Historical Narratives

Devine – English 11

Primary and Secondary Sources

(Foreshadowing)
Historical Narratives: Real Life on Paper

- Historical narratives give accounts of real-life experiences.
- They are either written by a person who actually experienced those events OR a person who has observed or studied them extensively.

- Historical narratives may be primary sources, which present direct, firsthand knowledge. Examples would be a diary, letter, speech, journal, or autobiography.
- Historical narratives may also be secondary sources, which provides indirect, secondhand knowledge (history, biography).
Primary Sources

- primary sources often include personal facts along with historical facts
- primary sources often give a unique perspective on a well-known event
- primary sources may reveal little known facts about an event
Primary Sources
Examples from the text book

- Log of Christopher Columbus – p. 67
- La Relacion – p. 73
- Of Plymouth Plantation – p. 81
- The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano – p. 93
- Bartolome Las Casas (excerpts read in class)
A close reading of Columbus

Please turn to page 67. We will be reading a short passage from *The Log of Christopher Columbus*.

Class Q&A: What kind of a man was Columbus? What do you know about him?

After reading, you will be answering the 10 questions from the handout. Take a look at the questions now, before reading.
Group Activity: Answering Questions on the text.

- Now take a few minutes to answer the questions on *The Log of Christopher Columbus*.

- You can work with a neighbor to do this.

- After completing the answers, we will look at another view of Columbus.
An eyewitness account

- The following three slides are an excerpt from the journal of a man who travelled with Columbus and witnessed what happened when he landed at Hispaniola (the island now shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic). He later became a Catholic priest and published his journals.

- Compare his story to what you already know about Columbus.
Primary Source Example: Bartolome Las Casas

"It all began with the Europeans taking native women and children both as servants and to satisfy their own base appetites; then, not content with what the local people offered them of their own free will (and all offered as much as they could spare), they started taking for themselves the food the natives contrived to produce by the sweat of their brows, which was in all honesty little enough...the people began to realize that these men could not, in truth, be descended from heaven.

The Christians punched them, boxed their ears and flogged them in order to track down the local leaders, and the whole shameful process came to a head when one of the European commanders raped the wife of the paramount chief of the entire island.

Their (Taino) weapons, however, were flimsy and ineffective both in attack and in defense (and, indeed, war in the Americas is no more deadly than our jousting or than many European children's games) and, with their horses and swords and lances, the Spaniards easily fend them off, killing them and committing all kind of atrocities against them."
“They forced their way into native settlements, slaughtering everyone they found there, including small children, old men, pregnant women, and even women who had just given birth. They hacked them to pieces, slicing open their bellies with their swords as though they were so many sheep herded into a pen. They even laid wagers on whether they could manage to slice a man in two at a stroke, or cut an individual's head from his body, or disembowel him with a single blow of their axes. They grabbed suckling infants by the feet and, ripping them from their mothers' breasts, dashed them headlong against the rocks. Others, laughing and joking all the while, threw them over their shoulders into a river, shouting: 'Wriggle, you little perisher.' They spared no one, erecting especially wide gibbets on which they could string their victims up with their feet just off the ground and then burn them alive thirteen at a time, in honor of our Savior and the twelve Apostles, or tie dry straw to their bodies and set fire to it. Some they chose to keep alive and simply cut their wrists, leaving their hands dangling, saying to them: 'Take this letter' -- meaning that their sorry condition would as a warning to those hiding in the hills. The way they normally dealt with the native leaders and nobles was to tie them to a kind of griddle consisting of sticks resting on pitchforks driven into the ground and then grill them over a slow fire, with the result that they howled in agony and despair as they died a lingering death.”
Bartolome Las Casas

“...these mortal enemies of human kind trained hunting dogs to track them down -- wild dogs who would savage a native to death as soon as look at him, tearing him into shreds and devouring his flesh as though he were a pig.

And when, as happened on the odd occasion, the locals did kill a European, as, given the enormity of the crimes committed against them, they were in all justice fully entitled to, the Spanish came to an unofficial agreement among themselves that for every European killed one hundred natives would be executed.”
Writing Prompt – 10 minutes

In your mind, compare the picture of Columbus painted by our text book with the one shown by Las Casas. How does it make you feel about what you were taught in grade school? Will it change the way you consider information presented to you in school?

Keep writing for the full 10 minutes! Then make sure your name, date and block are on your sheets and turn them in.
Primary and Secondary Sources

- The next section delves deeper into the differences between primary and secondary sources and how to tell them apart.
- This is the second half of your follow-along notes on sources.
Primary vs. Secondary Sources

- When you are doing research, the ability to distinguish between primary and secondary source material is essential. Basically, this distinction illustrates how close the author of a piece was to the actual event being described, informing the reader as to whether the author is reporting impressions first hand (or was the first to record these immediately following an event), or whether the author is conveying the experiences and opinions of others—that is, second hand.
Primary Sources

- These are contemporary accounts of an event, written by someone who experienced or witnessed the event in question. These original documents (i.e., they are not about another document or account) are often diaries, letters, memoirs, journals, speeches, manuscripts, interviews and other such unpublished works.

- They may also include published pieces such as newspaper or magazine articles (as long as they are written soon after the fact and not as historical accounts), photographs, audio or video recordings, research reports, or original literary or theatrical works.
Secondary Sources

- The function of secondary sources is to interpret primary sources. Secondary sources can be described as at least one step removed from the event under review. Secondary source materials interpret, assign value to, and draw conclusions about the events reported in primary sources. These are usually in the form of published works such as journal articles or books, but may include radio or television documentaries, or conference proceedings.
Questions for distinguishing primary from secondary sources

- Where does this information come from—personal experience, eyewitness accounts, or reports written by others?
- Are the author's conclusions based on a single piece of evidence, or have many sources been taken into account (e.g., diary entries, along with third-party eyewitness accounts, impressions of contemporaries, newspaper accounts)?
- How does the author know these details (names, dates, times)? Was the author present at the event or soon on the scene?
Attempting to arrive at the 'truth' of an event.

- Ultimately, all source materials of whatever type must be assessed critically and even the most scrupulous and thorough work is viewed through the eyes of the writer/interpreter. This must be taken into account when one is attempting to arrive at the 'truth' of an event.
Q&A: How can you be sure?

- Now that you have experienced some historical narratives:
  - What can we conclude about text books?
  - What can we conclude about primary sources?
  - What can we conclude about secondary sources?
- How can you be sure that a primary source is objective?