

**Applying Close Reading Tools for Primary Sources in Social Studies**

# **Sample Primary Sources**

The Federalist No. 51  
***Publius (James Madison)***

**February 6, 1788**

To the People of the State of New York:

TO WHAT expedient, then, shall we finally resort, for maintaining in practice the necessary partition of power among the several departments, as laid down in the Constitution? The only answer that can be given is, that as all these exterior provisions are found to be inadequate, the defect must be supplied, by so contriving the interior structure of the government as that its several constituent parts may, by their mutual relations, be the means of keeping each other in their proper places. Without presuming to undertake a full development of this important idea, I will hazard a few general observations, which may perhaps place it in a clearer light, and enable us to form a more correct judgment of the principles and structure of the government planned by the convention.

In order to lay a due foundation for that separate and distinct exercise of the different powers of government, which to a certain extent is admitted on all hands to be essential to the preservation of liberty, it is evident that each department should have a will of its own; and consequently should be so constituted that the members of each should have as little agency as possible in the appointment of the members of the others. Were this principle rigorously adhered to, it would require that all the appointments for the supreme executive, legislative, and judiciary magistracies should be drawn from the same fountain of authority, the people, through channels having no communication whatever with one another. Perhaps such a plan of constructing the several departments would be less difficult in practice than it may in contemplation appear. Some difficulties, however, and some additional expense would attend the execution of it. Some deviations, therefore, from the principle must be admitted. In the constitution of the judiciary department in particular, it might be inexpedient to insist rigorously on the principle: first, because peculiar qualifications being essential in the members, the primary consideration ought to be to select that mode of choice which best secures these qualifications; secondly, because the permanent tenure by which the appointments are held in that department, must soon destroy all sense of dependence on the authority conferring them.

It is equally evident, that the members of each department should be as little dependent as possible on those of the others, for the emoluments annexed to their offices. Were the executive magistrate, or the judges, not independent of the legislature in this particular, their independence in every other would be merely nominal. But the great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department consists in giving to those who administer each department the necessary constitutional means and personal motives to resist encroachments of the others. The provision for defense must in this, as in all other cases, be made commensurate to the danger of attack. Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place. It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.

A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions. This policy of supplying, by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives, might be traced through the whole system of human affairs, private as well as public. We see it particularly displayed in all the subordinate distributions of power, where the constant aim is to divide and arrange the several offices in such a manner as that each may be a check on the other that the private interest of every individual may be a sentinel over the public rights. These inventions of prudence cannot be less requisite in the distribution of the supreme powers of the State. But it is not possible to give to each department an equal power of self-defense. In republican government, the legislative authority necessarily predominates. The remedy for this inconveniency is to divide the legislature into different branches; and to render them, by different modes of election and different principles of action, as little connected with each other as the nature of their common functions and their common dependence on the society will admit. It may even be necessary to guard against dangerous encroachments by still further precautions. As the weight of the legislative authority requires that it should be thus divided, the weakness of the executive may require, on the other hand, that it should be fortified.

An absolute negative on the legislature appears, at first view, to be the natural defense with which the executive magistrate should be armed. But perhaps it would be neither altogether safe nor alone sufficient. On ordinary occasions it might not be exerted with the requisite firmness, and on extraordinary occasions it might be perfidiously abused. May not this defect of an absolute negative be supplied by some qualified connection between this weaker department and the weaker branch of the stronger department, by which the latter may be led to support the constitutional rights of the former, without being too much detached from the rights of its own department? If the principles on which these observations are founded be just, as I persuade myself they are, and they be applied as a criterion to the several State constitutions, and to the federal Constitution it will be found that if the latter does not perfectly correspond with them, the former are infinitely less able to bear such a test.

There are, moreover, two considerations particularly applicable to the federal system of America, which place that system in a very interesting point of view. First. In a single republic, all the power surrendered by the people is submitted to the administration of a single government; and the usurpations are guarded against by a division of the government into distinct and separate departments. In the compound republic of America, the power surrendered by the people is first divided between two distinct governments, and then the portion allotted to each subdivided among distinct and separate departments. Hence a double security arises to the rights of the people. The different governments will control each other, at the same time that each will be controlled by itself. Second. It is of great importance in a republic not only to guard the society against the oppression of its rulers, but to guard one part of the society against the injustice of the other part. Different interests necessarily exist in different classes of citizens. If a majority be united by a common interest, the rights of the minority will be insecure.

There are but two methods of providing against this evil: the one by creating a will in the community independent of the majority that is, of the society itself; the other, by comprehending in the society so many separate descriptions of citizens as will render an unjust combination of a majority of the whole very improbable, if not impracticable. The first method prevails in all governments possessing an hereditary or self-appointed authority. This, at best, is but a precarious security; because a power independent of the society may as well espouse the unjust views of the major, as the rightful interests of the minor party, and may possibly be turned against both parties. The second method will be exemplified in the federal republic of the United States. Whilst all authority in it will be derived from and dependent on the society, the society itself will be broken into so many parts, interests, and classes of citizens, that the rights of individuals, or of the minority, will be in little danger from interested combinations of the majority.

In a free government the security for civil rights must be the same as that for religious rights. It consists in the one case in the multiplicity of interests, and in the other in the multiplicity of sects. The degree of security in both cases will depend on the number of interests and sects; and this may be presumed to depend on the extent of country and number of people comprehended under the same government. This view of the subject must particularly recommend a proper federal system to all the sincere and considerate friends of republican government, since it shows that in exact proportion as the territory of the Union may be formed into more circumscribed Confederacies, or States oppressive combinations of a majority will be facilitated: the best security, under the republican forms, for the rights of every class of citizens, will be diminished: and consequently the stability and independence of some member of the government, the only other security, must be proportionately increased. Justice is the end of government. It is the end of civil society. It ever has been and ever will be pursued until it be obtained, or until liberty be lost in the pursuit. In a society under the forms of which the stronger faction can readily unite and oppress the weaker, anarchy may as truly be said to reign as in a state of nature, where the weaker individual is not secured against the violence of the stronger; and as, in the latter state, even the stronger individuals are prompted, by the uncertainty of their condition, to submit to a government which may protect the weak as well as themselves; so, in the former state, will the more powerful factions or parties be gradually induced, by a like motive, to wish for a government which will protect all parties, the weaker as well as the more powerful.

It can be little doubted that if the State of Rhode Island was separated from the Confederacy and left to itself, the insecurity of rights under the popular form of government within such narrow limits would be displayed by such reiterated oppressions of factious majorities that some power altogether independent of the people would soon be called for by the voice of the very factions whose misrule had proved the necessity of it. In the extended republic of the United States, and among the great variety of interests, parties, and sects which it embraces, a coalition of a majority of the whole society could seldom take place on any other principles than those of justice and the general good; whilst there being thus less danger to a minor from the will of a major party, there must be less pretext, also, to provide for the security of the former, by introducing into the government a will not dependent on the latter, or, in other words, a will independent of the society itself. It is no less certain than it is important, notwithstanding the contrary opinions which have been entertained, that the larger the society, provided it lie within a practical sphere, the more duly capable it will be of self-government. And happily for the REPUBLICAN CAUSE, the practicable sphere may be carried to a very great extent, by a judicious modification and mixture of the FEDERAL PRINCIPLE.

*PUBLIUS.*

The original text of the Federalist Papers (also known as *The Federalist*) was obtained by the Library of Congress from the e-text archives of Project Gutenberg

## FEDERALIST NO. 51 (1788)

***Excerpt***

“It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices [checks and balances] should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.”

“. . . [I]n the federal republic of the United States… all authority in it will be derived from and dependent on the society, the society itself will be broken into so many parts, interests, and classes of citizens, that the rights of individuals, or of the minority, will be in little danger from interested combinations of the majority.” All of the Constitution’s checks and balances, Madison concludes, serve to preserve liberty by ensuring justice. Madison explained, “Justice is the end of government. It is the end of civil society.”

**Primary Source Analysis Tool from the Library of Congress**

**Name of Document \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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| **Observe** |  | **Reflect** |  | **Question** |
| * Describe what you see. * What do you notice first? * How much of the text can you read? What does it say? * Describe anything that you see on the page besides words, such as images. * How is the text and information arranged? * Describe anything about this text that looks unfamiliar. * What other details can you see? |  | * What the purpose of this text? * Who created it? * Who do you think was its audience? * Can you tell anything about what was important at the time it was written? * Why do you think this document is important? * What can you learn from examining this? * If someone wrote this today, what would be different? |  | * What do you wonder – who? * What do you wonder – what? * What do you wonder – where? * What do you wonder – why? * What do you wonder – when? * What do you wonder – how? |
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| **Further Investigation** | | | | |
| What more do you want to know, and how can you find out?  Follow-up activities  Select a section of the text and put it in your own words. Look for clues to the points of view of the person, or people, who created this document. Discuss what someone with an opposing or differing point of view might say about the issues or events described.  How would the information be presented differently?  Examine a section of the text. Think about what you already know about this period in history. How does the text support or contradict your current understanding of this period? Can you see any clues to the point of view of the person who created this document? | | | | |

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**Name of Document \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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# **Reading Like a Historian (Stanford History Education Group)** <http://sheg.stanford.edu/rlh>

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| **Historical Reading Skills** | **Questions** | **Students should be able to . . .** | **Prompts** |
| Sourcing (Before reading document) | * Who authored the document? * What is the author’s point of view? * Why was it written? * When was it written? * Where was it written? * Is this source believable? Why? Why not? | * Identify author’s position * Identify and evaluate author's purpose in producing document * Predict what author will say BEFORE reading document * Evaluate source's believability/trustworthiness by considering genre, audience, and author's purpose | This author probably believes…  I think the audience is…  Based on the sourcing information, I predict this author will…  I do/don’t trust this document  because… |
| Contextualization | * What else was going on at the time this was written? * What was it like to be alive at this time? * What things were different back then? What things were the same? | * Use context/background information to draw more meaning from document * Infer historical context from document(s) * Recognize that document reflects one moment in changing past * Understand that words must be understood in a larger context | I already know that \_\_\_\_ is happening at this time…  From this document I would guess that people at this time were feeling…  This document might not give me the whole picture because … |
| Close Reading | * What claims does the author make? * What evidence does the author use to support those claims? * What words or phrases does the author use to convince me that he/she is right? * What information does the author leave out? * How does this document make me feel? | * Identify author’s claims about event * Evaluate evidence/reasoning author uses to support claims * Evaluate author’s word choice; understand that language is used deliberately | I think the author chose these words because they make me feel…  The author is trying to convince me… (by using/saying…) |
| Corroboration | * What do other pieces of evidence say? * Am I finding different versions of the story? Why or why not? * What pieces of evidence are most believable? | * Establish what is true by comparing   documents to each other   * Recognize disparities between two   accounts | This author agrees/ disagrees with…  This document was written  earlier/later than the other, so… |

# **Read Like a Historian**

## Document Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Examine: What do you see? What topic does it address? What details do you notice in this source? What is interesting? Is there something that you don’t understand?

Question: What other information do you need to understand this source? What questions do you have for further research?

Think: What are some guesses you can make about this document? Who do you think made it? When? Why did they make it? Is it neutral or biased?

Draw conclusions: Base on your background knowledge and the details in this document, what conclusions can you draw about the historical period and the meaning of the document?

**The Way Station**

Each evening, the stage announces its approach to a way station by the driver blowing a bugle. The way station offers sparse comfort.

"The station buildings were long, low huts, made of sun-dried, mud-colored bricks, laid up without mortar (adobes the Spaniards call these bricks, and Americans shorten it to 'dobies’). The roofs, which had no slant to them worth speaking of, were thatched and then sodded or covered with a thick layer of earth, and from this sprang a pretty rank growth of weeds and grass. It was the first time we had ever seen a man's front yard on top of his house. The buildings consisted of barns, stable-room for twelve or fifteen horses, and a hut for an eating room for passengers. This latter had bunks in it for the station-keeper and a hostler or two. You could rest your elbow on its eaves, and you had to bend in order to get in at the door. In place of a window there was a square hole about large enough for a man to crawl through, but this had no glass in it. There was no flooring, but the ground was packed hard. There was no stove, but fire-place served all needful purposes. There were no shelves, no cupboards, no closets. In a corner stood an open sack of flour, and nestling against its base were a couple of black and venerable tin coffee-pots, a tin teapot, a little bag of salt, and a side of bacon.

By the door of the station keeper's den, outside, was a tin wash-basin, on the ground. Near it was a pail of water and a piece of yellow soap, and from the eves hung a hoary blue woolen shirt, significantly - but this latter was the station-keeper's private towel, and only two persons in all the party might venture to use it - the stage-driver and the conductor.“

Mark Twain, Roughing It (1872)

## Questions for Analyzing Primary Sources

1. Who created the source and why? Was it created through a spur-of-the-moment act, a routine transaction, or a thoughtful, deliberate process?
2. Did the recorder have firsthand knowledge of the event? Or, did the recorder report what others saw and heard?
3. Was the recorder a neutral party, or did the creator have opinions or interests that might have influenced what was recorded?
4. Did the recorder produce the source for personal use, for one or more individuals, or for a large audience?
5. Was the source meant to be public or private?
6. Did the recorder wish to inform or persuade others? (Check the words in the source. The words may tell you whether the recorder was trying to be objective or persuasive.) Did the recorder have reasons to be honest or dishonest?
7. Was the information recorded during the event, immediately after the event, or after some lapse of time? How large a lapse of time?

## Social Studies Resources from the World Wide Web

**An Outline of American History**. An overview of history and government developed as part of *The American Revolution—an HTML Project.* <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/>

**Annenberg Classroom.** Great course for civics education. [http://www.annenbergclassroom.org](http://www.annenbergclassroom.org/)

**Digital History**. An interactive, multimedia history of the United States from the Revolution to the present. <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>

**DocsTeach** – This site includes links to primary sources, lesson plans, activity ideas, and template to build your own lessons. <http://docsteach.org/>

**Library of Congress**. Classroom and professional development materials to help teachers effectively use primary sources. To get started, try these quick starting points:

* **Browse by Topic** - Easy browsing for primary sources across all the digital collections of the Library of Congress. <http://www.loc.gov/topics/>
* **Primary Source Sets** - Each set collects primary sources on a specific topic. <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/>
* **Using Primary Sources in the Classroom -** <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/>

**50 Core Documents. Teaching American History.** <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/50docs/>

**Four Reads: Learning to Read Primary Documents**. Take a step-by-step process for reading primary documents. <http://teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/teaching-guides/25690>

**National Archives and Records Administration**. The website of the National Archives. All types of educational units and copies of national documents are available from this governmental site. <http://www.archives.gov>

**Newsela**. A site with nonfiction articles available in 4-5 different Lexile Levels with many of them providing a quiz that is aligned to a specific anchor standard. It is necessary to sign up for the free account to see the different level of articles. <https://newsela.com/>

**Our Documents**. <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/index.php?flash=true&>

**Reading Like a Historian**.Stanford History Education Group. Information on how to teach students to closely read primary sources. <http://sheg.stanford.edu/?q=node/21>

**Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media.** The resources are a great addition for your classroom. http[://chnm.gmu.edu/teaching-and-learning/](http://chnm.gmu.edu/teaching-and-learning/)

* **Live Binders.** <http://www.livebinders.com/play/play/573792>

**Teaching History – National History Clearinghouse.** This site has a lot of materials to assist in the teaching of history. <http://teachinghistory.org>

**The History Channel.** The History Channel provides both historic and current topics, readings, audio and video recordings, and lessons for the classroom. <http://www.history.com/>