

Evaluating Resources Handout – Looking at Primary and Secondary Sources

The purpose of this handout is to determine the characteristics of primary and secondary sources. By understanding the differences between the two, students will be better prepared to evaluate the materials they use for research.


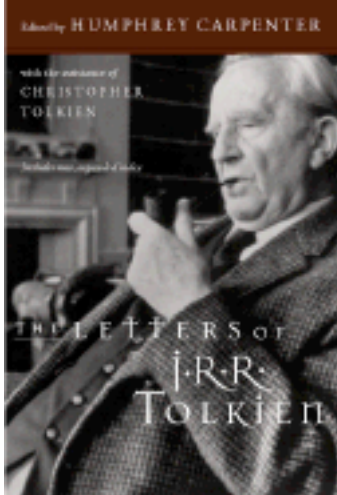

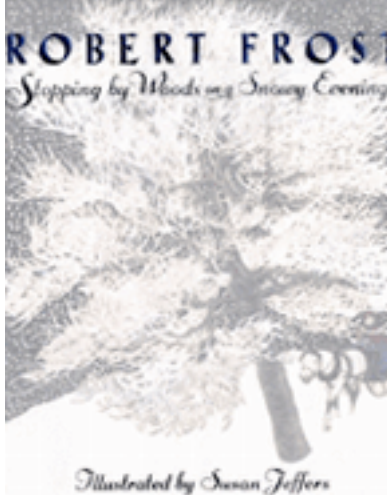
Primary Sources

What is a **primary source**?

A primary source is a document or creative work containing firsthand information, or original data, on a particular topic. Primary sources offer an inside view of an event, either fictional or historical. An example would be if you were doing research on William Shakespeare’s play, *Hamlet*, then a copy of the play would be your primary source for your paper.

Examples of Primary Sources

<p><u>Original Documents</u></p>	<p>Autobiographies Diaries Email Interviews Letters Photographs Raw Research Data Speeches</p>
<p><u>Creative Works</u></p>	<p>Art Film Music Novels Plays Poetry</p>

			
<p>Play</p>	<p>Collection of Letters</p>	<p>Autobiography</p>	<p>Poetry</p>

Evaluating Resources Handout – Looking at Primary and Secondary Sources, Continued


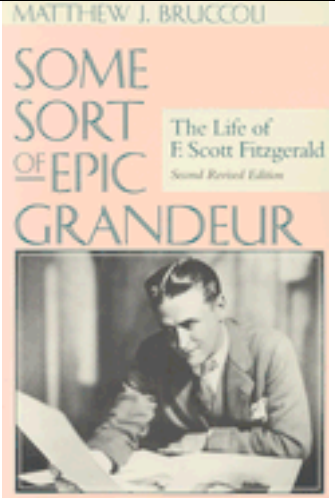
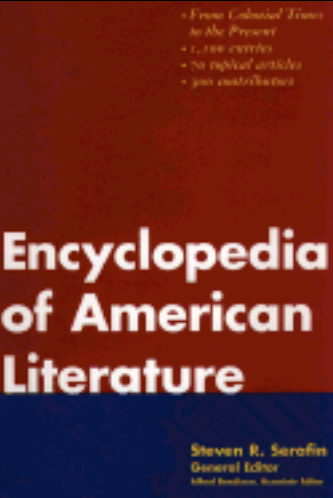
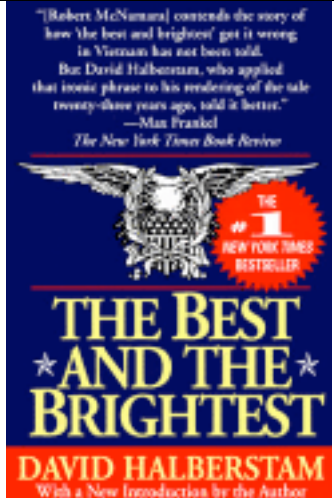
Secondary Sources

What is a **secondary source**?

A secondary source is a work that provides information on the primary source being researched. A secondary source describes, summarizes, analyzes, evaluates, or is based on the primary source. Using the example from the primary source, a book of critical essays on Shakespeare’s play, *Hamlet*, would be a good secondary source for your paper. In some situations, you may want to use a collection of letters written by the author of the primary source to gather further insight into the author’s thoughts and ideas. This collection of letters would still be considered a primary source, even though it may be used as a secondary source.

Examples of Secondary Sources

<p><u>Secondary Sources for</u> <u>Original Documents</u> and <u>Creative works</u></p>	<p>Biographies Critical Essays Encyclopedias Historical Studies Magazine/News Articles About The Event Political Commentaries Reviews Second-Hand Accounts Of The Event Textbooks</p>
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<p>Collection of Critical Essays</p>	<p>Biography</p>	<p>Encyclopedia</p>	<p>Historical Study – Political Commentary</p>

Evaluating Resources Handout – Looking at Primary and Secondary Sources, Continued

Primary and Secondary Sources in Use

1. Our Primary Source:

(AMER LIT VERSION) F. Scott Fitzgerald published his most famous work, *The Great Gatsby*, in 1925. It is the story of the wealthy Jay Gatsby, and his true love, Daisy Buchanan, as seen through the eyes of the narrator Nick Carraway. The story is set on Long Island, and it explores the lives of the affluent in the high-flying “Jazz Age”. Although the novel did not fly off the shelves when it first appeared, it has become the quintessential novel about America in the 1920s.

(BRIT LIT VERSION) J.R.R. Tolkien published his popular trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, in the 1950s. The series follows the epic journey of a hobbit, Frodo Baggins, in his quest to destroy the One Ring of power. Although *The Lord of the Rings* is set in the mythical world of Middle Earth, the story resonates with readers for its universal theme of good versus evil. Tolkien’s novels are considered the model for all fantasy fiction that has followed including works by authors Terry Pratchett, Anne McCaffrey and J.K. Rowling.

2. Our Secondary Source:

(AMER LIT VERSION) a. *Modern Critical Views: F. Scott Fitzgerald*, edited by Harold Bloom, is a collection of essays that interpret and analyze the novels and short stories by Fitzgerald. There are also essays included in the book, which examine the Fitzgerald’s life, and how his experiences influenced his writings. The editor, Harold Bloom, is a highly regarded literary critic, and a humanities professor at Yale University. His academic credentials establish him as a reliable source for research materials.

b. *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald* is the definitive biography of the author, F. Scott Fitzgerald. The biography examines the author’s life, his relationship with his wife Zelda, and the literary works he created. Matthew J. Bruccoli, the author of *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, has authored and edited many books about Fitzgerald and his novels and short stories. Bruccoli’s extensive scholarship has made him the academic expert on Fitzgerald’s work.

(BRIT LIT VERSION) a. *Modern Critical Views: J.R.R. Tolkien*, edited by Harold Bloom, is a collection of essays by different authors, which interpret and analyze the three novels in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, as well as the prelude, *The Hobbit*. The editor, Harold Bloom, is a highly regarded literary critic, and a humanities professor at Yale University. His academic credentials establish him as a reliable source for research materials.

b. *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, written by Tom Shippey, is intended as a companion work to *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *The Hobbit* and Tolkien’s later work related to Middle Earth, *The Silmarillion*. Shippey analyzes the master plot of Tolkien’s works, and explores both morality and the nature of evil and the role these themes play in the trilogy. The author is a former professor at Oxford University in England, and has published several works about Tolkien. Shippey’s extensive scholarship on language and literature has helped him become one of the leading experts on Tolkien.