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| **19 Essential questions you must always ask about a source** |
| **1. What is the nature of the source?** E.g. a newspaper, a diary entry, a government document, etc.**2. Who created this source, and what do I know about him/her/them?** Knowing who wrote the source can help you figure out the angle or perspective that the source will convey, and whether or not this source should be considered credible. **3. When was the source produced?**Knowing when the source was produced can help you start to put it into historical perspective and understand how it connects to historical events.**4. Where was the source produced?**Just as it is important to situate the source in time, it’s also important to identify the place where the source was produced. If you found an editorial in a Beijing newspaper discussing the Great Leap Forward, it might take a different view to a newspaper produced in a remote border region of China. **5. What do you know about the historical context for this source?**What was going on in the place and time that this source was created? What significant local, regional, or national events were taking place?**6. What do I know about how the creator of this source fits into that historical context?**Once you know the historical context of the source, you’ll want to think further about the person who created the source.  If it’s a source about the Red Guard movement consider how the creator of the source was connected. Was he/she a participant? Was he/ she opposed? **7. Why did the person who created the source do so? (Purpose)**Do you think this source was created as a private document, or was it intended for others to view? If there was an intended audience, who was that audience? The general public? The CCP? What did the creator of the source intend for that audience to get out of it? Was he/she trying to persuade people to a particular point of view? Was he/she simply recording daily events? Was he/she intentionally trying to deceive the audience? Was he/she trying to make herself look good?**8. What factual information is conveyed in this source?**As you read, think about what information in the source is presented as fact. Can the facts presented in the source be verified by your own knowledge?**9. What opinions are related in this source?** Identify sections of the source that seem to be opinion and ask yourself why the creator of the source might hold that opinion. Who else might share that opinion? Is it an opinion that you find compelling? Why or why not?**10. What is implied or conveyed unintentionally in the source? (Inferences)** People don’t always spell out what they are thinking when they write a letter, a diary entry, or a newspaper column. Intentionally or unintentionally, there may be ambiguities or vagueness in the source — places that require the reader to "fill in the blanks" and use the author’s tone and attitude to make **inferences** about meanings that are not spelled out. **11. What is not said in this source?** Sometimes what *isn’t*said in a source can be as interesting as what is said. Ask yourself, what did I expect to have seen here that I didn’t see? Use your own knowledge to work out what has been omitted. Ask yourself why have they omitted things?**12. What is surprising or interesting about the source?** What did you learn that you didn’t know before? What details were interesting to you? Was the perspective revealed by this source one that you hadn’t thought about before? What did you not expect that you found here — and what *did*you expect that wasn’t here after all?**13. What do I not understand in this source?** Are there words that were unclear to you? Are there events or people referred to that you aren’t familiar with? Does anything not make sense? Think about where you might go to clarify these issues so that you can understand the source fully. **14. How does the creator of the source convey information and make his/her point?** Sometimes it’s important to not only think about what the author said, but how he/she said it. What strategies did the writer use to convey information? In the case of written sources, did he/she use humour? Sarcasm? An appeal to patriotism? Guilt? **15. How is the world described in the source different from my world?** Think about the time and place in which this source was created. What did the author and people around him/her believe? What was their world like? **16. How might others at the time have reacted to this source?** Would the ideas and perspective revealed by this source have been universally accepted by others? Would certain individuals or groups have disagreed with the account in this source? Why or why not? Imagine an individual who might have disagreed with something in this source — how would that person’s account be different? What might they convey in their own source, and how? **17. How does this source compare to other sources?** Does this account in this source seem to agree with other sources you have read? Is it typical of other accounts? Remember that if your source doesn’t say exactly what other sources say, it may still be entirely truthful. It could be that the other sources were wrong. It could also be that all of the authors of your sources told the truth as they saw it, but that their own individual perspectives gave them different views and therefore different accounts. It may also be that the author of your source had a unique experience that wasn’t like most people’s experiences, but it happened that way just the same. Consider all of the possible reasons why this source may differ from other sources before you decide to reject any of your sources as only of limited use.**18. What do you believe and disbelieve from this source?** Based on everything you know about the historical context and from reading other accounts, what elements of this source do you take as credible and believable? What does the weight of the evidence suggest to you about the believability and historical usefulness of the information and attitudes conveyed in this source?**19. What do you still not know — and where can you find that information?** After assessing your source thoroughly, you’ll want to take stock of what you do and don’t know after reading it. What are you still wondering about? What gaps did this source leave in your understanding of the topic at hand, and what new questions did it raise for you? Think, too, about where you might turn to find out what you still don’t know.  |  |