

Syrian-Armenians and Research Analysis Skills

Estimated Lesson Time: 1 Hour

Materials needed: Devices for students to access the Internet, whiteboard or overhead projector

Primary Objective: Students will learn to critically analyze sources of new information, particularly in the context of storytelling, personal or family histories.

Additional objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Explain a bit about the Syrian Armenian experience
- Discuss pros/cons of using primary sources, recorded interviews, texts/recordings in translation, and archives

Motivation (2-5 minutes)

Ask: Why is research important to you as a student? Why might it be important to you in your life today?

Make sure answers cover some or all of the following:

- Research allows you to learn enough to write an essay or prepare a project, it's required of you as a student, generally
- Doing your own research means you can contribute to broader knowledge important to academics, journalists, and other members of society
- Misinformation and disinformation is increasingly common these days. Being able to research and analyze sources (especially primary sources!) is a useful skill to check information you find online or elsewhere.

Speaking of analyzing information..

Introduction (10)

Tell: One of the most important parts of research is your source material, and analyzing source material is a really great way to get your research to the next level. If you use good sources that your research will probably be fine, or maybe even good. If you use good sources and analyze the source itself, your research will likely be interesting and credible.

Interviews and personal histories are common sources for social science research, and depending on the interview, give a lot of really great qualitative information. Personal histories are all around us, so let's get a volunteer to practice learning from and analyzing a personal history source. The topic of the interview will be family experience in the region we're in now. I'll be the interviewer, can someone volunteer to be interviewed?

Ask the volunteer student to join you in the front of the class to be interviewed.

Ask the volunteer student some of the following questions, being sure to keep it between 3-5 minutes:

- Have you always lived in this region/state?
 - If no, when did you come to this region/state and why?
 - If yes, do you have any story about how this region has changed over time? Can you share one with us?
- What do you think about our community here? What does your family think about our community?
- What role would you say you play in our community? If you have family here, what roles do your family members play in our community?

Tell: Great, that was an interesting interview about (insert student's name)'s experience as a person who lives here in our area. We learned some things about (student) and about our region, but now let's analyze this interview as a source, take our research on our community to the next level.

Ask: What kinds of things should we think about if we want to use this interview as a source for our work? What kind of information did we get from this interview that wasn't just what (student) said? Look for some of the following answers:

- This interview might be influenced by the fact that:
 - the student is shy or not shy
 - because they want to do well in this class
 - They had or hadn't prepared for this interview
- The student might not know how their family members think or feel about things, and so things they share are "filtered" through their eyes
- We might have information about how the student feels about what they were sharing based on their body language.
- If the student shares a story, was the story a long time ago or recent? Does the memory seem clear or murky?
- How does the student feel about what they're saying? How might their feelings influence the way they share and respond to questions?
- What questions did the interviewer ask? How does interview format influence the information we get from this interview?

Information (15 minutes)

Say: Now we're going to use some interview sources from an archive.

If your class is not familiar with archives as a concept, introduce the following for support:

- An archive is a collection of something, usually documents, meant to store and preserve information for posterity. Archives can be virtual or physical, and can hold recordings, documents, letters, interviews, maps, notes, and other primary source documents.

Ask: Why might it be useful to have an archive full of interview recordings? What should we consider when using an archive for research?

Say: Great. I'm going to give you a list of critical analysis questions under the categories of Who-What-Where-When-Why that influence the information you get from a source. The answers to these questions become your critical analysis!

Write: **Who-What-Where-When-Why questions in bold** on the board in separate boxes. Give examples of sub-questions and prompt students to think of their own sub-questions that they might ask about their source

- **Who: Who curated the archive? Who's stories are in the archive?**
 - Who curated the archive: It's important to know who's putting an archive together, because maybe their feelings, background, interests, or purpose influence what we see!
 - Who's stories are told: Are the stories about the speaker who's interviewed, or someone the speaker knows, or a mix? Think about how feelings might play into a story about yourself, compared to a story that you tell about a friend or a family member.
- **What: What is the archive about?**
 - If an archive creator decides to curate an archive of maps from their home in Massachusetts, would you expect to see maps in their archive from Alaska? Maybe, but probably not. Maybe they're from Boston - does this influence whether or not they have maps from Western Mass?
- **Where: Where do the stories in the interview take place? Where do the interviews take place?**
 - Are the stories taking place somewhere the interviewee has lived or visited? If yes or no, what might change about the way they tell their story?
 - Are the stories set in the same place as the interview or not? Does this change the information at all?
- **When: When were the interviews recorded? When did the stories happen?**
 - When did the stories happen compared to when they were recorded? Remember the example of Grandma and the moon - hearing the story so much later means that maybe the story is shorter or less detailed than it would have been if she told it years earlier.
- **Why: Is there a goal or a purpose for this archive? Why did these interviews happen?**
 - People usually interview others for a reason. Does this reason change the stories you hear in the interviews?
 - Are there questions you would have wanted to ask that the interviewers didn't ask? Did the interviewers ask questions you wouldn't have thought to ask?
- **How: How were the interviews and archive prepared?**
 - How were the interviewees chosen?
 - How do you see the interviews? Are you reading the words spoken in the interview, are you listening to a recording, or watching a video? How do these differences give you more or less information?
 - Are the interviews in a language you speak, or another language? If there's a translation, how do you think that changes the information you're getting from the stories?

Say: Now that we have some tools to help us with critically analyzing our sources, we're going to research a specific group of people using an archive with their interviews about their lives.

Ask: Does anyone know about Armenia, or Armenian people?

Look for answers that cover the following, or give the following information as an answer:

- Armenians are a group of people, just like Ghanaian people, German people, or Korean people, for example. They are a group of people connected by shared history, ethnicity, and in most cases, religion and aspects of culture.
- Over 100 years ago, they were the victims of a Genocide (like the Holocaust, the Rwandan Genocide, the Cambodian Genocide), which meant that most survivors left their homes and spread all over the world.
- Today, lots of Armenians live in countries like in Russia, France, and Lebanon. There is a large population of Armenians living in the Republic of Armenia in the Caucasus region, just east of Turkey, north of Iran, south of Georgia, and west of Azerbaijan. There are Armenian communities all over the US, including Armenian communities in cities like LA, Boston, and Philadelphia.
- There was a sizeable Armenian community in Syria, mostly centered in Aleppo. Armenians in Syria live as ethnic and religious minorities, but after living there for +100 years, they've become a part of the larger community and generally appeared comfortable and content. When the Syrian war reached Aleppo in 2012 and as things got worse in the area, many Syrian Armenians (Armenians with Syrian passports or who grew up in or have other strong connections to Syria) had to leave their homes behind them.

Application (30 minutes)

Say: Now we're going to use an archive that has tons of interviews of Syrian Armenians, people like you and me, who had to leave their homes because of war. This is good research practice because we can learn about a war you might already be familiar with from a unique, local minority perspective, we can learn about the Armenian Genocide through these Syrian Armenians' stories, and we can practice analyzing an archive and individual interviews as a source of information. As you know, when you're doing research, usually you have a research question guiding your information-hunt, but developing a research question is a whole activity in and of itself. For today, use one of the already-written, broad research questions related to the Syrian Armenian experience we've just discussed:

- What was the Armenian experience like in 1915, during the Armenian Genocide? How did Armenians live and what conditions were they facing?
- What were Armenian relations like with other Syrian nationals during the time leading up to the Syrian War?
- How do different people experience the same traumatic period differently?

Instruct students to access <https://www.rerooted.org/archive>. Let them know they have approximately 20-25 minutes to sort through the interviews available to find information related to their question, while analyzing their source.

Instruct that this is a relatively low-pressure practice activity, but they should do their best to be respectful, curious, and

thoughtful. As you go through an interview or two and gather information, apply your critical thinking and analysis questions to evaluate the archive and interview(s) you're using.

Monitor student progress while circulating around the room. Offer feedback and remind students to ask the critical analysis questions about the interviews they watch or transcripts they read.

Regroup and discuss (5-10 minutes):

- How was this task? Was it easy, or hard? Why? Did anything about this activity surprise you?
- What information did you find to answer your questions? (Acknowledge that sometimes it's really hard to answer these kinds of questions using a big archive, first you have to kind of figure out what's in the archive before you can answer your own questions, right?)
- Was the information you found enough to answer your question? Why or why not?
- What would you do to find more information on this subject?
- What factors in the archive influenced the information you have? (Were the events a long time ago, are the people old or young, is there emotion involved, etc?)

Homework Assignment

- Continue with the in-class activity but on your own at home. Write three to five paragraphs sharing the answers from your critical analysis questions (this becomes your critical analysis). Write at least two more paragraphs to present the information you've gathered on your chosen research question.