The HISTORIAN'S APPRENTICE

What Does It Mean to Say Rome "Fell"?

Sourcing
Contextualizing
Finding Bias
Corroborating
Interpreting

Students learn the historian's craft by analyzing primary and secondary sources

MindSparks
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

The HISTORIAN'S APPRENTICE

What Does It Mean to Say Rome "Fell"?

by Jonathan Burack

Each unit in *The Historian's Apprentice* series deals with an important historical topic. It introduces students to a five-step set of practices designed to simulate the experience of a historian and make explicit all key phases of the historian's craft.

The Historian's Apprentice: A Five-Step Process

1. **Reflect on Your Prior Knowledge of the Topic.**
   Students discuss what they already know and how their prior knowledge may shape or distort the way they view the topic.
2. **Apply Habits of Historical Thinking to the Topic.**
   Students build background knowledge on the basis of five habits of thinking that historians use in constructing accounts of the past.
3. **Interpret the Relevant Primary Sources.**
   Students apply a set of rules for interpreting sources and assessing their relevance and usefulness.
4. **Assess the Interpretations of Other Historians.**
   Students learn to read secondary sources actively, with the goal of deciding among competing interpretations based on evidence in the sources.
5. **Interpret, Debate and Write About the Topic Yourself.**
   Students apply what they have learned by constructing evidence-based interpretations of their own in a variety of ways.

MindSparks®
CULVER CITY, CALIFORNIA

HS775 v2.0

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Printed in the United States of America

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ISBN: 978-1-57596-353-2
Product Code: HS775 v2.0

Teacher Introduction

Teaching the Historian's Craft

The goal of *The Historian's Apprentice* units is to expose students in a manageable way to the complex processes by which historians practice their craft. By modeling what historians do, students will practice the full range of skills that make history the unique and uniquely valuable challenge that it is.

Modeling the historian's craft is not the same as being a historian—something few students will become. Therefore, a scaffolding is provided here to help students master historical content in a way that will be manageable and useful to them.

Historical thinking is not a simple matter of reciting one fact after another, or even of mastering a single, authoritative account. It is disciplined by evidence, and it is a quest for truth; yet, historians usually try to clarify complex realities and make tentative judgments, not to draw final conclusions. In doing so, they wrestle with imperfect sets of evidence (the primary sources), detect multiple meanings embedded in those sources, and take into account varying interpretations by other historians. They also recognize how wide a divide separates the present from earlier times. Hence, they work hard to avoid present-mindedness and to achieve empathy with people who were vastly different from us.

In their actual practice, historians are masters of the cautious, qualified conclusion. Yet they engage, use their imaginations, and debate with vigor. It is this spirit and these habits of craft that *The Historian's Apprentice* seeks to instill in students.

The Historian's Apprentice: Five-Steps in Four Parts

The Historian's Apprentice is a five-step process. However, the materials presented here are organized into four parts. Part I deals with the first two of the five steps of the process. Each of the other three parts then deals with one step in the process. Here is a summary of the four parts into which the materials are organized:

Teacher Introduction. Includes suggested day-by-day sequences for using these materials, including options for using the PowerPoint presentations. One sequence is designed for younger students and supplies a page of vocabulary definitions.

Part 1. A student warm-up activity, an introductory essay, a handout detailing a set of habits of historical thinking, and two PowerPoint presentations (*Five Habits of Historical Thinking* and *What Does it Mean to Say Rome "Fell"?*). Part 1 (including the PowerPoints) deals with *The Historian's Apprentice* Steps 1 and 2.

Part 2. A checklist for analyzing primary sources, several primary sources, and worksheets for analyzing them. Part 2 deals with *The Historian's Apprentice* Step 3.

Part 3. Two secondary source passages and two student activities analyzing those passages. Part 3 deals with *The Historian's Apprentice* Step 4.

Part 4. Two optional follow-up activities enabling students to write about and/or debate their own interpretations of the topic. Part 4 deals with *The Historian's Apprentice* Step 5.

Suggested Five-Day Sequence

Below is one possible way to use this *Historian's Apprentice* unit. Tasks are listed day by day in a sequence taking five class periods, with some homework and some optional follow-up activities.

PowerPoint Presentation: *Five Habits of Historical Thinking*. This presentation comes with each *Historian's Apprentice* unit. If you have used it before with other units, you need not do so again. If you decide to use it, incorporate it into the **Day 1** activities. In either case, give students the "Five Habits of Historical Thinking" handout for future reference. Those Five Habits are as follows:

- History Is Not the Past Itself
- The Detective Model: Problem, Evidence, Interpretation
- Time, Change, and Continuity
- Cause and Effect
- As They Saw It: Grasping Past Points of View

Warm-Up Activity: **Homework assignment:** Students do the "Warm-Up Activity." This activity explores student memories and personal experiences shaping their understanding of the topic.

Day 1: Discuss the "Warm-Up Activity." Then either have students read or review the "Five Habits of Historical Thinking" handout, or use the *Five Habits* PowerPoint presentation.

Homework assignment: Students read the background essay "How 'Dark' Were the Dark Ages?"

Day 2: Use the second PowerPoint presentation, *What Does It Mean to Say Rome "Fell"?,* to overview the topic for this lesson. The presentation applies the Five Habits of Historical Thinking to this topic. Do the two activities embedded in the presentation.

Homework assignment: Students read the "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist." The checklist teaches a systematic way to handle sources:

- Sourcing
- Contextualizing
- Interpreting meanings
- Point of view
- Corroborating sources

Day 3: In class, students study some of the ten primary source documents and complete "Source Analysis" worksheets on them. They use their notes to discuss these sources. (Worksheet questions are all based on the concepts on the "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist.")

Day 4: In class, students complete the remaining "Source Analysis" worksheets and use their notes to discuss these sources. Take some time to discuss briefly the two secondary source passages students will analyze next.

Homework assignment: Students read these two secondary source passages.

Day 5: In class, students do the two "Secondary Sources" activities and discuss them. These activities ask them to analyze the two secondary source passages using four criteria:

- Clear focus on a problem or question
- Position or point of view
- Use of evidence or sources
- Awareness of alternative explanations

Follow-Up Activities (optional, at teacher discretion):

Do as preferred: the DBQ Essay Assignment and/or the Structured Debate.

Suggested Three-Day Sequence

If you have less time to devote to this lesson, here is a suggested shorter sequence. The sequence does not include the PowerPoint presentation *Five Habits of Historical Thinking*. This presentation is included with each *Historian's Apprentice* unit. If you have never used it with your class, you may want to do so before following this three-day sequence.

The three-day sequence leaves out a few activities from the five-day sequence. It also suggests that you use only six key primary sources. Yet it still walks students through the steps in the *Historian's Apprentice* approach: Clarifying background knowledge, analyzing primary sources, comparing secondary sources, and debating or writing about the topic.

Warm-Up Activity. **Homework assignment:** Ask students to read or review the "Five Habits of Historical Thinking" handout and read the background essay "How 'Dark' Were the Dark Ages?"

Day 1: Use the PowerPoint presentation *What Does It Mean to Say Rome "Fell"?* It overviews the topic for this lesson by applying the Five Habits of Historical Thinking to it. Do the two activities embedded in the presentation.

Homework assignment: Students read or review the "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist." The checklist teaches a systematic way to handle sources.

Day 2: In class, students study some of the ten primary source documents and complete "Source Analysis" worksheets on them. They use their notes to discuss these sources. We suggest using Documents 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 9.

You may wish to make your own choices of primary sources. Use your judgment in deciding how many of them your students can effectively analyze in a single class period.

Homework assignment: Students read the two secondary source passages.

Day 3: In class, students do the two "Secondary Sources" activities and discuss them. These activities ask them to analyze the two secondary source passages using four criteria.

Follow-Up Activities (optional, at teacher discretion):

Do as preferred: the DBQ Essay Assignment and/or the Structured Debate.

Suggestions for Use with Younger Students

For younger students, parts of this lesson may prove challenging. If you feel your students need a somewhat more manageable path through the material, see the suggested sequence below.

If you want to use the *Five Habits of Historical Thinking* PowerPoint presentation, this sequence takes four class periods. If you do not use this PowerPoint, you can combine **Day 1** and **Day 2** and keep the sequence to just three days. We suggest using six primary sources only. The ones listed for **Day 3** are less demanding in terms of vocabulary and conceptual complexity. For **Day 4**, we provide some simpler DBQs for the follow-up activities.

Vocabulary: A list of vocabulary terms in the sources and the introductory essay is provided on page 7 of this booklet. You may wish to hand this sheet out as a reading reference, you could make flashcards out of some of the terms, or you might ask each of several small groups to use the vocabulary sheet to explain terms in one source to the rest of the class.

SUGGESTED FOUR-DAY SEQUENCE

Warm-Up Activity. **Homework assignment:** Students do the "Warm-Up Activity." This activity explores student memories and personal experiences shaping their understanding of the topic.

Day 1: Discuss the "Warm-Up Activity." Show the *Five Habits of Historical Thinking* PowerPoint presentation (unless you have used it before and/or you do not think it is needed now). If you do not use this PowerPoint presentation, give students the "Five Habits of Historical Thinking" handout and discuss it with them.

Homework assignment: Ask students to read the background essay "How 'Dark' Were the Dark Ages?"

Day 2: Use the PowerPoint presentation *What Does It Mean to Say Rome "Fell"?* This introduces the topic for the lesson by applying the Five Habits of Historical Thinking to it. Do the two activities embedded in the presentation.

Homework assignment: Students read or review the "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist." The checklist teaches a systematic way to handle sources.

Day 3: Discuss the "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist" and talk through one primary source document in order to illustrate the meaning of the concepts on the checklist. Then have students complete "Source Analysis" worksheets after studying primary source documents 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 8.

Homework assignment: Students read the two secondary source passages.

Day 4: Students do *only* "Secondary Sources: Activity 2" and discuss it. This activity asks them to choose from among the sources the two that best back up each secondary source passage.

Follow-Up Activities (optional, at teacher discretion):

Do as preferred: the DBQ Essay Assignment and/or the Structured Debate.

Here are some alternate DBQs tailored to the six primary sources recommended here:

Edward Gibbon wrote about the "decline and fall" of the Roman Empire. Do you think late antiquity really was just a time of "decline and fall"? Why or why not?

"It's just not fair to call Clovis's Franks and the other Germanic peoples 'barbarians'." Explain why you do or do not agree with this statement.

Vocabulary: The Introductory Essay

- **Arianism:** Christian beliefs about Christ's nature adopted by some "barbarians," but called heresy by the Church
- **aristocrat:** A person born to a high status, often with wealth based on landed property
- **"barbarian":** Among the ancient Greeks and Romans, a term for any foreigner of a different culture and language
- **constitution:** In this case, the overall organization of a society's political system
- **deduce:** To infer or conclude something based on evidence
- **despotic:** Tyrannical
- **devolve:** To pass something, such as authority, to another
- **heretical:** Anything seen as opposed to an official creed or doctrine
- **heritage:** Something belonging to someone at birth or passed on to them from the past
- **literacy:** Ability to read
- **monarchy:** Rule by kings and queens
- **Roman Senate:** A ruling body of Roman nobles whose powers varied greatly and declined over time

Vocabulary: The Primary Sources

- **abashed:** Ashamed, put down, or embarrassed
- **admonition:** A warning or criticism
- **calumnious:** Slanderous
- **commence:** Start
- **concupiscence:** Lust
- **constrain:** Hold in check, or stop
- **contrition:** Deep remorse; the act of being sorry for one's sins
- **invoke:** To call for or pray for
- **profer:** To bring forth or utter; in this case, to offer something
- **pestilence:** In this case, a deadly epidemic disease
- **opprobrium:** The disgrace attached to someone for shameful conduct
- **remnants:** Things that remain or are left over
- **reconcile:** Bring together; to settle something or accept it
- **sacrilegious:** Describes a violation of what is considered sacred
- **suffer:** In this case, to allow or permit something
- **waylay:** To attack or ambush

Vocabulary: The Secondary Sources

- **crisis:** A key turning point, usually of danger or disorder
- **diffusion:** In this case, the spreading out or wide distribution of something
- **distinctive:** Unique or unusual
- **high culture:** The arts, music, literature, and other forms of learning most valued by a society
- **irrevocable:** Unable to be taken back, revoked, or undone
- **obsessive:** In this case, describes a persistent, strongly held idea or feeling
- **prelude:** In this case, the opening phase of an event or trend
- **sophistication:** In this case, a high level of complexity

Part 1: The Fall of Rome—Providing the Context

Note to the teacher: The next pages provide materials meant to help students better understand and evaluate this topic. The materials also seek to teach students the Five Habits of Historical Thinking.

This section includes the following:

- **PowerPoint presentation: *The Five Habits of Historical Thinking***
  This presentation illustrates five habits of thought or modes of analysis that guide historians as they construct their secondary accounts of a topic. These five habits are not about skills used in analyzing primary sources (those are dealt with more explicitly in another handout in the next section). The Five Habits are meant to help students see history as a way of thinking, not as the memorizing of disparate facts and predigested conclusions. The PowerPoint uses several historical episodes as examples to illustrate the Five Habits. In two places, it pauses to ask students to do a simple activity applying one of the habits to some of their own life experiences.

  If you have used this PowerPoint with other *Historian's Apprentice* units, you may not need to use it again here.

- **Handout: "The Five Habits of Historical Thinking"**
  This handout supplements the PowerPoint presentation. It is meant as a reference for students to use as needed. If you have used other *Historian's Apprentice* units, your students may only need to review this handout quickly.

- **Warm-Up Activity**
  A simple exercise designed to help you see what students know about the topic, what confuses them, or what ideas they may have absorbed about it from popular culture, friends and family, etc. The goal is to alert them to their need to gain a clearer idea of the past and be critical of what they think they already know.

- **Introductory essay: "How 'Dark' Were the Dark Ages?"**
  The essay provides enough basic background information on the topic to enable students to assess primary sources and conflicting secondary source interpretations. At the end of the essay, students get some points to keep in mind about the nature of the sources they will examine and the conflicting secondary source interpretations they will debate.

- **PowerPoint presentation: *What Does It Mean to Say Rome "Fell"?***
  This PowerPoint presentation reviews the topic for the lesson and shows how the Five Habits of Historical Thinking can be applied to a clearer understanding of it. At two points, the presentation calls for a pause and students are prompted to discuss some aspects of their prior knowledge of the topic. Our proposed sequences suggest using this PowerPoint presentation *after* assigning the introductory essay, but you may prefer to reverse this order.

Warm-Up Activity

What Do You Know About Ancient Rome?

This lesson deals with the end of the Roman Empire and the era of late antiquity (around 400 to 800 CE). Whenever you start to learn something about a time in history, it helps to think first of what you already know about it, or think you know. You probably have impressions, or you may have read or heard things about it already. Some of what you know may be accurate. You need to be ready to alter your fixed ideas about this time as you learn more about it. This is what any historian would do. To do this, study this illustration and take a few notes in response to the questions below it.

This photo shows some ruins in the city of Rome. What do you know about the famous round building, the Colosseum, behind the arch in this photo?

The structure standing alone in front of the Colosseum is a triumphal arch. Ancient Romans built many of these arches to celebrate victories at war. Why do you think war was such a central concern for the ancient Romans? What ideas about the nature of the Roman Empire do these architectural ruins give you?

The ruins here remind many of the fact that the mighty Roman Empire did fall apart and fade away. What do you know about the fall of Rome? What books or movies do you know of that deal with that time in history? From them, what impression do you have of what life was like after the fall of Rome, in late antiquity?

How "Dark" Were the Dark Ages?

The most famous work on ancient Rome is *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, by Edward Gibbon, published in several volumes between 1776 and 1788. In the first chapter of this great historical study, Gibbon offered this glowing description of the Roman Empire at its height:

> *"In the second century of the Christian era, the Empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilized portion of mankind. The frontiers of that extensive monarchy were guarded by ancient renown and disciplined valour. The gentle but powerful influence of laws and manners had gradually cemented the union of the provinces. Their peaceful inhabitants enjoyed and abused the advantages of wealth and luxury. The image of a free constitution was preserved with decent reverence: the Roman senate appeared to possess the sovereign authority, and devolved on the emperors all the executive powers of government. During a happy period (A.D. 98–180) of more than fourscore years, the public administration was conducted by the virtue and abilities of Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, and the two Antonines. It is the design of this, and of the two succeeding chapters, to describe the prosperous condition of their empire; and afterwards, from the death of Marcus Antoninus, to deduce the most important circumstances of its decline and fall; a revolution which will ever be remembered, and is still felt by the nations of the earth."*

In Gibbon's view, the "decline and fall" of this great civilization was a huge tragedy: It set humanity back centuries. It resulted in the triumph of several inferior "barbarian" societies, especially in the western half of the former empire. It meant the loss for centuries of the priceless literary heritage of Rome, to say nothing of the political stability and prosperity that the Roman Empire gave to the entire Mediterranean region at its height.

For centuries, the Roman army's famous legions manned forts all along its northern frontiers—across northern England, along the Rhine and down the Danube rivers. In the mid-200s CE, especially, Germanic warriors fought Roman armies in these northern frontier regions. Those years were a time of great internal trouble for the Roman Empire as well. However, for the most part, Rome held off the invaders. It survived this crisis of the mid-200s, and in fact it revived and strengthened itself. Under Emperor Constantine I (306–337 CE), it began to transform itself into a Christian empire, and by the end of the fourth century it seemed in many ways stronger than ever.

Then in 378 a huge army of Goths wiped out the forces of the eastern Roman Empire at the battle of Hadrianople, killing the Emperor Valens. The Goths were seeking lands of their own within the Roman Empire. Their invasion began a new and more decisive phase of pressure by the Germanic peoples. In the 400s, Rome itself was sacked several times as Visigoths, Vandals, Sueves, Alans, and other Germanic tribes began to carve out kingdoms of their own throughout the western half of the Roman Empire.

The eastern part of the empire held out much more successfully. It did face a formidable foe in the Sassanid rulers of Persia to its east. However, under Justinian (ruled 527–565 CE), it was able to reestablish control over much of Italy, parts of Spain, and most of the North African coastal areas that had been taken over from Rome by the Vandals in the early 400s. However, Justinian's empire was soon struck by a vast and deadly plague, as well as by renewed warfare with Persia and other problems. Then, in the seventh century, Arab warriors inspired by Islam arrived and conquered much of the weakened eastern Roman Empire (along with all of Persia). By the 700s, a drastically smaller eastern empire (Byzantium) and a series of Christianized barbarian kingdoms in western Europe were all that remained of the powerful Roman Empire that Gibbon so admired.

The Germanic and other peoples whom the Romans called "barbarians" are often badly misunderstood today. They were not simple, primitive warrior bands. By and large, they were also not horse-riding nomads, such as the Huns and others from the steppes of Central Asia. They were complex

societies, based on agriculture and herding, ruled by warrior-kings and their aristocratic landholding elites. In the fifth century, the more powerful of these barbarian peoples did invade the Roman Empire, but not in order to destroy it. They wanted to live in it and benefit more directly from it. For centuries, after all, many of them had traded with Rome and learned from it. They had supplied soldiers to support its frontier legions. They had often allied with it against its other enemies.

Many Germanic tribes converted to Christianity. However, except for Clovis's Franks, most of them adopted the Arian Christianity declared heretical by the Roman Catholic Church. Nevertheless, these outsiders soon learned to live with and cooperate with the wealthy Roman aristocrats who owned vast estates throughout Gaul and other parts of the western empire. New societies resulted from this merging and began to grow stronger. Churches and monasteries began to spread literacy once again. Kings issued increasingly complex law codes. And in time, these Europeans adopted more rapidly than Rome ever had new tools such as the heavy plough, the stirrup, the horse collar, water mills—technologies that would in time enable them to grow in strength and power far beyond that of the Romans.

So just how "dark" were the centuries between about 400 and 800 CE? Few historians would accept the idea of labeling these centuries a "dark age." However, some stress the positive features while others emphasize the negatives. Some see mainly collapse and retreat, others a new and unique advance. The sources for this lesson will let you make up your own mind—and they should help you decide what you think it means to say Rome "fell."

Points to Keep in Mind

Historians' Questions

Some historians view the centuries after Rome's fall as a very unfortunate time. Central political control collapsed, tribal violence and disorder was widespread, population declined drastically, literacy vanished, trade shrank, high-quality goods disappeared, and a much poorer economy emerged based only on local production. Other historians, however, emphasize the positive developments of the era. They point out how despotic and rigid the Roman Empire itself had become by 400 CE. As the empire fell apart, Christianity provided a new framework both for culture and political authority. The new kingdoms adopted Roman standards of law and government. Monasteries and wealthy aristocrats kept literacy and culture alive. The increasingly localized and rural economic life also made possible the beginnings of technological change and progress.

Both sides probably have a part of the truth. The Roman Empire's collapse did result in disorder and economic decline. However, it also made possible the emergence of a new society that even in those early "dark ages" showed many signs of the great vitality and creativity to come.

The Primary Source Evidence

*(**Note:** The spelling, punctuation, and capitalization in some of these primary sources have been simplified and modernized.)*

For this lesson, you will study ten primary source documents on late antiquity (approximately 400–800 CE). Most, though not all, focus on the western European regions in the centuries after that portion of the Roman Empire fell apart. Together, these sources will give you evidence to help you better understand what life was like and how it changed from around the fifth through the eighth centuries CE. They will also enable you to make some informed judgments of your own about what two historians say about the fall of Rome.

Secondary Source Interpretations

After studying and discussing the primary sources, you will read two short passages by two different historians. The historians who wrote these passages agree about most of the facts, but they make quite different overall judgments about what the "fall" of Rome meant. You will use your own background knowledge and your ideas about the primary sources as you think about and answer some questions about the views of these historians.

Five Habits of Historical Thinking

History is not just a chronicle of one fact after another. It is a meaningful story, or an account of what happened and why. It is written to address questions or problems historians pose. This checklist describes key habits of thinking that historians adopt as they interpret primary sources and create their own accounts of the past.

History Is Not the Past Itself

When we learn history, we learn a story about the past, not the past itself. No matter how certain an account of the past seems, it is only one account, not the entire story. The "entire story" is gone; that is, the past itself no longer exists. Only some records of events remain, and they are never complete. Therefore it is important to see all judgments and conclusions about the past as tentative or uncertain. Avoid looking for hard-and-fast "lessons" from the past. The value of history is in a way the opposite of such a search for quick answers; that is, its value is in teaching us to live with uncertainty and see even our present as complex, unfinished, open-ended.

The Detective Model: Problem, Evidence, Interpretation

Historians can't observe the past directly. They must use evidence, just as a detective tries to reconstruct a crime based on clues left behind. In the historian's case, primary sources are the evidence—letters, official documents, maps, photos, newspaper articles, artifacts, and all other traces from past times. Like a detective, a historian defines a very specific problem to solve, one for which evidence does exist. Asking clear, meaningful questions is a key to writing good history. Evidence is always incomplete. It's not always easy to separate fact from opinion in it, or tell what is important from what is not. Historians try to do this, but they must stay cautious about their conclusions and open to other interpretations of the same evidence.

Time, Change, and Continuity

History is about the flow of events over time, yet is not just one fact after another. It seeks to understand this flow of events as a pattern. In that pattern, some things change while others hold steady over time. You need to see history as a dynamic interplay of both change and continuity together. Only by doing this can you see how the past has evolved into the present—and why the present carries with it many traces of or links to the past.

Cause and Effect

Along with seeing patterns of change and continuity over time, historians seek to explain that change. In doing this, they know that no single factor causes change. Many factors interact. Unique, remarkable, and creative individual actions and plans are one factor, but individual plans have unintended outcomes, and these shape events in unexpected ways. Moreover, individuals do not always act rationally or with full knowledge of what they are doing. Finally, geography, technology, economics, cultural traditions, and ideas all affect what groups and individuals do.

As They Saw It: Grasping Past Points of View

Above all, thinking like a historian means trying hard to see how people in the past thought and felt. This is not easy. As one historian put it, the past is "another country," in which people felt and thought differently, often very differently, from the way we do now. Avoiding "present-mindedness" is therefore a key task for historians. Also, since the past includes various groups in conflict, historians must learn to empathize with many diverse cultures and subgroups to see how they differ and what they share in common.

Part 2: Analyzing the Primary Sources

Note to the teacher: The next pages provide the primary sources for this lesson. We suggest you give these to students after they read the background essay, after they review the "Five Habits of Historical Thinking" handout, and after they watch and discuss the PowerPoint presentation for the lesson.

This section includes the following:

- **Handout: "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist"**

  Give copies of this handout to students and ask them to refer to it when analyzing any primary source.

- **Ten Primary Source Documents**

  The Documents are as follows:

  Document 1. Two photos of a Roman road
  Document 2. A passage about Severinus
  Document 3. A Roman aristocrat sells land to a Visigothic settler
  Document 4. A passage from Augustine's *Confessions*
  Document 5. converts to Christianity
  Document 6. A poem celebrating ancient Rome
  Document 7. A description of the death of Hypatia
  Document 8. Evagrius describes the plague
  Document 9. A Table: Average Height of Cattle
  Document 10. Drawing of the Ardagh Chalice

- **Ten "Source Analysis" Worksheets for Analyzing the Primary Sources**

  Each worksheet asks student to take notes on one source. The prompts along the side match the five categories in the "Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist." Not every category is used in each worksheet, only those that seem most relevant to a full analysis of that source.

  You may want students to analyze all of the sources. However, if time does not allow this, use those that seem most useful for your own instructional purposes.

  Students can use the notes on the "Source Analysis" worksheets in discussions, as help in analyzing the two secondary sources in the next part of this lesson, and in follow-up debates, DBQs, and other activities.

Interpreting Primary Sources Checklist

Primary sources are the evidence historians use to reach conclusions and write their accounts of the past. Sources rarely have one obvious, easily grasped meaning. To interpret them fully, historians use several strategies. This checklist describes some of the most important of those strategies. Read the checklist through and use it to guide you whenever you need to analyze and interpret a primary source.

Sourcing

Think about a primary source's author or creator, how and why the primary source document was created, and where it appeared. Also think about the audience it was intended for and what its purpose was. You may not always find much information about these things, but whatever you can learn will help you better understand the source. In particular, it may suggest the source's point of view or bias, since the author's background and intended audience often shape his or her ideas and way of expressing them.

Contextualizing

"Context" refers to the time and place of which the primary source is a part. In history, facts do not exist separately from one another. They get their meaning from the way they fit into a broader pattern. The more you know about that broader pattern, or context, the more you will be able to understand about the source and its significance.

Interpreting Meanings

It is rare for a source's full meaning to be completely obvious. You must read a written source closely, paying attention to its language and tone, as well as to what it implies or merely hints at. With a visual source, all kinds of meaning may be suggested by the way it is designed, by such things as shading, camera angle, use of emotional symbols or scenes, etc. The more you pay attention to all the details, the more you can learn from a source.

Point of View

Every source is written or created by someone with a purpose, an intended audience, and a point of view or bias. Even a dry table of numbers was created for some reason, to stress some things and not others, to make a point of some sort. At times, you can tell a point of view simply by sourcing the document. Knowing an author was a Democrat or a Republican, for example, will alert you to a likely point of view. In the end, however, only a close reading of the text will make you aware of point of view. Keep in mind, even a heavily biased source can still give you useful evidence of what some people in a past time thought. But you need to take the bias into account in judging how reliable the source's own claims really are.

Corroborating Sources

No one source tells the whole story. Moreover, no one source is completely reliable. To make reasonable judgments about an event in the past, you must compare sources to find points of agreement and disagreement. Even when there are big differences, both sources may be useful. However, the differences will also tell you something, and they may be important in helping you understand each source.

The Primary Sources for the Lesson

Document 1

Information on the source: Two photos from the 1930s of an ancient Roman road north of Aleppo, a city located in what is now northern Syria. The road is dated to the second century CE, an era when Aleppo was on the eastern end of the Roman Empire.

Document 2

Information on the source: Saint Severinus of Noricum (c. 410–489 CE) was a wealthy Roman who traveled along the Danube in what is now Austria preaching, aiding the poor, founding monasteries, and freeing captives. As this passage suggests, the region was disrupted then by the constant raids of various "barbarian" tribes. This brief passage is from *The Life of Saint Severinus* by Eugippius, as translated by George W. Robinson (Cambridge, MA: 1914), pp. 69–70. Eugippius was a disciple of Severinus.

So long as the Roman dominion lasted, soldiers were maintained in many towns at the public expense to guard the boundary wall. When this custom ceased, the squadrons of soldiers and the boundary wall were blotted out together. The troop at Batavis, however, held out. Some soldiers of this troop had gone to Italy to fetch the final pay to their comrades, and no one knew that the barbarians had slain them on the way. One day as Saint Severinus was reading in his cell, he suddenly closed the book and began to sigh greatly and to weep. He ordered the bystanders to run out with haste to the river, which he declared was in that hour besprinkled with human blood; and straightway word was brought that the bodies of the soldiers mentioned above had been brought to land by the current of the river.

Document 3

Information on the source: Paulinus of Pella was a fifth-century Roman aristocrat in Gaul. In this passage, Paulinus thanks God for aiding him in his dealings with one Visigothic settler. The Visigoths were a Germanic people who the Romans allowed to settle and rule the Garrone valley in southwestern France in 419 CE. Adapted from *The Eucharisticus by Paulinus Pellaeus* (published in the Loeb Classical Library, 1921), pp. 347–349.

Yet in this same state of life thou did not suffer me long to drowse in doubt, but unasked, O God, did speedily agree to comfort me . . . For when thou had shown I could no longer hope for further profit from my grandfather's property; and when all that also which in my poverty I was able to hold at Marseilles was retained by me under the terms of a written contract, the freehold now being lost—thou did raise up for me a purchaser among the Goths who desired to acquire the small farm, once wholly mine, and of his own accord sent me a sum, not indeed equitable, yet nevertheless a godsend, I admit, for me to receive, since thereby I could at once support the tottering remnants of my shattered fortune and escape fresh hurt to my cherished self-respect.

Document 4

Information on the source: One of the most famous Latin Church Fathers was Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE). His book *The City of God* sought to console Christians about the collapsing Roman Empire. Rome was the "City of Man," which would perish as do all of man's works. But the "City of God," which was heaven (or the Catholic Church here on earth), would never perish. Augustine's *Confessions* is one of the most personal memoirs ever written up to that time. In this passage, he describes what turned him toward God and away from his earlier life, which he saw as deeply sinful. From *Confessions of S. Augustine: Revised from a Former Translation by the Rev. E. B. Pusey*, *D.D.* (Oxford: John Henry Parker; J. G. F. and J. Rivington: London, 1853), pp. 153–154.

So was I speaking and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo! I heard from a neighboring house a voice, as of boy or girl, I know not, chanting, and oft repeating, "Take up and read; Take up and read." . . . So checking the torrent of my tears, I arose; interpreting it to be no other than a command from God to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find. For I had heard of Antony, that coming in during the reading of the Gospel, he received the admonition, as if what was being read was spoken to him: "Go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me": and by such oracle he was forthwith converted unto Thee. Eagerly then I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for there had I laid the volume of the Apostle when I arose thence. I seized, opened, and in silence read that section on which my eyes first fell: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, in concupiscence." No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.

Document 5

Information on the source: Gregory of Tours was an aristocrat in Gaul who became Bishop of Tours in 573 CE. He lived in a border region between the Franks to the north and the more traditionally Roman culture of southern Gaul. In this passage, he describes the conversion of the Frankish king Clovis to Catholic Christianity in 496. Other barbarian kingdoms had accepted the Arian form of Christianity, but the Roman Catholic Church considered Arianism a heresy. Clovis's conversion helped unify Romans and Franks in northern Gaul. The passage is from Gregory's *History of the Franks*, Book 2, Chapter 30, trans. Ernest Brehaut, Records of Civilization 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916).

The queen [Clotilda] did not cease to urge him to recognize the true God and cease worshipping idols. But he could not be influenced in any way to this belief, until at last a war arose with the Alamanni, in which he was driven by necessity to confess what before he had of his free will denied. It came about that as the two armies were fighting fiercely, there was much slaughter, and Clovis's army began to be in danger of destruction. He saw it and raised his eyes to heaven, and with remorse in his heart he burst into tears and cried: "Jesus Christ, whom Clotilda asserts to be the son of the living God, who art said to give aid to those in distress, and to bestow victory on those who hope in thee, I beseech the glory of thy aid, with the vow that if thou wilt grant me victory over these enemies, and I shall know that power which she says that people dedicated in thy name have had from thee, I will believe in thee and be baptized in thy name. For I have invoked my own gods but, as I find, they have withdrawn from aiding me; and therefore I believe that they possess no power, since they do not help those who obey them. I now call upon thee, I desire to believe thee, only let me be rescued from my adversaries." And when he said thus, the Alamanni turned their backs, and began to disperse in flight. And when they saw that their king was killed, they submitted to the dominion of Clovis . . . And he stopped the fighting, and after encouraging his men, retired in peace and told the queen how he had had merit to win the victory by calling on the name of Christ.

Document 6

Information on the source: Rutilius Numantius, born in Gaul, became an important official in the city of Rome. He was a pagan who in 413 CE wrote a poem praising of the Rome that Alaric and his Visigoths had recently sacked. This is part of that poem, from William Stearns Davis, ed., *Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources, Vol. II: Rome and the West*, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1912–13), pp. 318–319.

Give ear to me, Queen of the world which thou rulest, O Rome, whose place is amongst the stars! Give ear to me, mother of men, and mother of gods!

Through thy temples we draw near to the very heaven. Thee do we sing, yea and while the Fates give us life, thee we will sing. For who can live and forget thee? Before thy image my soul is abased—graceless and sacrilegious, it were better for me to forget the sun, for thy beneficent influence shinest—even as his light—to the limits of the habitable world. Yea the sun himself, in his vast course, seems only to turn in thy behalf. He riseth upon thy domains; and on thy domains, it is again that he setteth.

As far as from one pole to the other spreadeth the vital power of nature, so far thy virtue hath penetrated over the earth. For all the scattered nations thou createst one common country. Those that struggle against thee are constrained to bend to thy yoke; for thou profferest to the conquered the partnership in thy just laws; thou hast made one city what was aforetime the wide world!

Document 7

Information on the source: Hypatia of Egypt was a leading pagan mathematician and philosopher in early fifth-century Alexandria, a major center of learning. She was a friend of Orestes, the pagan governor of Alexandria, who was opposed by Cyril, Alexandria's new Catholic bishop. This passage is from Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, Bk VI: Chap. 15, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Ser. II, Vol. II, published simultaneously in Europe and in America, by T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, and Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1890. Courtesy Internet Sacred Text Archive (http://sacred-texts.com/index.htm).

There was a woman at Alexandria named Hypatia, daughter of the philosopher Theon, who made such attainments in literature and science, as to far surpass all the philosophers of her own time. Having succeeded to the school of Plato and Plotinus, she explained the principles of philosophy to her auditors, many of whom came from a distance to receive her instructions. On account of the self-possession and ease of manner, which she had acquired in consequence of the cultivation of her mind, she not infrequently appeared in public in presence of the magistrates. Neither did she feel abashed in coming to an assembly of men. For all men on account of her extraordinary dignity and virtue admired her the more. Yet even she fell a victim to the political jealousy which at that time prevailed. For as she had frequent interviews with Orestes, it was calumniously reported among the Christian populace, that it was she who prevented Orestes from being reconciled to the bishop. Some of them therefore, hurried away by a fierce and bigoted zeal . . . waylaid her returning home, and dragging her from her carriage, they took her to the church called Cæsareum, where they completely stripped her, and then murdered her with tiles. After tearing her body in pieces, they took her mangled limbs to a place called Cinaron, and there burnt them. This affair brought not the least opprobrium, not only upon Cyril, but also upon the whole Alexandrian church. And surely nothing can be farther from the spirit of Christianity than the allowance of massacres, fights, and transactions of that sort.

Document 8

Information on the source: In 542 CE, plague (probably bubonic plague) broke out in the eastern Roman Empire and soon spread throughout the Mediterranean region. Over the next several decades, it destroyed as much as half of the population of the region. It reappeared many times over the next two centuries and added to the economic decline and social chaos of the years after the collapse of Roman rule in the west. This account is from Evagrius, a church historian at the time in Antioch. From Evagrius Scholasticus, Ecclesiastical History (AD 431–594), translated by E. Walford (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1846), Book 4, Chapter 29, pp. 223–226.

I will also describe the circumstances of the pestilence which commenced at that period [542 CE], and has now prevailed and extended over the whole world for fifty-two years; a circumstance such as has never before been recorded. Two years after the capture of Antioch by the Persians, a pestilence broke out, in some respects similar to that described by Thucydides, in others widely different. It took its rise from Ethiopia, as is now reported, and made a circuit of the whole world in succession, leaving, as I suppose, no part of the human race unvisited by the disease. Some cities were so severely afflicted as to be altogether depopulated, though in other places the visitation was less violent . . .

This calamity has prevailed, as I have already said, to the present time, for two and fifty years, exceeding all that have preceded it. For Philostratus expresses wonder that the pestilence which happened in his time, lasted for fifteen years. The sequel is uncertain, since its course will be guided by the good pleasure of God, who knows both the causes of things, and their tendencies.

Document 9

Information on the source: This table uses average height to estimate the approximate size of cattle during three eras: the Iron Age before Rome, Roman times, and the early Middle Ages. These averages are presented by Bryan Ward-Perkins in his *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 145. Ward-Perkins calculated the averages based on finds at 22 Iron Age sites, 67 Roman-era sites and 49 early medieval sites.

Average Height of Cattle	
Pre-Roman Iron Age	*15.5 cm*
Roman times	*20 cm*
Early Medieval	*112 cm*

Document 10

Information on the Source: A drawing of the Ardagh Chalice. The Ardagh Chalice is a famous work of Celtic art discovered in Ireland and dated to the 700s CE. It is a large two-handled silver-bronze cup, decorated with gold filigree and semiprecious stones. The names of the Christian apostles are incised around the bowl along with animals, birds, and geometric designs.

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 1

Two photos from the 1930s of an ancient Roman road north of Aleppo

Interpreting meanings

This photo is of an ancient Roman road from the second century CE. What can you tell from it about the nature of the roads of the Roman Empire?

Contextualizing

The photo is of a Roman road in Aleppo in what is today northern Syria. What does this suggest about the important role these roads played in the Roman Empire? Why do you think the Roman system of roads was especially important to the rulers of ancient Rome?

Sourcing

This photo was taken in the 1930s. Is it a primary source document for the late Roman Empire? How does knowing this date add to or take away from the usefulness of this photo as evidence of ancient Roman times?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 2

Eugippius's account of conditions along the Danube during the time of Saint Severinus of Noricum (c. 410–489 CE)

Contextualizing

For centuries, Roman army legions manned posts along the Roman Empire's northern border. Along what two main rivers did most of that border run?

Romans referred to the societies north of their border as "barbarians." What do you think the Romans meant by calling these peoples "barbarians"? Do you think they meant what we mean by the term? Why or why not?

Interpreting meanings

From this passage, what can you tell about conditions along the northern border at this time? What does the reference to soldiers going to "fetch their pay" suggest about the power of the Roman imperial government at the time?

Point of view

What can you tell from this passage about Eugippius's attitude about Severinus? Do his ideas about Severinus make you doubt his account of the conditions on the border and the fate of the soldiers he mentions? Why or why not?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 3

Paulinus of Pella's letter describing his dealings with one Visigothic settler in fifth-century Gaul

Contextualizing

In 410, a Visigothic army under Alaric sacked Rome. In 419, however, the Romans allowed the Visigoths to take control of a large area of southern Gaul, what is today southern France. Why do you suppose the Romans did that?

Interpreting meanings

Paulinus was a Roman aristocrat who held lands in the part of Gaul controlled by the Visigoths. What else can you tell about his circumstances from this passage?

What can you tell or infer about relationships between Visigoths and Romans in this region at the time? How well do the Visigoths appear to have adapted to Roman ways of life, for example?

Point of view

How would you describe Paulinus's attitude or feelings about his own place in the world?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 4

A passage from Saint Augustine's *Confessions* in which he describes his own conversion to Christianity

Sourcing

What do you know about Augustine? Does his importance as a leader of the Catholic Church make this account of his conversion more or less important in your opinion?

Interpreting meanings

What can you infer about Augustine's life before he became a Christian, as compared to the life he sought to lead after he became a Christian?

Notice the way Augustine makes use of passages from Scripture. What does this suggest about the role these writings played in the lives of Christians at this time?

Historian Thomas Cahill* sees Augustine's *Confessions* as a great breakthrough to a new more personal and individualistic spirit. He says, "Here for the first time [in literature] is a man consistently observing himself not as Man but as this singular man, Augustine." What do you think Cahill means? Based on this passage, do you think he is right?

* Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), p. 41.

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 5

An account by Gregory of Tours, of the conversion of the Frankish king Clovis to Catholic Christianity in 496

Interpreting meanings

Clovis is said here to have appealed to the Christian God after unsuccessfully invoking his "own gods." In this passage, do you think Gregory of Tours sees Clovis as truly and sincerely giving up his pagan beliefs to become a Christian? Why or why not?

What role did Clovis's wife seem to play in his conversion? What does this suggest about the role which high-status women may have played at this time?

Sourcing

From the information given on Gregory of Tours and Clovis, what problems, if any, do you see in using this passage as evidence of how Christianity spread among the barbarian societies of western Europe?

Corroborating sources

Compare Clovis's conversion experience with that of Augustine. Taken together, what do they suggest about the way Christianity spread during these centuries after the fall of Rome?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 6

Rutilius Numantius's poem praising the Roman Empire in 413 CE

Contextualizing

What point does Rutilius make about the Roman Empire when he says it has given "the conquered the partnership in thy just laws"? From what you know of the Roman Empire, do you think he was right about this?

Interpreting meanings

The poem was written at a time when historians say the Roman Empire was already falling apart. Does the poem hint at this in any way? That is, does Rutilius in any way express doubts about Rome along with his admiration for it?

Sourcing

Rutilius Numantius was a both a pagan and a Roman official in 413 CE. How do these facts help you understand his point of view about the Roman Empire.

Corroborating sources

Rutilius Numantius refers to Rome as "mother of men and mother of gods." What do you think he means? What do you think Augustine would have said about Rutilius's view of the relationship between religion and the Roman state?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 7

A passage from Socrates Scholasticus on the death of Hypatia in 415

Contextualizing

Until the reign of Emperor Constantine I (306–337 CE), Christians were more often than not the victims of attacks by pagans. From this passage, explain how that appears to have changed, and why?

Interpreting meanings

What does this passage suggest caused the bishop Cyril to oppose Hypatia?

What, if anything, can you tell about the general role of women in the Roman Empire from this description of Hypatia and her reputation? Do you think her experience was typical? Why or why not?

Point of view

Socrates Scholasticus was a Greek, as well as a Christian church historian. How does this seem to have affected his point of view about the death of Hypatia? What can you learn from his account about the nature of the Christian community in this part of the Roman Empire at this time?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 8

A passage from Evagrius's account of the plague that began to afflict the Mediterranean world in 542 CE

Contextualizing

This plague arrived at a crucial historical time. A major effort was then underway to restore the Roman Empire and regain control over the entire Mediterranean region. Can you explain?

This passage mentions the capture of Antioch by the Persians. What do you know about rivalry between the Persian Empire and the eastern Roman Empire in the sixth century?

Interpreting meanings

From Evagrius's description, how might the plague have added to the troubles of those seeking to restore central control and order to the lands once ruled by the entire Roman Empire?

How well do you think Evagrius understood the plague, its course, its effects, and what might have caused it?

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 9

A table displaying estimated average cattle sizes by height in three historical eras

Interpreting meanings

If you knew nothing else about the end of the Roman Empire, what could you conclude from this table about conditions of life in the post-Roman world?

Aside from the size of cattle alone, what other changes in society might these numbers lead you to expect to find?

How important do you think it is that the number for the early Medieval period is even lower than the one for the time before Roman civilization arose?

Sourcing

This table is itself based on findings from 138 different sites. The figures are averages of what was found at those sites. Do you consider what was discovered at those 138 sites to be primary sources? Do you consider the three averages to be primary sources? Whether primary sources or not, are they useful evidence for how life changed over these three time periods? Explain your answers.

Source Analysis: Primary Source Document 10

A drawing of the Ardagh Chalice, a famous work of Celtic art discovered in Ireland and dated to the 700s CE

Contextualizing

This famous chalice or large cup is a work of Celtic art from the 700s CE found in Ireland. What do you know about the Celtic peoples of Ireland, England, and other parts of Europe?

Interpreting meanings

The Romans considered the Celts warriors and uncivilized barbarians. How does this chalice suggest that the Celts were more than that?

What about the chalice suggests how Roman civilization may have influenced Irish Celts and altered their customs in profound ways by the 700s?

Sourcing

The chalice was discovered by two men in 1868 in a potato field. It was buried along with another chalice and four brooches. They were buried without any protecting case and covered only by a slab of stone. Why do you think these items were buried in this way?

Part 3: Analyzing the Secondary Sources

Note to the teacher: This next section includes passages from two secondary source accounts on the fall of Rome along with two activities on these sources. We suggest you first discuss the brief comment "Analyzing Secondary Sources" just above the first of the two secondary sources. Discuss the four criteria the first activity asks students to use in analyzing each secondary source. These criteria focus students on the nature of historical accounts as 1) problem-centered, 2) based on evidence, 3) influenced by point of view and not purely neutral, and 4) tentative or aware of alternative explanations.

Specifically, this section includes the following:

- **Two secondary source passages**

  Give copies of these passages to students to read, either in class or as homework. The two passages are from *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*, by Bryan Ward-Perkins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 183, and from *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, edited by G. W. Browersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2001), Introduction, p. ix.

- **Two student activities**

  Activity 1

  Students analyze the two passage taking notes on the following questions:

  - How clearly does the account focus on a problem or question?
  - Does it reveal a position or express a point of view?
  - How well does it base its case on primary source evidence?
  - How aware is it of alternative explanations or points of view?

  Activity 2

  In pairs, students select two of the primary sources for the lesson that best support each author's claims in the secondary source passages. Students discuss their choices with the class.

The Secondary Sources for the Lesson

Analyzing Secondary Sources

Historians write secondary source accounts of the past after studying primary source documents like the ones you have studied on the fall of Rome. However, They normally select documents from among a great many others, and they stress some aspects of the story but not others. In doing this, historians are guided by the questions they ask about the topic. Their selection of sources and their focus are also influenced by their own aims, bias, or point of view. No account of the past is perfectly neutral. In reading a secondary source, you should pay to what it includes, what it leaves out, what conclusions it reaches, and how aware it is of alternative interpretations.

* * * *

Secondary Source 1

Information on the source: The passage in the box below is an excerpt from *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*, by Bryan Ward-Perkins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 183.

> In my opinion, the fifth century witnessed a profound military and political crisis, caused by the violent seizure of power and much wealth by the barbarian invaders. The native population was able, to some extent, to adapt to these new conditions, but what is interesting about this adjustment is that it was achieved in very difficult circumstances. I also believe that the post-Roman centuries saw a dramatic decline in economic sophistication and prosperity, with an impact on the whole society, from agricultural production to high culture, and from peasants to kings. It is very likely that the population fell dramatically, and certain that the widespread diffusion of well-made goods ceased. Sophisticated cultural tools, like the use of writing, disappeared altogether in some regions, and became very restricted in others.

The Secondary Sources for the Lesson

Secondary Source 2

Information on the Source: The passage in the box below is an excerpt from *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, edited by G. W. Browersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2001), Introduction, p. ix.

> The essays in this volume . . . share the frank assumption that the time has come for scholars, students, and the educated public in general to treat the period between around 250 and 800 as a distinctive and quite decisive period of history that stands on its own. It is not, as it once was for Edward Gibbon, a subject of obsessive fascination only as the story of the unraveling of a once glorious and "higher" state of civilization. It was not a period of irrevocable Decline and Fall; nor was it merely a violent and hurried prelude to better things. It cannot be treated as a corpse to be dragged quickly offstage so that the next great act of the drama of the Middle Ages should begin—with the emergence of Catholic Europe and the creation of the Arabic civilization associated with the golden age of medieval Islam.
>
> Not only did late antiquity last for over half a millennium; much of what was created in that period still runs in our veins.

The Secondary Sources: Activity 1

In this exercise, you read two short passages from much longer secondary sources dealing with the end of the Roman Empire and the age of late antiquity. For each secondary source, take notes on the following four questions (you may want to underline phrases or sentences in the passages that you think back up your notes):

1. How clearly does this account focus on a problem or question. What do you think that problem or question is? Sum it up in your own words here.

   The Fall of Rome, Ward-Perkins *Interpreting Late Antiquity,* G. W. Browersock et al.

2. Does the secondary source take a position or express a point of view about late antiquity? If so, briefly state that point of view or quote an example of it.

   The Fall of Rome, Ward-Perkins *Interpreting Late Antiquity,* G. W. Browersock et al.

3. How well does the secondary source seem to base its case on primary source evidence? Take notes about any specific examples, if you can identify them.

   The Fall of Rome, Ward-Perkins *Interpreting Late Antiquity,* G. W. Browersock et al.

4. Does the secondary source seem aware of alternative explanations or points of view about this topic? Underline points in the passage where you see this.

   The Fall of Rome, Ward-Perkins *Interpreting Late Antiquity,* G. W. Browersock et al.

In pairs, discuss your notes for this activity.

The Secondary Sources: Activity 2

This activity is based on the passages from *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*, by Bryan Ward-Perkins, and from *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, edited by G. W. Browersock et al. From the primary sources for this lesson, choose two that you think best support each author's point of view about late antiquity. With the rest of the class, discuss the two secondary source passages and defend the choice of sources you have made.

1. From this lesson, choose two primary sources that best back up Ward-Perkins's interpretation of late antiquity. List those sources here and briefly explain why you chose them.

2. From this lesson, choose two primary sources that best back up Browersock's interpretation of late antiquity. List those sources here and briefly explain why you chose them.

3. Does your textbook include a passage describing or summing up the fall of Rome and the era of late antiquity? If so, with which of the two secondary sources (Ward-Perkins or Browersock) does it seem to agree most? What one or two primary sources from this lesson would you add to this textbook passage to improve it?

Discuss your choices with the rest of the class.

Part 4: Follow-Up Options

Note to the teacher: At this point, students have completed the key tasks of *The Historian's Apprentice* program. They have examined their own prior understandings and acquired background knowledge on the topic. They have analyzed and debated a set of primary sources. They have considered secondary source accounts of the topic. This section includes two suggested follow-up activities. Neither of these is a required part of the lesson. They do not have to be undertaken right away. However, we do strongly recommend that you find some way to do what these options provide for. They give students a way to write or debate in order to express their ideas and arrive at their own interpretations of the topic.

Two suggested follow-up activities are included here:

- **Document-Based Questions**
  Four document-based questions are provided. Choose one and follow the guidelines provided for writing a typical DBQ essay.

- **A Structured Debate**
  The aim of this debate format is not so much to teach students to win a debate, but to learn to listen and learn, as well as speak up and defend a position. A more interactive and more civil debating process is the goal.

Document-Based Questions

Document-based questions (DBQs) are essay questions you must answer by using your own background knowledge and a set of primary sources on that topic. Below are four DBQs on late antiquity and the end of the Roman Empire. Use the sources for this lesson and everything you have learned from it to write a short essay answer to one of these questions.

Suggested DBQs

"Gibbon was right. Rome declined and it fell, and the disruptions caused by the rise of Christianty were a key cause." Assess the validity of this statement (that is, explain why you do or do not agree with it).

Compare and contrast the Roman pagan view of the late Roman Empire with the view held by Christians living through those times.

"The Roman world may have declined—by its own standards. However, its standards no longer meant much. To those actually alive in late antiquity, history was not declining at all. It was advancing." Assess the validity of this statement (that is, explain why you do or do not agree with it).

How useful is the term "barbarian" in describing the various ethnic groups and kingdoms that came to replace so much of the Roman Empire in its western half?

Suggested Guidelines for Writing a DBQ Essay

- **Planning and thinking through the essay**
  Consider the question carefully. Think about how to answer it so as to address each part of it. Do not ignore any detail in the question. Pay attention to the question's form (cause-and-effect, compare-and-contrast, assess the validity, etc.). This form will often give you clues as to how best to organize each part of your essay.

- **Thesis statement and introductory paragraph**
  The thesis statement is a clear statement of what you hope to prove in your essay. It must address <u>all</u> parts of the DBQ, it must make a claim you can back up with the sources, and it should be specific enough to help you organize the rest of your essay.

- **Using evidence effectively**
  Use the notes on your "Source Analysis" activity sheets to organize your thoughts about these primary sources. In citing a source, use it to support key points or illustrate major themes. Do not simply list a source in order to get it into the essay somehow. If any sources do <u>not</u> support your thesis, you should still try to use them. Your essay may be more convincing if you qualify your thesis so as to account for these other sources.

- **Linking ideas explicitly**
  After your introduction, your internal paragraphs should make your argument in a logical or clear way. Each paragraph should be built around one key supporting idea and details that back up that idea. Use transition phrase such as "before," "next," "then," or "on the one hand…, but on the other hand" to help readers follow the thread of your argument.

- **Wrapping it up**
  Don't add new details about sources in your final paragraph. State a conclusion that refers back to your thesis statement by showing how the evidence has backed it up. If possible, look for nice turns of phrase to end on a dramatic note.

A Structured Debate

Small-group activity: Using a version of the Structured Academic Controversy model, debate alternate interpretations of this lesson's topic. The goal of this method is not so much to win a debate as to learn to collaborate in clarifying your interpretations to one another. In doing this, your goal should be to see that it is possibly for reasonable people to hold differing views, even when finding the "one right answer" is not possible.

Use all their notes from previous activities in this lesson. Here are the rules for this debate.

1. Organize a team of four or six students. Choose a debate topic based on the lesson *What Does It Mean to Say Rome 'Fell'?*

   (You may wish to use one of the DBQs suggested for the "Document-Based Questions" activity for this lesson, or you may want to define the debate topic in a different way.)

2. Split your team into two subgroups. Each subgroup should study the materials for this lesson and rehearse its case. One subgroup then present its case to the other. That other subgroup must repeat the case back to the first subgroup's satisfaction.

3. Then the two subgroups switch roles and repeat step 2.

4. Your team either reaches a consensus which it explains to the entire class, or it explains where the key differences between the subgroups lie.

Answers to "Source Analysis" Activities

Source Analysis: Document 1

Interpreting meanings: Answers should stress the durability of the roads, the skill that went into cutting the stone, the organization required to transport it to the site, etc.

Contextualizing: The roads moved people and goods throughout an enormous empire. They were especially important for moving troops rapidly to unstable frontier regions etc.

Sourcing: The photo suggests the great skill needed to build such long-lasting roads etc.

Source Analysis: Document 2

Contextualizing: The Rhine and the Danube

Originally, the ancient Greeks used the term for any foreigner who did not speak Greek. Romans also used it for foreign peoples as well. In time, they also used it as a term of ridicule. Answers may vary as to how much this used is similar to our own today.

Interpreting meanings: The passage suggests how chaotic the border area was and how weak and unreliable the central government had become.

Point of view: Eugippius shared the common Christian belief in saints who perform miracles, but answers will vary as to whether this affected his reliability in describing conditions along the border.

Source Analysis: Document 3

Contextualizing: They regarded the Visigoths as possible allies who could act as a buffer against the Vandals and other invading tribes.

Interpreting meanings: Answers will vary, but students should note that Paulinus was wealthy but had fallen on hard times. They may also note his literary abilities, his Christian faith, etc.

Paulinus's dealings suggest Romans and Visigoths traded and interacted in normal ways, had a legal system, could based their dealings on legal contracts, etc., but the passage may also suggest how life for older Roman aristocrats was disrupted by the events of the fifth century.

Point of view: Answers may vary and should be discussed.

Source Analysis: Document 4

Sourcing: Answers could vary, with some seeing his leading role as indicating what many other Christians would be taught to feel, while others might say he was an unusual individual and his experience could have been special or unique.

Interpreting meanings: From the Bible passage he cites, he implies he had been a selfish, pleasure-seeking individual and that conversion meant for him the need to reform his character totally.

He takes them not just as general moral commands or guidelines, but also as personally directed at him. The implication is that the Christian god is concerned directly with each individual etc.

Answers will vary and should be discussed.

Source Analysis: Document 5

Interpreting meanings: Students should see there is no easy way to answer this: It depends on what Gregory thought a "sincere" belief in Christianity meant. He might have seen Clovis as giving up his pagan gods and turning to Christ just to succeed in war, but perhaps he saw this as acceptable. Gregory was glad about Clovis's conversion, but was also often critical of the Franks' warlike ways.

Clotilda is at least presented here as firmer in her Christian beliefs and able to some degree to influence her husband. How much her views mattered to him is not at all clear, however.

Sourcing: Answers will vary. The dates indicate Gregory wrote this account nearly a century after the events. He may have had his own purposes in depicting Clovis as he does etc.

Corroborating sources: Answers will vary but should at least focus on the widely varying motives and causes that may have led people to convert to Christianity.

Source Analysis: Document 6

Contextualizing: The Romans often completely took over conquered lands and made their people citizens, instead of treating them as alien residents of separate colonies.

Interpreting meanings: Answers will vary. Some may detect an uneasy feeling beneath what appears to be a celebration of Rome's glory, as for example in asking, "who can live and forget thee?"

Sourcing: They may help explain his strong desire to find meaning in the empire and its past.

Corroborating sources: Answers will vary. Augustine would likely have objected strongly to seeing God as dependent in this way on the Roman Empire or any other state.

Source Analysis: Document 7

Contextualizing: Constantine ended persecution of Christians, and after 312 he began favoring them. By centuries end, Christianity was the dominant and then the exclusive official religion of the Roman state. Soon it was paganism that was being persecuted.

Interpreting meanings: The passage suggests Cyril mistakenly viewed her as a political threat who was turning the pagan governor against him, but it is not clear if this was the sole cause of the tension.

Answers will vary, but clearly Hypatia was unusual, even for upper-class Roman women, yet her experience does show the outer limits, perhaps, of what was possible for some women.

Point of view: Answers will vary, but this does seem to suggest the Christian community was made up of many people of different social standing, points of view, and levels of tolerance of pagans.

Source Analysis: Document 8

Contextualizing: The Emperor Justinian briefly reconquered much of Italy, the northern coast of Africa, the eastern coast of Spain, etc. Many of these areas were again lost to the Roman Empire within a century.

This rivalry resulted in a series of wars in the sixth century that drained and weakened both sides.

Interpreting meanings: It devastated otherwise prosperous areas, reduced manpower for armies, depressed economic productivity and long-distance trade, made it hard to collect taxes, etc.

Answers may vary. Evagrius seems to know a great deal about what was happening, but not what caused it.

Source Analysis: Document 9

Interpreting meanings: The post-Roman decline in cattle size does suggest that a troubled economic situation made it hard to keep up the health and quality of these animals.

Poorer quality of diet in general, greater disruption of agricultural production due to disease or warfare, lack of access to markets, poorer facilities for taking care of animals, etc.

Answers here may vary. This could indicate a drastic decline in standards of living, or it might be due to other factors, or not statistically reliable for some reason, etc.

Sourcing: Answers will vary and should be discussed.

Source Analysis: Document 10

Contextualizing: Before and during part of Roman times, the Celtic language was dominant in much of western Europe. By the early Christian era, Celtic-speaking tribes had been pushed into just a few places (such as Ireland and western England).

Interpreting meanings: The chalice is evidence of a high degree of artistic skill, the production of luxury items for ritual purposes or other uses by powerful elites, etc.

Clearly, the chalice is evidence of the spread of Christianity in Ireland and its importance among the powerful ruling elites there by the 700s.

Sourcing: It may have been quickly buried to hide it from attackers, but no one really knows.

Evaluating Secondary Sources: Activity 1

These are not definitive answers to the questions. They are suggested points to look for in student responses.

1. How clearly does this account focus on a problem or question. What do you think that problem or question is? Sum it up in your own words here?

   Ward-Perkins focuses on the problem of overall social, economic and technological change in the post-Roman world and how these changes affected standards of living for masses of people.

   Browersock is interested in understanding what made late antiquity unique, instead of simply comparing it either favorably or unfavorably to the Roman era that came before it.

2. Does the secondary source take a position or express a point of view about late antiquity and the end of the Roman Empire? If so, briefly state that point of view or quote an example of it.

   Ward-Perkins stresses what he sees as dramatic declines in broad economic trends, culture, literacy, and other measures of well-being among the population as a whole in the post-Roman world.

   Browersock insists the era should not be seen only as a time of decline but as "a distinctive and quite decisive period of history that stands on its own." He calls for attention to its unique qualities and its accomplishments, as they would affect the future.

3. How well does the secondary source seem to base its case on primary source evidence? Take notes about any specific examples, if you can identify them.

   Neither *Ward-Perkins* nor *Browersock* makes specific reference to primary sources in these brief passages. The passages are only summaries of the point of view each author holds regarding the age of late antiquity. Both do hint at the sort of evidence they focused on as they developed their ideas.

4. Does the secondary source seem aware of alternative explanations or points of view about this topic? Underline points in the passage where you see this.

   Each of these historians indirectly references the fact that they present an interpretation that is their own and may not be shared by others. *Ward-Perkins* qualifies his view several times with the words "in my opinion . . ." *Browersock* clearly describes himself as breaking with past practice by claiming that "the time has come for scholars" to treat the period differently from Gibbon and others who see it in terms mainly of decline and fall.