

Critically reading a source

identifying intended and unintended purposes and messages of text and other sources when inquiring into local history

- targeted
- adaptable
- Primary
- Intermediate
- Middle
- Senior

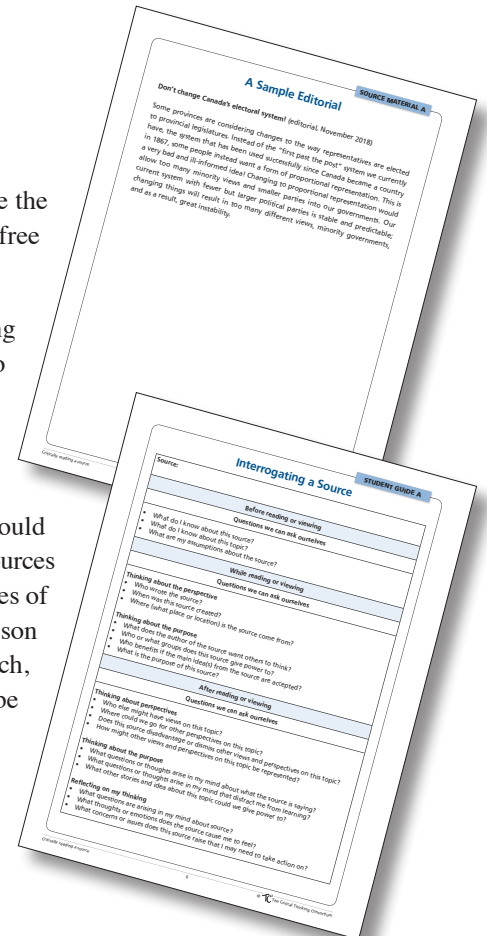
- Objectives:**
- question or interrogate text and other sources to determine the perspective and purpose
 - recognize the intended and unintended messages found in a text or source
 - identify the perspectives that are included and not included in text and other sources
 - question or interrogate text and other sources to reveal inequities or social justice issues

How can we decode the perspectives, purposes, and assumptions of texts and other sources?

Use the following activities to develop the strategy

Introduce the strategy

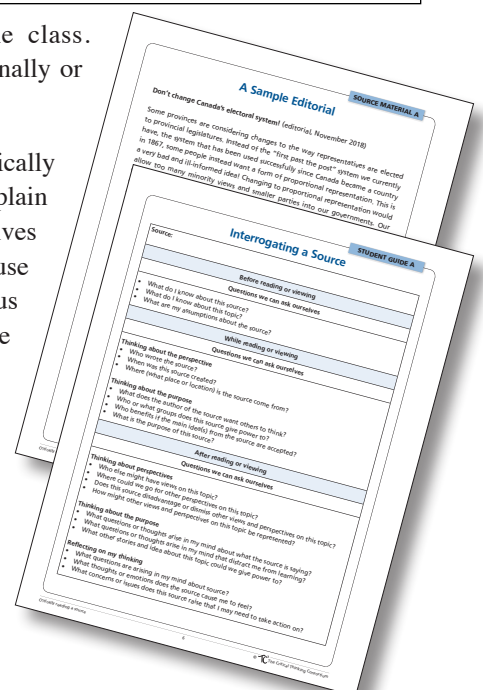
- Organize students into pairs and read aloud, or note on chart paper or other form of display, the following examples of texts and sources:
 - government report
 - history textbook
 - math textbook
 - song lyrics
 - television news story
- Ask groups to decide which example would have the strongest opinion, and which example would be free from opinion or perspective.
- Invite students to share their decisions and thinking with the class. As students share, guide students to respond to the question “Is it possible for a text or source to be “perspective-free”?”
- Encourage students to share their thinking with the class. Explain that all texts and sources would include perspectives and views, and all texts and sources are constructed for a purpose. Revisit the examples of texts and sources shared at the beginning of the lesson and discuss what perspectives might be found in each, especially the sources that are often thought to be “perspective-free,” such as the math text.
- Organize students into small groups (3-4 students) and provide each group with a copy of *A Sample Editorial* (Source material A), and each student with a copy of *Critically Reading a Source* (Student guide A).



- Explain that this strategy uses a number of questions designed to help “read between” or “beyond the lines.” Inform students that the strategy is sometimes referred to as critical literacy, and is similar to how a detective might interrogate a suspect or a source.
- Briefly explain that the source is a sample editorial about an important current issue in Canadian politics. Direct students’ attention to the “Before reading or viewing” section, and use the questions to guide a discussion about the source.
- Read aloud the scenario with students. Guide students’ attention to the “During reading or viewing” section and explain that the next step is to use the details from the source to infer the possible perspective and purpose of the source. If necessary, share the definition of perspective: a particular attitude towards or way of regarding something.
- Ask groups to discuss the “During reading or viewing” questions, prompting them to note their responses to the questions.
- Encourage groups to share their responses with the class. For example, students might suggest that the source gives power to people and groups whose views align with mainstream or dominant political parties.
- Guide students’ attention to the “After reading or viewing” section and explain that the last step is to reflect on the implications of the perspective and purposes of the source. Ask groups to discuss the questions in this section, encouraging them to note their responses.

This Tools for Thought lesson focuses on nurturing students’ competency and disposition to think critically about the purposes of text and other sources. To introduce students to the process of analyzing text and other sources, consider using the Tools for Thought lessons *Read around the document* and *Identifying important voices*. More importantly, thinking critically about the messages and issues in texts and other sources may elicit student emotions and reactions. To help students identify and react to emotions that may emerge when interrogating text and other sources, consider using the Tools for Thought lesson, *Paying attention to emotions when learning*.

- Invite students to share their responses with the class. Discuss what underlying issue(s) the source intentionally or unintentionally raises.
- Highlight the importance of using the strategy to critically question any text or source to reveal its intentions. Explain that while it can be quite easy to identify the perspectives and purposes of an editorial, it’s just as important to use the strategy when examining sources with less obvious perspectives and purposes. The strategy could be used to critically read, view, and listen to accounts and perspectives when learning about a historically important person, event, place, or idea. Invite students to suggest other situations where this strategy might be useful.
- Organize students into pairs and provide each pair with a copy of *An Excerpt From a Government Act (Source material A)*, and each student with a copy of *Interrogating a Source (Student guide A)*.



Practise the strategy

- Encourage groups to use the questions from the “Before reading or viewing” section and preview the document. Invite students to share their responses to the questions with the class. Students may be interested in knowing that the document is the United States Government’s official apology to Native Peoples (the term often used in the U.S. for Indigenous Peoples) for policies and actions of past governments. The apology is found on page 45 of a 67-page budget document passed in 2010. There was no media coverage of the apology at that time, and President Obama did not read the apology publicly or offer any other comment on behalf of the government.
- Guide students’ attention to the “During reading or viewing” section and explain that the next step is to use the details from the source to infer the possible perspective and purpose(s) of the source. Suggest to students that they may wish to note or record their responses to the questions. Invite students to share their responses with the class.
- Direct students’ attention to the “After reading or viewing” section and explain that the last step is to reflect on the implications of the perspective and purposes of the source. Suggest to students that they may wish to note or record their responses to the questions.
- Invite students to share their responses with the class. Discuss what underlying issue(s) or social justice concern the apology intentionally or unintentionally raises.

Apply the strategy to learn more about a local history

- At appropriate times over the ensuing several weeks, provide students with a copy of *Interrogating a Source* (Student guide A) and encourage them to use the strategy in learning situations such as:
 - examining sources that describe important events, people, or places in the history of a community
 - comparing the platforms and policies of political parties
 - analyzing government documents and reports describing actions and programs
 - comparing the responses to important issues from politicians and other spokespeople

Assess use of the strategy

- Encourage students to use *Assessing My Understanding: Interrogating a Source* to self-assess their use of this strategy.
 - Allow students opportunities to apply the strategy two or three times without assessment.
 - Guide students in interpreting and using the rubric to assess their own responses.
 - Encourage students to use the rubric whenever they use this strategy.
 - To use the rubric for teacher assessment of student work, remove the first person (student) reference from each descriptor.

Interrogating a Source STUDENT GUIDE A

Source: _____

Before reading or viewing

Questions we can ask ourselves

- What do I know about this source?
- What do I know about the topic?
- What are my assumptions about the source?

During reading or viewing

Questions we can ask ourselves

Thinking about the perspective

- Who wrote the source?
- When was the source created?
- Where (what place or location) is the source from?

Thinking about the purpose

- What does the author of the source want others to think?
- Who benefits if other people believe what the source says?
- What is the purpose of this source?

After reading or viewing

Questions we can ask ourselves

Thinking about perspectives

- What do I think about this source?
- Where could I go for other perspectives on this topic?
- How might other views and perspectives on this topic be represented?

Thinking about the purpose

- What questions or thoughts are in my mind about what the source is saying?
- What questions or thoughts are in my mind about what the source is trying to say?
- What thoughts or emotions does the source cause me to feel?
- What concerns or issues does the source raise that may need to take action on?

Assessing My Understanding: Interrogating a Source ASSESSMENT MATERIAL

Name: _____

Use the scales below to assess your understanding of the strategy for interrogating a source. Include examples or ideas how you have met the success criteria. Remember to describe the next steps in your learning.

Success criteria

How am I doing?

Descriptor	1	2	3	4	5
I understand that all texts and sources are constructed for a purpose, and all have perspectives.					
Examples:					
Next steps (e.g., ask for help):					
I am able to use details from texts and other sources to identify the possible perspectives and purposes.					
Examples:					
Next steps (e.g., use reading strategies, ask for help):					
I am able to suggest other perspectives that should be considered when interrogating a text or source.					
Examples:					
Next steps (e.g., use reading strategies, ask for help):					

A Sample Editorial

Don't change Canada's electoral system! (editorial, November 2018)

Some provinces are considering changes to the way representatives are elected to provincial legislatures. Instead of the "first past the post" system we currently have, the system that has been used successfully since Canada became a country in 1867, some people instead want a form of proportional representation. This is a very bad and ill-informed idea! Changing to proportional representation would allow too many minority views and smaller parties into our governments. Our current system with fewer but larger political parties is stable and predictable; changing things will result in too many different views, minority governments, and as a result, great instability.

An Excerpt From a Government Act

APOLOGY TO THE NATIVE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED STATES

SEC. 8113.

(a) ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND APOLOGY.—The United States, acting through Congress—

(1) recognizes the special legal and political relationship Indian tribes have with the United States and the solemn covenant with the land we share;

(2) commends and honors Native Peoples for the thousands of years that they have stewarded and protected this land;

(3) recognizes that there have been years of official depredations, ill-conceived policies, and the breaking of covenants by the Federal Government regarding Indian tribes;

(4) apologizes on behalf of the people of the United States to all Native Peoples for the many instances of violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted on Native Peoples by citizens of the United States;

(5) expresses its regret for the ramifications of former wrongs and its commitment to build on the positive relationships of the past and present to move toward a brighter future where all the people of this land live reconciled as brothers and sisters, and harmoniously steward and protect this land together;

(6) urges the President to acknowledge the wrongs of the United States against Indian tribes in the history of the United States in order to bring healing to this land; and

(7) commends the State governments that have begun reconciliation efforts with recognized Indian tribes located in their boundaries and encourages all State governments similarly to work toward reconciling relationships with Indian tribes within their boundaries.

(b) DISCLAIMER.—Nothing in this section—

(1) authorizes or supports any claim against the United States; or

(2) serves as a settlement of any claim against the United States.

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From Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2010

<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-111hr3326enr/pdf/BILLS-111hr3326enr.pdf>

Interrogating a Source

Source:

Before reading or viewing

Questions we can ask ourselves

- What do I know about this source?
- What do I know about this topic?
- What are my assumptions about the source?

While reading or viewing

Questions we can ask ourselves

Thinking about the perspective

- Who wrote the source?
- When was this source created?
- Where (what place or location) is the source come from?

Thinking about the purpose

- What does the author of the source want others to think?
- Who or what groups does this source give power to?
- Who benefits if the main idea(s) from the source are accepted?
- What is the purpose of this source?

After reading or viewing

Questions we can ask ourselves

Thinking about perspectives

- Who else might have views on this topic?
- Where could we go for other perspectives on this topic?
- Does this source disadvantage or dismiss other views and perspectives on this topic?
- How might other views and perspectives on this topic be represented?

Thinking about the purpose

- What questions or thoughts arise in my mind about what the source is saying?
- What questions or thoughts arise in my mind that distract me from learning?
- What other stories and idea about this topic could we give power to?

Reflecting on my thinking

- What questions are arising in my mind about source?
- What thoughts or emotions does the source cause me to feel?
- What concerns or issues does this source raise that I may need to take action on?

