Teaching Inquiry with Primary Sources
(http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly/inquiry_learning/article.html)

Why is inquiry important for student learning?

Inquiry is a process of active learning that is driven by questioning and critical thinking. The understandings that students develop through inquiry are deeper and longer lasting than any pre-packaged knowledge delivered by teachers to students.

Inquiry-based learning follows a process that progresses through phases, but is recursive and reflective throughout. The six phases and their thought processes are detailed in the following diagram.
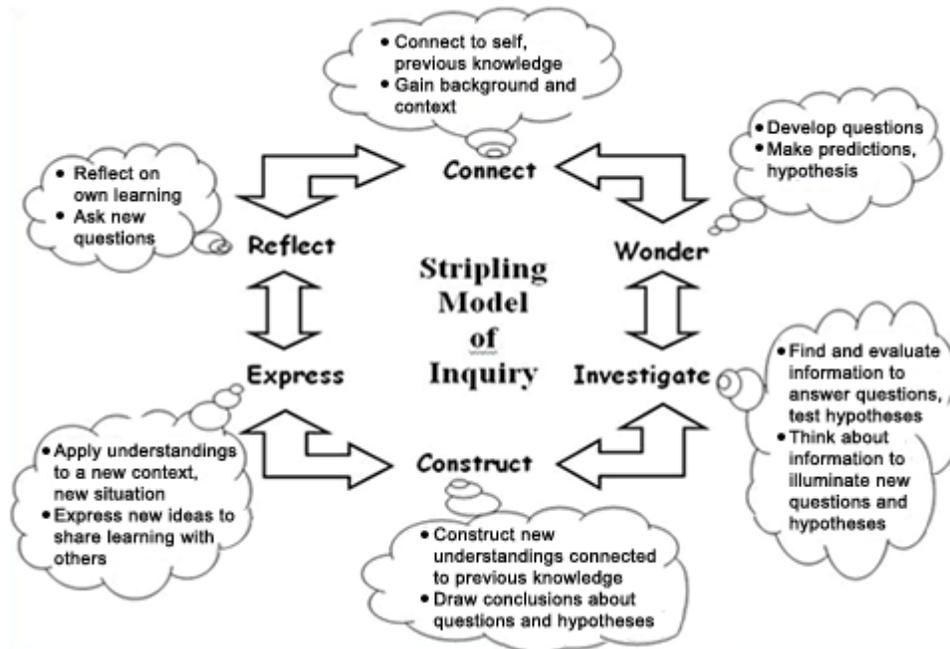
Stripling Model of Inquiry
pdf version of Stripling Model of Inquiry

Why should primary sources be used for inquiry?

By their very nature, primary sources engage students in inquiry. First, they transform the learning process by provoking critical thinking: questioning; making inferences; interpreting different points of view; using critical thinking skills to analyze and evaluate; drawing conclusions; and pulling together disparate pieces of evidence to think conceptually.

Second, primary sources engage students both emotionally and personally because the sources represent authentic voices and images. Students connect to the people who produced or were subjects of the primary sources as they rarely, if ever, connect to textbooks and other secondary sources.

Finally, the conflicting nature of primary sources helps students see the complexity of issues and recognize the importance of context for credible interpretation. This multiple-perspective approach is particularly important for historical inquiry.

How can primary sources be used during the phases of inquiry?

Primary sources effectively support learning throughout the inquiry process when teachers and librarians select appropriate sources, teach students essential thinking skills, and carefully structure learning

experiences. A brief example will help illustrate the use of primary sources. An American History teacher and school librarian have collaborated to develop a unit on immigration from 1850 to 1950, focusing on the essential question of: How does society's treatment of minority groups during a crisis reveal deeply embedded societal attitudes and values?

Connect: Primary sources can be used during the initial phase of inquiry to open students' minds to the possibility of interpreting and questioning an information source, in contrast to secondary sources that shut off questioning because they appear to be authoritative and complete. At the beginning of the unit, students are presented with two to three brief documents that reveal conflicting points of view about the treatment of Chinese immigrants in the aftermath of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.

Connect Phase of Inquiry		
Guidelines for Selecting Primary Sources	Skills and Strategies to Teach	Cautions to Consider
Find primary sources that:	Show students how to:	Be aware that:
Connect to major theme or concept Represent alternative perspectives Present conflicting evidence	Identify prior knowledge and misconceptions Identify point of view and its effect on information presented Use concept mapping to develop framework of overall themes, major concepts Make valid inferences Develop context through acquiring background knowledge	Lack of context and background knowledge makes interpretation of primary sources difficult Students without a clear conceptual focus may see primary sources as disconnected bits of information Students may develop misinterpretations based on their limited prior exposure

Wonder: Students should develop focus questions to guide their inquiry investigations. In the sample unit, students are provoked to ask probing questions when they see published and official documents that advocate for equitable treatment of the Chinese after the earthquake and other published documents advocating for the removal and exclusion of the Chinese.

Wonder Phase of Inquiry		
Guidelines for Selecting Primary Sources	Skills and Strategies to Teach	Cautions to Consider
Find primary sources that:	Show students how to:	Be aware that:
Contain provocative or conflicting images and texts Represent major facets of overall topic or theme Provide enough detail to invite interpretation, provoke questions	Develop focus questions at different levels of thought that lead to manageable investigations Connect focus questions to larger theme or essential question	Students tend to use primary sources as illustrations only, without probing deeper into their meaning Students tend to be enticed by graphic images and might ignore relevant text-based sources

Investigate: Students will use a combination of primary and secondary sources to pursue their questions in depth. To help students locate high-quality digital primary sources from multiple perspectives, teachers and librarians may want to provide the URLs for specific digital collections or sources as well as guide students to find their own sources.

Investigate Phase of Inquiry		
Guidelines for Selecting Primary Sources	Skills and Strategies to Teach	Cautions to Consider
Find primary sources that:	Show students how to:	Be aware that:
Represent a variety of formats Offer different perspectives Provide in-depth information on relevant topics and questions Are appropriate for students' reading levels Allow students to corroborate evidence	Determine the authority, purpose, point of view, and accuracy of sources Corroborate evidence by using multiple sources Take notes on main ideas and supporting evidence Make inferences Interpret evidence	Students' lack of content knowledge makes valid interpretation of primary sources difficult; teachers must carefully scaffold this thinking process

Construct: This phase is probably the most difficult for both teachers and students because it involves teaching students to organize and draw conclusions from the information they have found, to confront conflicting ideas and form their own evidence-based opinions, and to be ready to take a stand and defend it. Students' conclusions should relate to the essential question of the inquiry unit. Teachers and librarians may want to model how to form an argument by taking a previously studied primary source and analyzing it with the class, not for content, but for the development of a line of thinking with corroborating evidence. An editorial, a political speech or debate, a documentary film, a photo essay or collection of photos around a theme would work well.

Construct Phase of Inquiry		
Guidelines for Selecting Primary Sources	Skills and Strategies to Teach	Cautions to Consider
Find primary sources that:	Show students how to:	Be aware that:
Connect to essential question and theme Represent a point of view with supporting evidence Show explicit development of a line of thinking Represent a variety of formats	Organize information into main ideas and supporting evidence Compare evidence for alternative viewpoints Draw conclusions and forming opinions based on evidence	Students may have limited experience with drawing valid conclusions or forming evidence-based opinions; they will need support and modeling of the thinking processes involved

Express The *Express* phase is essential to inquiry learning because, when students develop a product to demonstrate their new understandings and share with others, they solidify their own learning. Students should know how they will be expected to demonstrate their learning at the beginning of any inquiry-based assignment so that they can find appropriate evidence as they conduct their investigations. For example, producing a feature article for a class magazine will require both images and text.

Students will be more motivated and engaged throughout the inquiry experience if they are assigned relevant and creative products, like conducting a mock Oprah Winfrey interview, producing an article for an electronic magazine, or developing a political ad campaign. Teachers and librarians can select primary sources from today, like television footage, web site articles and campaign posters, as authentic examples.

Express Phase of Inquiry		
Guidelines for Selecting Primary Sources	Skills and Strategies to Teach	Cautions to Consider
Find primary sources that:	Show students how to:	Be aware that:
Represent a variety of formats, if appropriate Include authentic examples of the format that students are expected to produce Connect to the types of communication that students recognize and relate to	Think creatively to generate an original approach to develop a final product Employ writing, speaking, and visualizing skills appropriate for developing an inquiry-based product Use technology to create a final product	Research has shown that students must be taught the skills needed for creating products (especially those involving technology) or they will ignore content learning and focus on production only

Reflect: Reflection is embedded throughout the inquiry process, but it is especially important at the end of a learning experience for students to think about what they have learned about the topic or idea and about inquiry itself. Although there are predictable points during inquiry at which students tend to become frustrated or unsure, students will benefit from analyzing their own challenges and successes. Inquiry is a cycle. Each inquiry experience should lead students to ask themselves some final reflective questions that propel them into further inquiry:

- What new questions do I now want to answer about the topic or idea?
- What inquiry skills do I need to work on to improve my next project?

Reflect Phase of Inquiry		
Guidelines for Selecting Primary Sources	Skills and Strategies to Teach	Cautions to Consider
Find models that:	Show students how to:	Be aware that:
Exemplify high-quality, student-created products or real-world examples	Use reflective questioning Use metacognitive thinking strategies Solicit peer consultation and feedback	Reflection should not be confused with evaluation and the assignment of a grade. Even students who have received a high grade should reflect on their process and product and set goals for future inquiry

What final tips help teachers and librarians use primary sources successfully for inquiry-based teaching and learning?

Primary sources will play an increasingly important role in inquiry because of the expansion of digitization and the development of valuable digital collections like those available from the Library of Congress. To successfully use primary sources in inquiry:

- Focus the inquiry experience on big ideas and themes;
- Frame the learning experience with an inquiry process;
- Explicitly teach and scaffold the critical thinking and information skills of inquiry;
- Confront students with both conflicting and corroborating evidence; and
- Engage students in locating and interpreting primary sources on their own

  Using primary sources during inquiry-based learning empowers students to develop deep understandings of academic content and a portfolio of thinking strategies and skills that are essential for lifelong learning.

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"Inquiry-Based Learning." In *Curriculum Connections Through the Library: Principles and Practice*, edited by Barbara K. Stripling and Sandra Hughes-Hassell. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2003.
"Inquiry: Inquiring Minds Want To Know." *School Library Media Activities Monthly* 25 [September 2008]: 50-52.
"Inquiry-Based Teaching and Learning: The Role of the Library Media Specialist." *School Library Media Activities Monthly* 25 [September 2008]: 2.