

## Primary Sources for Ideas

Both the past and the present can be revealed to us in many different ways. We watch movies, TV, and read books that convey information about specific times, places and things that happened even when they are 'fictional' or 'imaginary'. Other people give us information – parents and grandparents, teachers and instructors, experts and professionals.

If this information originated after the fact or from second-hand learning then these sources are described as 'secondary'. Like hearsay – which is not allowed in a court of law.

However, when we talk directly to people who experienced an event, a discovery, a way of living, changes and disruptions, then that information is 'primary' (first-hand). That kind of direct testimony is one powerful example of a 'primary source'.

If we're dealing with the present, and those people are alive, they can tell us about it themselves. This explains the importance of oral history and of recording events as they occur, through the words and experiences of witnesses. That's why human interest, case studies, quotes and examples are so important in making creative nonfiction 'come alive'.

When it's the past, or when you're far from the origins of your subject, there are other 'primary sources' that can help you to understand, explain and illuminate what you're writing about - things such as diaries, journals, official documents, artifacts, letters, and many other types of historical objects. They are called primary sources because they were written, used, or owned by the people who lived during a specific time period or through a particular incident or event. The people to whom it happened and who had their own point of view about what and why and how.

Through primary sources you are able to recreate first-hand, eyewitness accounts and incorporate them into your writing. To hold something in your hand that was present is to make contact and connections which you can then share with your reader.