

Unit 1, Lesson 10: Shake or Fake in Wilmington

Lesson Overview

In this lesson students will examine two conflicting newspaper accounts of President Lincoln's train trip through Wilmington on 16 June 1864 and consider why there might be different accounts of the same event.

**Note to Teachers: You will notice that the historical context used in this lesson (Abraham Lincoln in 1864) falls outside of the 4th grade course chronology. This was purposeful. Lincoln was selected as a historical figure who is familiar to most students so that background knowledge would be less of a barrier for students to enter into a discussion of History Standard 3. The goal of this lesson is for students to gain an understanding of why historical accounts of the same event may differ and the extent to which the points of view of the authors contributed to those differences, not to learn details about Abraham Lincoln. In other words, this lesson uses Lincoln to introduce students to History Standard 3.*

Delaware Standard(s)

- **History Standard 3a, 4-5 [Interpretation]:** Students will explain why historical accounts of the same event sometimes differ and relate this explanation to the evidence presented or the point-of-view of the author.

Common Core ELA Standards

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.6:** Compare and contrast a firsthand and secondhand account of the same event or topic; describe the differences in focus and the information provided.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.9:** Integrate information from two texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably

Essential Questions

- Why might there be two accounts of the same event?

Enduring Understandings

Historical accounts of the same event sometimes differ due, in part, to the evidence presented or the point-of-view of the author.

Prior Knowledge: This lesson assumes that students understand the definitions and differences between primary and secondary sources.

- Primary source - a piece of evidence (document or object) that dates back to the time when an event occurred, or that is produced by an eyewitness.
- Secondary source - evidence, descriptions, or explanations that offer information or interpretations about a past event or person but are not produced by eyewitnesses or linked close in time to when the event occurred.

Resources

- [Lesson 10 Google Presentation](#)
- [Resource 1: Fake Excerpts from Fake Books Published Recently about President Lincoln](#)
- [Resource 2: Newspaper Accounts of Lincoln in Wilmington](#)
- [Resource 3: Check for Understanding](#)

Procedures

1. **Introduce the Lesson:** Here is where you get to act like the history geek that students think you are ;). Tell the students that you were looking at some new children's books about President Abraham Lincoln last night when the following two passages caught you by surprise. Read the fake excerpts found on [Resource 1](#) as if you are reading them from two different books (you might want to insert the fake excerpts in a real book to add to the ruse).
2. Ask the students...
 - a. to summarize the two accounts
 - b. why they think you were suddenly surprised. [[two books had two completely different accounts of the same event](#)]
 - c. in what ways are the two accounts similar or different? [[one passage suggests Lincoln took time to shake hands with, while the other suggest his train passed rudely by without the President even showing his face](#)]
 - d. how can we account for the differences in the books? [[uncovering the answer to this question is the focus of this lesson](#)]
3. Suggest that you have a real "history mystery" on your hands as you don't know if there actually was a "shake" (i.e., handshakes with President Lincoln) or whether the suggestion that handshaking occurred, is "fake." Is this a case of a "Shake or Fake?"
4. **Think-Pair-Share:** Write "Shake or Fake?" on the board. Have students consider the question, "what are some strategies that could be used to figure out what 'really' happened?"
5. Ask the students to recall the difference between a primary and a secondary source. Ask students to offer definitions. Ask the students...
 - a. do you think the people who wrote the two books witnessed or saw Abraham Lincoln go through Wilmington in 1864?
 - b. should the 2 books from which you just read considered primary or secondary sources?
 - c. might there be a good way to find out whether President Lincoln actually stopped and took time to shake the hands of people in Wilmington?
6. Point out that the two accounts you just read are considered secondary sources and that one way to determine what "really" happened is to look back to primary sources to see what they suggest. Maybe someone who was there saw what President Lincoln did! Historians consider primary sources to be evidence because the people who were there at the time would have seen what happened.
7. Put students in pairs. Distribute copies of [Resource 2: Newspaper Accounts of Lincoln in Wilmington](#). Read the two accounts aloud while students follow along. Tell the students that there are two documents on this page and that these are primary source newspaper accounts from June 17, 1864. They appeared exactly one day after Lincoln's train passed through Wilmington.
8. **Graphic Organizer:** Have students work with a partner to create and complete a Venn diagram in which they analyze the similarities and differences between the two accounts. The two outer circles should prompt them to list information that is unique to each article, while the inner

portion of the diagram should be used to highlight information that is similar between the two documents.

9. **Whole Group:** have volunteers describe the unique elements of each article and the similarities while you complete a Venn diagram on the board or projector.
10. Draw special attention to the fact that one **similarity** is that both articles are reporting on the same event(i.e. Lincoln's train ride through Wilmington). Then, ask the students...
 - a. Why might two primary source accounts of the same event be **different**?
 - i. *Suggested Response: There may be a number of reasons but the one that seems clear and most important in this case is that there were two different newspapers in Delaware which were owned by people who had different points of view about President Lincoln. The Gazette tended to support Lincoln while the Journal tended to oppose the President. In terms of the standard addressed in this lesson, there are two key points for students to pick up on here:*
 1. *whoever wrote the books in 2021 and 2022 **used different sources** to support their conclusions. One used the Gazette as their evidence; the other used the Journal.*
 2. *those who wrote the newspaper articles back in 1864 held **different points of view** about President Lincoln.*
 - b. Has this “shake or fake” mystery been solved?
 - i. *Suggested Response: It has not. Students need to understand that sometimes we just must accept that we just don't have enough evidence to be certain that something in the past actually happened. But historians are always looking for new evidence that supports or corroborates one conclusion or interpretation. Ask students if they can think of any new kinds of evidence that might be discovered some day to help solve the “Shake or Fake” mystery e.g., might find someone's diary or letter, the train conductor's log or diary, a photograph of the event etc.*
 - c. **Extend Thinking:** Ask students if and how researchers might find out whether President Lincoln actually did stop and shake hands with people in Wilmington?
 - i. *Potential Response: e.g., uncover new and credible sources that corroborate one of the accounts*

Debrief

1. Suggest to students that all historical sources reflect some degree of bias whether they be primary or secondary sources. In this lesson, it should be clear that
 - a. both primary and secondary sources can and should be questioned
 - b. there is not always a “best” source
 - c. that it is important for researchers to continue to try to corroborate stories
 - d. that just because a mystery is not resolved today does not mean that it may not be resolved in the future by those who continue to investigate.
2. Tell students that the two secondary accounts which you read (Resource 1) were “fake” but that they easily could have been actual accounts based on what appears in the primary sources. Suggest that they were intended as an instructional tool i.e., to help students better understand History Standard 2.

3. Revisit the essential questions for this lesson. Ask students - Why might there be two accounts of the same event?

Check for Understanding:

Distribute copies of [Resource 3: Check for Understanding](#) and have students complete the checks for understanding.