

Syrian-Armenians and Research Analysis Skills

Estimated Lesson Time: 1 Hour

Materials needed: Devices 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, and 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 (broadly)
-

Motivation (3-5 minutes)

Solicit answers to the following question: Why are research skills important to you?

Open up to discussion with students about why today's lesson is important, highlighting that in preparation for larger research projects.

- As they move up into higher grade levels, they'll need to refine their research skills.
 - In future classes, or in the future of this class, they'll have projects that require research.
- Research allows us to learn about the world!
 - Learning how to do research can teach us more about our homes, our families, the country, the world, and most other things we want to know.

Say: As we research, it's important to think about where our information comes from and how the source influences the information. This is important for school but it's an even more important life skill.

Introduction (10 minutes)

Explain: Knowledge always comes from somewhere, and it's good to understand how information is influenced by where you find it.

Have a student read aloud the following scenario:

Your grandmother tells you the story of where she was when the first astronaut landed on the moon. Her mother was really excited about the event and called her in from playing outside so she could watch. She was happy because she got to eat chocolate ice cream and sit in her parents'

living room on the fuzzy green carpet in front of the TV. She remembers the way the astronaut left the spaceship and seemed to bounce on the gray surface.

Ask: What do we need to consider when using your grandma's story as a historical resource?

*Lead a **brief** discussion/ look for answers including the following:*

- Time:
 - Has it been a long time since this happened to grandma? Do we know how long?
 - Are there details that might have been blurry?
- Feelings:
 - How does grandma feel about what happened?
 - Does grandma like to share stories, or is it hard for her to open up about things that happened in the past?
 - Does the way that grandma feels about the story influence this memory at all? Are there things that maybe she left out because she doesn't think they are important?
 - How old was grandma during the moon landing? Are there parts of the story that relate to her being a kid that you can imagine would be different if she were an adult?

Ask: Why is it important to honor Grandma's story? Why could this be considered an important source for your research?

Information (15 minutes)

Say: We're going to use some sources from an archive.

Ask: What's an archive? Why might or might not it be useful for a research project? An archive is a collection of something, usually documents, meant to store and preserve information. Archives can be virtual or physical and can hold recordings, documents, letters, interviews, maps, notes, and other primary or secondary source documents.

Ask: Now that we're clear on what an archive is, why might it be useful to have an archive full of interview recordings? What should we consider when using an archive for research?

*Guide students through **Who-What-Where-When-Why questions** to analyze 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 Massachusetts?

- **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 may mean that 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 understanding stories, 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.
- Over 100 years ago, they were the victims of a Genocide, which means lots of them were killed because of *who* they were, in this case, it was because they were Armenians.
 - (Reference the Holocaust, Rwanda, or other Genocides your class might already be familiar with.)
- Most of the Armenians that survived the Genocide had to leave their homes and spread all over the world.
- Today, lots of Armenians live in countries like in Russia, France, and Lebanon. There are also Armenians in a small country right next to Turkey called Armenia! In the United States, there are Armenian communities in cities like LA, Boston, and Philadelphia.
- There were also a lot of Armenians in Syria, but there was a war in Syria that started in 2011. Since the start of that war, many of the Armenians who lived in Syria have had to leave and find new homes.

Activity (30 minutes)

Say: Now we're going to use an archive that has tons of interviews of Armenians from Syria, people like you and me, who had to leave their homes because of war. This is good research practice, we can learn about a new part of the world, and we can practice analyzing a source of information.

Have students select a question from the list of the following broad research questions:

- 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> in groups. Let them know they have **20 minutes** to sort through the interviews, and watch/read a bit to find information related to their question. Instruct that this is a low-pressure, practice activity, but they should do their best to be respectful, curious, and thoughtful. The goal here is not to get tons of information to answer their question (that might take all semester), but instead, they should try to start answering their question while asking the Who-What-Where-When-Why-How questions about the interviews and archive.*

Circulate around the room to monitor students' progress, reminding them to ask the questions about their sources

Regroup and discuss (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?)

Exit ticket (2-5 minutes)

Before leaving the classroom, ask students to complete the following task and hand it to you (submit it).

Write two examples of important questions to ask about this archive or one of the interviews you came across. Write your answer to those questions!