond of me. For this reason and because I really do not know where else to turn for the assistance I so much need at this moment, I venture to throw myself upon your generosity and ask you to lend me \$200. With this sum I should be able to take the first steps in an enterprise where there can be no doubt of my success, and which, if successful, would, in one or two years, ensure me fortune and very great influence... Most sincerely yours, Edgar A. Poe. Edward Valentine Esq

THE OLD STONE HOUSE, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA (1730's)



The Old Stone House (1865)

The Old Stone House (Present)

Object Info: This building is the oldest standing structure in Richmond, Virginia. This home was built for the Ege family. Today, the Old Stone House is a part of the Poe Museum.

Guiding Questions: Why are some buildings preserved and others are not? What can the Old Stone House tell us about Richmond in the 18th century? What can it tell us about Richmond in the 21st century?

IRONS (2020.10.1.a-b)



Object Info: These irons belonged to John and Francis Allan, Poe's foster parents, at their home Moldavia.

Guiding Questions: Who in the Allan home would have used this object? Would anyone use this object or only certain people? How does object show the change of technology over the past 150 years?

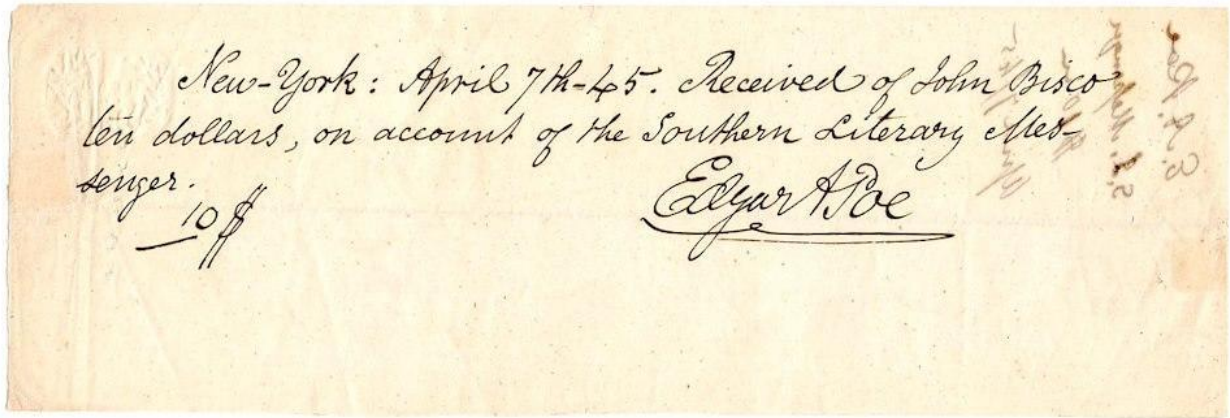
POE'S SISTER'S HANDKERCHIEF (17)



Object Info: This handkerchief case is painted and embroidered by Edgar Allan Poe's sister Rosalie Mackenzie Poe. Handkerchiefs were used to cover coughs for those suffering with tuberculosis. Both Poe's mother and wife passed away of tuberculosis.

Guiding Questions: How might this object have influence Poe's depiction of women in his works?

POE'S RECEIPT (2021.1.10)

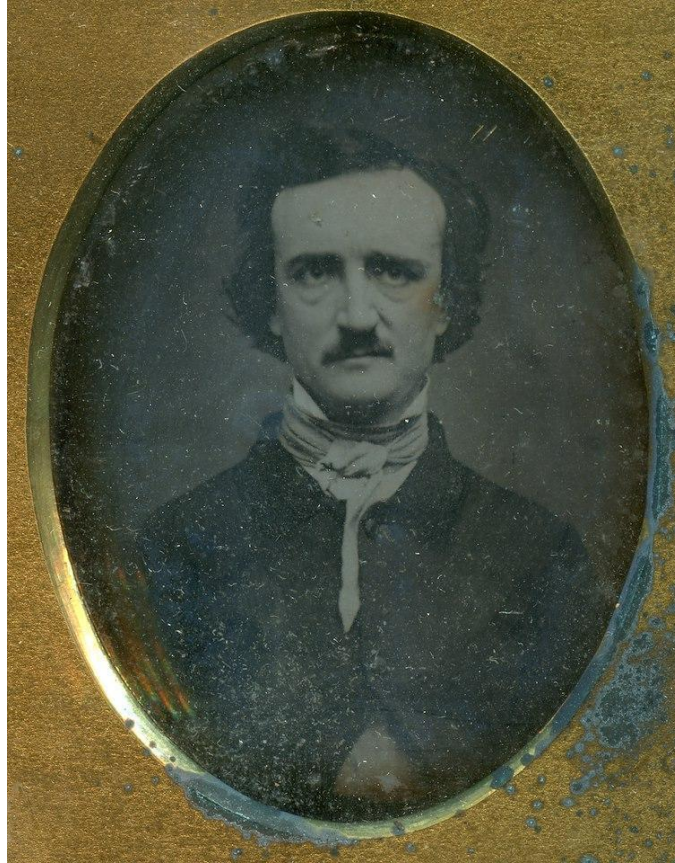


New-York: April 7th-45. Received of John Bisco
ten dollars, on account of the Southern Literary Messenger.
10\$
Edgar Poe

Object Info: Poe received this receipt for publishing "The Raven" in 1845.

Guiding Questions: What does this object tell us about Poe's career in the 1840's?

DAGUERRETYPE OF POE (600)



Object Info: This daguerreotype of Edgar Allan Poe was made by Samuel Masury in Providence, Rhode Island. This is a copy of the 1848 "Ultima Thule" daguerreotype, which disappeared around 1860. The present copy was probably made before 1854. It is housed in a dark leather case with pale red colored fabric on left and the daguerreotype on the right in a pebbled oval brass mat.

Guiding Questions: How has this image contributed to Poe's legacy today? In what ways has Poe be represented in modern media?

PRIMARY SOURCE WORKSHEET

Analyze and Identify

What is this source? Describe it. What color is it? Is it big or small? Have you seen an object like this before?

When and where was it made?

Why was it created?

Who created it? Are there multiple people?

Can anyone use this source? Or can only people of a certain gender, class, race, job etc. use this source?

How was it made? What is it made of?

Is this source sentimental to someone?

Does this source have any text? If so, what does it say?

Evaluate

Is this source truthful and reliable?

What is this source not telling us? Does further research need to be done?

Interpret

Context: What does this object show about larger historical events/trends at the time?

Cause and Effect: What event(s) led to this source being created? What bigger, historical event(s) happened when this source was used/created?

Compare and Contrast: What is similar about this source to another source? What is different?

Continuity: Is this source still used today? If so, how has it stayed the same? How has it changed? If not, why is it no longer used today?

Conclusion

Summarize your findings to draw historical conclusions about the past. Be sure to answer the guiding questions above in your answer. What information do you still need? What other primary sources would be helpful to look at?