

Historical Document-Based Learning: Student process Guide

Choose one of the historical documents from the *Mavericks: An Incorrigible History of Alberta* website. Read any information about the document and examine it. Answer some or all of the following questions as they apply to each document. Complete your work in a journal format, and add any other information or questions that may not be included in this guide.

A historical document can tell historians a great deal about what it was truly like to live in a certain time. Letters, diaries, and journals tell a great deal about the writer, providing personal insight into how they viewed their lives, yet may also leave out important information. Hunt for details that offer extra information about the writer of the document, and make sure you ask questions about the document you are investigating.

1. Type of Document

- What kind of document is it? (A letter, speech, press release, report, advertisement, telegram, newspaper, or something else?)
- Are there any unique physical qualities to the document? (Exciting letterhead? Handwritten? Stamps? Other markings?)
- When was the document written?
- Where was it written?

2. The Author and the Audience

- Who is the author(s) or creator(s) of the document?
- Who are they? Do they have a specific position or title?
- What authority does the author(s) have to write about this topic?
- Is there a bias in the author's writing toward a certain viewpoint? Do they have a specific opinion on the topic? What might have influenced their point of view?
- Who was the intended audience(s)? Who was supposed to read or hear it?
- How might the audience(s) have reacted to the content of the text?

3. Content

- What is the content of the document about? What is the topic of the written text?
- What are the main points of the document?
- Does the author provide evidence to back up what they are saying in the document?
- What story does it tell us about life at the time and how they lived?

4. Context and Purpose

- Was it written for a specific occasion?
- What events or things going on at the time might have affected the writing of the document?
- What is the purpose of the document? Why was it written in the first place?
- Did the author(s) have an “unspoken” or “hidden” agenda in writing the document?
- Would someone gain an advantage from this document? Does it help them in some way?
- Would someone be harmed by the content of this document? How?

5. Importance

- Why do you think this document was written?
- What is important about this document? Why examine it?
- What have you learned from analyzing this document?
- Why is what we learn about the past from this document important?

6. Interpretation/Conclusions

- What does the document tell us about the values, ethics, and difficulties of the writer(s)?
- What does the document tell us about the life of the writer(s)?
- What questions do you still have about the document, its writer, or its audience?