



Make Your Own Primary Source

Much of what we know about the past comes from **Primary Sources**. A primary source is anything that is from the time period that it is describing.

Diaries, letters, notebooks, and journals (like those in our collection at the American Civil War Museum) are kinds of primary sources that help us understand the Civil War.

They were written by the men, women, and children who lived through what we study as history today. Their experiences at important events, or even notes about their everyday lives, help us to better understand what happened 150 years ago.



EXAMPLES

“There are many people who do not know what some of the colored women did during the war.”

[Susie King Taylor](#) in her book *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp*. Susie’s account of her experience is the only published memoir from an African American woman during the War.

“At one time there was a sudden uprising of the nursery contingent. They fought, screamed, laughed. It was Bedlam broke loose.”

[Mary Chesnut](#) describing a carriage ride with the children of Jefferson Davis. Mary’s diary entries talk about life on the Homefront and help prove that children haven’t changed much in 150 years.

“I had made several attempts to join the regiment but, not being over fifteen years of age and small in size, was rejected”

[William Bircher](#) trying to enlist in the Army at age 15. Many young people lived through the Civil War and wrote about their thoughts and feelings as things happened around and to them.

DOING YOUR PART

Many things are changing around us right now. In the future, we will look back on this moment and want to understand it better. That understanding can come from you in the form of your very own primary source document.

Will you help future historians understand you?

ACTIVITIES

Take pictures of your house and the things you do each day. This can give people clues about your life, including what things you do or how you live.

Draw your world. Drawings are different than pictures because they can show how *you* see the world. You get to pick what is important and make it real for everyone.

Send a letter to your friends and your family. Even if they are next door, a written letter is something that people can hold onto and read over and over again -- including historians years from now.

Write about your day. Even when it seems boring, writing down what happened today, could help people who read it understand what you are thinking. Sometimes that reader is the future you!



Need help getting your writing started? Here are some easy questions that you can answer. Where you go from there is up to you!

- **Describe what's around you:** Where are you? What is it like? What do you notice?
- **Describe what you are doing:** What have you done already and what do you plan to do? Are you doing what you really want to be doing? Why or why not?
- **Describe other people:** Who are you interacting with and why? How do their experiences compare with your own? Is anyone not around that you wish was?
- **Describe your thoughts and feelings:** What are you thinking about? How are you feeling? What's making you think about these things or feel this way?
- **Describe what's normal and what's different:** Have things changed lately? Why?

Most importantly, no matter how you do it, **tell your story.** You never know who will need to understand your point of view.