

A guide to using documentary evidence

Choosing and using documents

'Simple documentary evidence can play an important part in personal and local studies and it may be used to investigate aspects of national or international history'. (SESE History T.G. pg 104)

'At all levels in the primary curriculum, children should encounter a wide range of evidence. Most documentary evidence and printed sources are probably best left to the last two years of primary school because of readability problems, but opportunities should be identified for the use of simple evidence in all classes. (SESE History T.G. pg 12)

Consider

- A variety of documentary sources should be used
- Editing may be necessary
- Vocabulary may need to be explained in advance
- A transcript of the document may be required but if possible children should also see the original version. Sometimes the teacher may read from important sources rather than pupils attempting to access the material themselves.

What do we mean by Documentary Evidence?

- Items from child's own history
- Advertising, packaging, labels, tickets.
- School records
- Newspapers especially local newspapers
- Postcards and letters
- Stamps, coins and paper money
- Old timetables
- Inscriptions on memorials, gravestones, foundation stones.
- Document packs
- Old Textbooks

Some possible sources of Documentary Evidence

Personal and family history; Items from child's own history

- baby book, clinic book, birthday cards, first books, scrapbooks, children's own names, family name, old family recipes, inscriptions on family medals, trophies, family letters and diaries etc.

The aim is to develop a sense of the child having a past and an appreciation of the value attached to that past- their sense of being part of a greater continuity. Sensitivity may have to be observed.

The concept of personal documentation existing that is unique to each individual is important for children to understand, particularly as we live in a world where increasingly, documentary evidence, is needed for official and other purposes. If

children can appreciate the importance of personal documentation as a source of information and have opportunities to develop skills in the decoding of such documentation they are more likely to understand the relevance of historical documents in providing information about the lives of people in the past. Developing awareness of personal documentation also helps to enhance an individual's self identity.

The General Registers Office: www.gro.ie By supplying some information you can order *birth certificates*, *death certificates*, *marriage certificates* from this site. There is a specific cost per item and it usually takes three/four weeks to receive the requested documents.

The National Archives: www.nationalarchives.ie is currently engaged in a project that aims to digitise the 1901 and 1911 Census records. At present these records are in the custody of the National Archives. They are arranged by townland or, in urban areas, by street. The 1901 census lists, for every member of the household: name, age, sex, relationship to head of the household, religion, marital status and county or country of birth. It also records an individual's ability to read or write and ability to speak the Irish language. The same information was recorded for the 1911 census. On this occasion married women were required to state the number of years they had been married, the number of children born alive and the number still living.

Local libraries: Most local city and county libraries hold the 1901 and the 1911 census records relating to that particular area.

Documents for exploring aspects of national/ international history

The National Archives: www.nationalarchives.ie :

When you enter this site you will notice on the left of the screen '*Document of the Month*'. This document which may relate to a national/international aspect of history can be downloaded or printed. By clicking on '*News and Events*' you will have access to the '*Documents of the Month*' for each month for the past number of years. By clicking on '*News and Events*' you will be able to browse a number of online exhibitions including:

- '*The Theft of the Irish Crown Jewels*'. Here you will find a commentary and image gallery relating to the theft of the Irish Crown Jewels in 1907.
- '*Jacob's Biscuit factory, 1916*'. The National Archives of Ireland building stands on the site of the Jacob's biscuit factory, a landmark building in Dublin for over 100 years. Jacob's factory was one of the key positions occupied by rebels during the 1916 Rising. The National Archives Online Exhibition contains a number of extracts from statements made to the Bureau of Military History by people who were part of the Jacob's garrison.
- '*Condolences and Funerals*'. This online exhibition relates to two key national events: the visit of the Taoiseach, Eamon de Valera to

Eduard Hempel, German Minister to Ireland, to present his condolences on the death of Adolf Hitler in 1945; and the repatriation of the remains of Sir Roger Casement, followed by his state funeral, in 1965.

- *'James Joyce and Ulysses'*. This online exhibition related to the author James Joyce and his work 'Ulysses'.
- *'Views of Four Presidencies(1938-1975)*. This online exhibition consists of a selection of digitised images of documents, together with commentaries.

The National Library www.nli.ie

This site contains an online exhibition rich with documents and photographs related to the 1916 Rising and WB Yeats

School records:

Roll books, enrolment registers, punishment books, old textbooks, posters, projects etc. Some schools will have a wealth of documentary evidence related to their school. Sensitivity is important. Other useful sources of Documentary evidence related to schools include:

The National Archives www.nationalarchives.ie You have to visit the National Archives to acquire documentation relating to a school.

www.askaboutireland.ie – click on 'Student Zone', lessons for Fifth and Sixth. Here you will find lessons on Schools in the past using documentary evidence such as Roll books, census returns, old textbooks.

The Schools Folklore Collection (1937/1938) is housed in "The Delargy Centre for Irish Folklore and the National Folklore Collection" which is located in U.C.D. in Belfield. www.ucd.ie/irishfolklore Its main purpose is to provide a service to the general public and for those involved in Academic Research. Phone 01- 7168436. Teachers can visit. The Schools Folklore Collection was the result of a nationwide initiative launched in 1937, a collaboration between the INTO, The Dept. of Education and The Irish Folklore Commission. Children in the senior classes of primary schools were involved. An Instruction booklet was sent to schools with guiding questions and activities. There were 35 Headings, sets of questions etc. The children had to interview neighbours, family members with the headings and questions in mind and compile essays in response. The essays were to reflect the reality of what they heard. Other essays were as a result of children going out into their locality to interview local crafts people – e.g. the local Blacksmith. The children wrote their essays into copy books. 40,000 copy books are in the Centre today. The teachers however selected from what the class wrote and transcribed essays into the official manuscript books. This selection process obviously excluded a lot of material. It is this manuscript selection that has been put on Microfiche and is available for study in local County Libraries and some City Libraries. The libraries allow teachers to photocopy sections from the Folklore Collection. This is a rich source of Documentary Evidence as it is an enduring legacy of folklore collected by children seventy years ago. The folklore collected by the children in schools that are no longer in existence today lives on as evidence of the past. If the same nationwide project was to be undertaken today I wonder how much of the folklore collected in 1937,'38 would remain.

'Slates Up' Schools and Schooling in the Nineteenth Century' pack available from The Church of Ireland College of Education, 96 Upper Rathmines Road, Dublin. This pack equips teachers with primary sources relating to schools in 19th Century Ireland. The documentary evidence it supplies is from the archive of the Kildare Place Society, Rathmines, Dublin.

Newspapers especially local newspapers; headlines in newspapers

www.nationalarchives.ie

Local libraries have archival newspaper repositories, including local publications which are very useful.

On www.askaboutireland.ie there is a link to 'The Irish Times' archives. This digital archive contains the entire 'The Irish times' from the first edition in 1859 to the present. It is fully indexed and searchable. You simply enter your desired search item and view the results, or you can browse the paper by edition.

Using newspapers as documentary evidence can be especially valuable in attempting to develop two of the skills listed in the SESE History Curriculum under 'Using Evidence':

The child will be enabled to

- *compare accounts of a person or event from two or more sources*
- *make simple deductions from evidence*
- *recognise that evidence may be incomplete or biased*

By looking at two accounts of the same event children come to realise that there are two sides to every story so we need to compare and contrast the two sides if we can access them. If we can't we have to bear in mind that our evidence may be incomplete/ biased or written with a particular purpose or agenda in mind. There are possibilities here for integration with the Media Education strand of the SPHE curriculum.

Local Publications

Local publications are very useful for advertisements, photographs

Advertisements, packaging, labels, tickets.

Use 'Google Images' to find old advertisements.

The History of Advertising Trust : www.hatads.org.uk is a UK site that has a vast store of advertisements from the past under a number of headings: Business and Industry, Food and Drink, Entertainment.

www.advertisingarchives.co.uk contains an impressive online gallery of advertisements from the past. Images are catalogued in decade by decade format.

Old newspapers, magazines, local publications will also be useful for pictures and advertisements.

Local Libraries

Local county and city libraries are excellent sources of documentary evidence that is directly related to specific parts of the country. Usually they hold an archaeological inventory of the area, archival local and national newspapers, archival local publications, maps past and present, the Schools Folklore Collection (on microfilm) for the schools in that area, printed works including 'A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland' (1846) by Samuel Lewis

Postcards and letters

Sending a postcard has been a means of communication across the world since the 1800s. On the 'Ask about Ireland' website you can take a trip around the island of Ireland looking at a variety of postcards old and new, samples from the collections of local libraries.

www.askaboutireland.ie

Stamps, coins and paper money.

Stamps: www.anpost.ie – click on 'history and heritage'
www.irishstamps.ie – Each year a number of stamps are issued for celebratory or commemorative purposes. In a way they tell the story of that year.

Coins and paper money: www.centralbank.ie , www.irishcoinage.ie

Inscriptions on memorials, graveyards and headstones, and foundation stones.

The **foundation stone/ plaque** on the school wall is a valuable source of Documentary Evidence related to a particular school.

Graveyards and headstones are an exceptional resource. Module 11 of the '[**Archaeology in the Classroom**](#)' folder is very useful. The various forms of stone carved into, the changing fashions in inscriptions and the symbols used to decorate the stones can all be explored. An activity sheet can be designed to record individual headstones. This should include room for a full transcription of the inscription,

measurements of the stone and comments on the shape of the stone, the type of stone and the direction it faces. Any religious symbols could also be drawn. To further develop an appreciation of the headstones, children can make rubbings of the headstone inscription or of some of the carved decorations by placing a poster sized sheet of paper over the headstone and rubbing it with a crayon.

Epitaphs: Some older gravestones feature epitaphs- inscriptions on gravestones to mark the memory of the dead. Often their purpose was to remind people of their own mortality. Some people chose their own epitaph in advance from a selection offered by the stonecutter. In other cases the epitaph was written by a family member or by the individual themselves. They often took the form of a bible verse.

Document packs

'Slates Up! Schools and Schooling in the Nineteenth Century', Church of Ireland College of Education, Rathmines.

'The Flight of the Earls Document Study Pack', Cultural Services, Donegal County Archives Service, Donegal County Council (0749172490)

'Our World Our History', Activity Pack for Fifth and Sixth (contains some documents relating to slavery) Trocaire, Maynooth, Co.Kildare (01 6290661)

Textbooks

An example of how to use textbooks in a judicious manner would be to create tasks for the children based on the documents contained in the textbooks in the light of the list of possibilities in relation to what we want children to do with documents outlined below.

www.askaboutireland.ie

On this website you can access documents, manuscripts, information about placenames, stories about different localities, letters, postcards, newspapers, images, maps and directories (such as that of Samuel Lewis below) from the collections of libraries around the country.

Samuel Lewis, **'A topographical dictionary of Ireland'**, London, 1837. Samuel **Lewis's 'A topographical dictionary'** was published in two volumes, with a third volume of maps. It was published before the famine which makes it very interesting as it shows what the country was like then. It is arranged in alphabetical order by civil or Church of Ireland parish. It gives a detailed description of each parish in the country, giving its size and telling us how many people lived there. It gives a short history of the place and tells us about the churches and schools and about the big houses where the gentry lived.

Other Useful Websites for Documentary Evidence

www.scoilnet.ie

www.irish-roots.net/genealogy-links.asp

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/museum

www.learningcurve.gov.uk (contains lessons using documents)

www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/family/history

www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk

Contributing to creating the Documentary Evidence of the future

At the beginning of the year acquire one hard covered copybook. Each child in the class has to take it home for one/two weeks each and in the course of that time must write/draw/paste in pieces of news/information or cuts out newspaper headings/photographs under the following headings- personal/ local/ national/ international. Each child has the opportunity to contribute to the copybook at his/her own level over the course of the year. At the end of the year it is a documentary legacy recording the year that has past. By leaving it in the school it will be a valuable resource for future classes.

For younger children: creating a class 'Big Book' of the 'News of the Day'. Each day a different child writes/ illustrates the class 'news'. At the end of the year the 'Big book' documents the key moments, as identified by the children themselves, of the year that has passed.

What do we want children to do with documentary evidence?

It is important to consider a range of tasks that require children to apply a number of different skills:

- Extracting facts and selecting information
- Translation of information (for example ,translating gravestone date inscriptions into graph format)
- Making deductions
- Analysing the feelings and perspective of the person who wrote the document. (especially possible when looking at diaries or letters)
- Comparing two or more pieces of written evidence.
- Synthesising an account from two or more pieces of evidence.

Consider the following questions:

Who wrote the document? What position did she/he hold?

What is the date of the document? What is the historical context?

Why was the document created?

For what audience was the document intended?

Was the source meant to be public or private?

REMEMBER

- When we access a piece of documentary evidence or any other form of evidence we only have a piece of the jigsaw, and we don't know how many pieces we are missing.
- As with any other form of evidence it is important to realise that a document may be incomplete/ biased/ inaccurate or written with a particular agenda or purpose in mind.
- At any stage new information may become available which could cause us to look at this document in a different light.
- Two people will interpret a piece of evidence in differing ways, depending on their values/ beliefs/ state of mind at any one time.

Skills and concepts Development

Working as an historian: Using Evidence

Through completing the strand units of the history curriculum the child should be enabled to:

Infants
encounter some simple historical evidence family photographs, own clothes worn when younger, buildings
First and second
examine a range of simple historical evidence <i>photographs, objects, memories of older people, buildings, stories and songs</i>
begin to distinguish between fictional accounts in stories, myths and legends and real people and events in the past
Third and fourth
examine and use a wider range of historical evidence, especially that which may be found in the locality or which is connected with local history <i>photographs, pictures, objects, memories of older people, buildings, stories and songs, written sources, films, other media, information and communication technologies</i>

ask questions about a piece of evidence

summarise information in, and make simple deductions from, a single source of evidence

Fifth and sixth

examine and use critically a wide range of historical evidence

photographs, pictures, objects, memories of older people, buildings, stories and songs, written sources, films, other media, information and communication technologies

develop some skills in the location and selection of evidence

distinguish between primary and secondary sources · ask questions about a piece of evidence

compare accounts of a person or event from two or more sources

make simple deductions from evidence · recognise that evidence may be incomplete or biased

appreciate that evidence can be interpreted in a number of ways