“Historical thinking ... in particular the disposition to think about the past by recognizing the inadequacy of one’s own conceptual apparatus, is essential in teaching people how to understand others different from themselves. If we never recognize that our individual experience is limited, what hope is there of understanding people whose logic defies our own, whose choices and beliefs appear inscrutable when judged against our own standards?” ~ Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2001), page 110. ~

What do you already know about the subject of the source?

What is the source?

Who created it? What is their status in society? Was it a man or woman or child? How old was the person who created it?

What is the point of view of the source’s creator? What biases might the creator have? Is the voice in the document the same as the author?

What do you believe or doubt about this source?

Why was it created? For what event or occasion? What was at stake for the author?

Where was it created?

Are there other documents that refer to it? Do they corroborate or conflict with our source?

For what audience is it intended? How do we know?

Is the source an “original” or reprint? What editions or changes have been made to it over time?

How can we establish “authenticity”?

How was it made? What materials were used in the process?

When was the item created? What was happening at that time?
Was the item created individually or is it part of a collection, volume, album or other larger unit? What is its place?

What ideas or values appear in the source?

What is implied in the source, but not stated? What is its mystery?

What assumptions do we bring with us when analyzing this source? How might this complicate our understanding?

What don’t we learn from the document? What seems vague or confusing? What is surprising or unexpected?

What in the source conflicts with what you have seen or read elsewhere? What other information or types of sources do we need to understand the document?

What is strange to us in this source? What is familiar?

What do we learn about history from reading this source? What do we learn about our world now? Why did we save this item? Was it preserved over time? Why? What value does it hold to us now?