

Quick and easy activity ideas to start using Library of Congress primary sources in the classroom

## Teacher Instructions

### Goal

Analyze a friend's personal response to the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

### Background

"O, fatal day. O, noble victim. Treason has done its worst. The President has been assassinated." This handwritten diary entry, dated half past 10 o'clock PM, April 14, 1865, concludes simply, "I have just come from near the scene, it is too True."

The writer, Horatio Nelson Taft, is mourning the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. For Taft, though, Lincoln was more than just a political leader—he was a family friend. An examiner for the U.S. Patent Office, Taft lived in Washington, D.C., during the Civil War. His younger sons played regularly with the Lincoln boys, Willie and Tad. His older son, Charles, was one of the doctors who attended the wounded president from Ford's Theater to the nearby boarding house where Lincoln ultimately died.

Taft's diaries chronicle many events in the war-torn nation's capital, but the relationship between the Taft and Lincoln families provides a unique lens on the events. And Taft's raw, unfiltered emotional response to the assassination raises many questions about the ways in which personal perspectives contribute to the record of history.

Subsequent entries add context, with Taft telling additional details of Lincoln's death as he learns them.

### Activities

Teachers can have students:

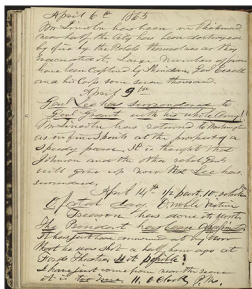
- Read entries from the days immediately following the assassination and construct a timeline of events
- Identify clues to Taft's emotional state as he wrote the diary
- Compare Taft's response to other accounts of the assassination, such as a newspaper of the time or a textbook, and analyze the point of view in each.

You can use the Library's primary source analysis tool and teacher guides to help students analyze Taft's diary in further depth.

### For more of Taft's descriptions of life in Washington, D.C. during the Civil War:

Washington during the Civil War: The Diary of Horatio Nelson Taft

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/tafthtml/tafthome.html>



For more classroom materials and other teacher resources from the Library of Congress, visit [loc.gov/teachers](http://loc.gov/teachers)

### Primary Source

**The Diary of Horatio Nelson Taft, 1861-1865. Volume 3, January 1, 1864-May 30, 1865**

Horatio Nelson Taft. January 1864-May 1865. From Library of Congress: *Washington during the Civil War: The Diary of Horatio Nelson Taft.*

[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mtaft:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(mtaftmtaft3div51\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mtaft:@field(DOCID+@lit(mtaftmtaft3div51)))

April 6<sup>th</sup> 1865

Mr Lincoln has been in Richmond near half the City has been destroyed by fire by the Rebels themselves as they evacuated it, Large numbers of prisoners have been captured by Sheridan, Gen Excell and his Corps. some seven thousand.

April 9<sup>th</sup>

Gen Lee has surrendered to Gen Grant with his whole Army!  
Mr Lincoln has returned to Washington as in firm spirits at the prospect of a speedy peace. It is thought that Johnson and the other rebel Gen's will give up now that Lee has surrendered.

April 14<sup>th</sup> 1/2 past 10 o'clock <sup>P.M.</sup>

Of fatal day. O noble victim  
Season has done its worst.  
The President has been assassinated.  
It has just been announced at my door that he was shot a half hour ago at Ford's Theatre. Is it possible?  
I have just come from near the scene it is too true. 11 o'clock P.M.



# PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS TOOL

## OBSERVE

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## REFLECT

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## QUESTION

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## FURTHER INVESTIGATION

[http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Primary\\_Source\\_Analysis\\_Tool.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Primary_Source_Analysis_Tool.pdf)

# TEACHER'S GUIDE ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES



Guide students with the sample questions as they respond to the primary source. Encourage them to go back and forth between the columns; there is no correct order.

## OBSERVE

**Have students identify and note details.**

Sample Questions:

What do you notice first? · Find something small but interesting. · What do you notice that you didn't expect? · What do you notice that you can't explain? · What do you notice now that you didn't earlier?

## REFLECT

**Encourage students to generate and test hypotheses about the source.**

Where do you think this came from? · Why do you think somebody made this? · What do you think was happening when this was made? · Who do you think was the audience for this item? · What tool was used to create this? · Why do you think this item is important? · If someone made this today, what would be different? · What can you learn from examining this?

## QUESTION

**Have students ask questions to lead to more observations and reflections.**

What do you wonder about...  
who? · what? · when? · where? · why? · how?

## FURTHER INVESTIGATION

**Help students to identify questions appropriate for further investigation, and to develop a research strategy for finding answers.**

Sample Question: What more do you want to know, and how can you find out?

**A few follow-up activity ideas:**

**Beginning**

*Have students compare two related primary source items.*

**Intermediate**

*Have students expand or alter textbook explanations of history based on primary sources they study.*

**Advanced**

*Ask students to consider how a series of primary sources support or challenge information and understanding on a particular topic. Have students refine or revise conclusions based on their study of each subsequent primary source.*

*For more tips on using primary sources, go to*

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers>

[http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing\\_Primary\\_Sources.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Primary_Sources.pdf)

# TEACHER'S GUIDE ANALYZING MANUSCRIPTS



Guide students with the sample questions as they respond to the primary source. Encourage them to go back and forth between the columns; there is no correct order.

## OBSERVE

**Have students identify and note details.**

Sample Questions:

- Describe what you see. · What do you notice first?
- How much of the text can you read? What does it say? · What do you see that looks strange or unfamiliar? · How are the words arranged? · What do you notice about the page the writing appears on? · What size is the page? · What do you see on the page besides writing? · What other details can you see?

## REFLECT

**Encourage students to generate and test hypotheses about the manuscript.**

- Why do you think this manuscript was made? · Who do you think created it? · Who do you think was intended to read it, if anyone? · What do you think was happening when it was created? · What tools and materials were used to create it? · What can you learn from examining this? · If someone created something like this today, what would be different? · What would be the same?

## QUESTION

**Have students ask questions to lead to more observations and reflections.**

- What do you wonder about...  
who? · what? · when? · where? · why? · how?

## FURTHER INVESTIGATION

**Help students to identify questions appropriate for further investigation, and to develop a research strategy for finding answers.**

Sample Question: What more do you want to know, and how can you find out?

**A few follow-up activity ideas:**

- Beginning*  
Have students choose a section of the manuscript and put it in their own words.
- Intermediate*  
Select a section of a manuscript. Speculate about the purpose of the manuscript, and what the person, or people, who created it expected it to accomplish. Do you think it achieved their goals? Explain why you think so.
- Advanced*  
Examine a section of the manuscript. Think about what you already know about this period in history. How does the manuscript support or contradict your current understanding of this period? Can you see any clues to the point of view of the person who created this manuscript?

For more tips on using primary sources, go to <http://www.loc.gov/teachers>

[http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing\\_Manuscripts.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Manuscripts.pdf)