

Historical Exercises

Primary sources are first-hand accounts or direct evidence about the past, such as diaries, letters, photographs and oral histories. Historians use primary sources to answer many different kinds of questions about the past. Historians analyze and interpret evidence from primary sources to build historical knowledge. Some of the questions that historians ask about the past are easier to answer than others. For instance, it might be easy to find out when a certain event occurred, but it is likely harder to determine what significance the event had for the individuals who experienced it.

The following historical exercises will guide you in analyzing and interpreting primary sources, using examples from the *Chinese Canadian Women, 1923-1967: Inspiration-Innovation-Ingenuity* website.

Working with Photographs

Photographs are valuable primary sources because they help provide a visual record of the past. Often, they contain much more information than appears at first glance. Using examples from the Collection section of the website, the following exercise will help you think about and identify different kinds of information found in photographs.

Look carefully at each photograph, using the Guiding Questions to help you think like a historian and interpret the photographs as primary sources.

Canada Produce grocery store, Vancouver, c. 1940



Guiding Questions:

- Do you think this photograph was posed? Why or why not?
- Why do you think this photograph was taken?
- What does the photograph tell you about food prices? Can you compare these prices to current-day prices? Why or why not?
- Do you recognize any of the brand names on display? Are there any that are unfamiliar to you? What does this tell you? What conclusions can you make with this information? Do you need more information to be sure?
- If you didn't know when this photograph was taken, how might you make a guess?

You can read about the Canada Produce grocery store in the Collection.

Toronto V-J Day Parade by Chinese Community



Guiding Questions:

- What is V-J Day? Why might it be important to the Chinese community in Canada?
- What do you notice about the photograph? If you didn't know when V-J Day occurred, could you tell when the photograph was taken? Would the clothes, cars, or buildings give you clues? Why or why not?
- Can you tell where this photo was taken? Do any of the buildings pictured still exist? How could you find out?
- Do you recognize any of the flags in the photograph? If you can identify any of the flags, why might they have been chosen for the parade? You may need to do extra research about V-J Day to draw a conclusion.

Discover more about the participation of Chinese Canadians in the war effort during WWII by looking up the subject tag "War and War Effort" in the Collection.