

Analyzing Written Historical Documents

GRADES 3-8



Overview

This activity is geared toward participants in grades 6-12. The estimated amount of time to deliver this lesson is 60 minutes.

In this lesson, participants will discuss the role of a historian and how to interpret written documents to learn about the past.

Participants will then evaluate the process of using written documents to extract historical information and think of further context that might be needed to learn about a particular topic.



Objective

Participants will be able to identify considerations one should take when analyzing written historic documents to learn about the past.



Materials

- Analyzing Written Documents Worksheet
- Four separate written documents that vary in purpose. Examples found below.



Set Up

Select four separate documents you would like the students to analyze that vary in purpose (letter, journal, memorandum, article, menu, invitation, etc.). Examples can be found below.



Inquiry

Ask participants:

- What are some examples of text that you have written down just for you to see?
- What are some examples of text you have written for someone else to see?
- How might they differ?

Let participants know that they will be acting as historians and looking at primary sources to try to figure out what happened at certain points of history. Inform them that they will look at various documents and determine how the document's audience and the author's purpose can impact what is read.



Investigation

Model using the “Analyzing a Written Document” worksheet with a document participants have seen before. State your thinking out loud as you move through the questions below and invite participants to share their thoughts.

- Who wrote this document?
- Who would have read it? Who was the intended audience?
- How would I summarize this document?
- Why did the author write this?
- What is a quote that tells you the author's purpose?
- What might have been happening in history that impacts the author's purpose?



Activity

Analyzing Written Documents (grades 8-12)

Hand each participant an “Analyzing Written Documents” worksheet. Separate participants into groups of four. Assign each group one of the four documents and provide individual copies to each member of that group. Provide time for each group to examine their documents and record their answers on their worksheet. Have participants take part in a jigsaw activity in a group with peers who read the other three documents and share the information on their worksheets with each other.

- How are the documents similar? How are they different?
- How might the author’s purpose impact what we read?

Have participants share what their group discussed. If needed, add any historical content that may be missed after each student presents.

- What did we learn by reading these documents?
- What is challenging about this process?
- What could potential next steps be as a historian?
- What other primary resources could help provide context on this topic?

Group Discussion: Privacy vs the Historical Record (grades 6-12)

Ask participants to discuss if they think a person's private diary, correspondence, etc. should be studied by historians.

- Would you want people in the future to look through your conversations on social media to learn about the past?
- What could they learn with that information that they wouldn't learn elsewhere?
- What should historians take into consideration when using private documents as a primary source?



Lesson Connection

See our lesson, **Analyzing Artifacts**, for content on how historians can use artifacts to learn about the past.



Additional Resources/References

For access to primary source documents:

<http://docsteach.org/>

<https://www.fold3.com/>

<http://dp.la/>



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Documents and Images

Document A

Enero 21, Estamos en aguas peligrosísimas estamos al alcance de aviones japoneses. Ya están haciendo cajas de muerto. Tiré 10 rounds desde mt 4 cañon izquierdo. Enero 22, 1944

Hoy a las 10³⁰ entramos a las Elice islas y anclamos a las 11⁰⁴ A.M. aquí habían muchos vapores de guerra grandes esperandonos. Cojimos aceite. Tuve guardia de 9 a 12³⁰ A.M.

~~Enero 22, 1944~~ Vino Sammy a visitarme él está en el mazo hace tiempo no lo veía. Cruzamos la línea internacional hacia que ganamos un día.

Credit: Collection of Battleship New Jersey, 2019.058.0008(1), Rafael Maza

Transcript of Document in Spanish:

Enero 21, Estamos en aguas peligrosísimas. Estamos al alcance de aviones japoneses. Ya están haciendo cajas de muerto. Tiré 10 rounds desde mt 4 cañon izquierdo.

Enero 22, 1944. Hoy a las 10:30 entramos a las Elice islas y nos anclamos a las 11:04 A.M. Aquí habían muchos vapores de guerra grandes esperandonos. Cojimos aceite. Tuve guardia de 9 a 12:30 A.M.

Vino Sammy a visitarme. Él está en el mazo. Hace tiempo no lo veía. Cruzamos la línea internacional hacia que ganamos un día.

English Translation on Following Page

Translation in English:

January 21, We are in very dangerous waters. We are within reach of Japanese airplanes. They are already making coffins. I fired 10 rounds from the mt 4 left cannon.

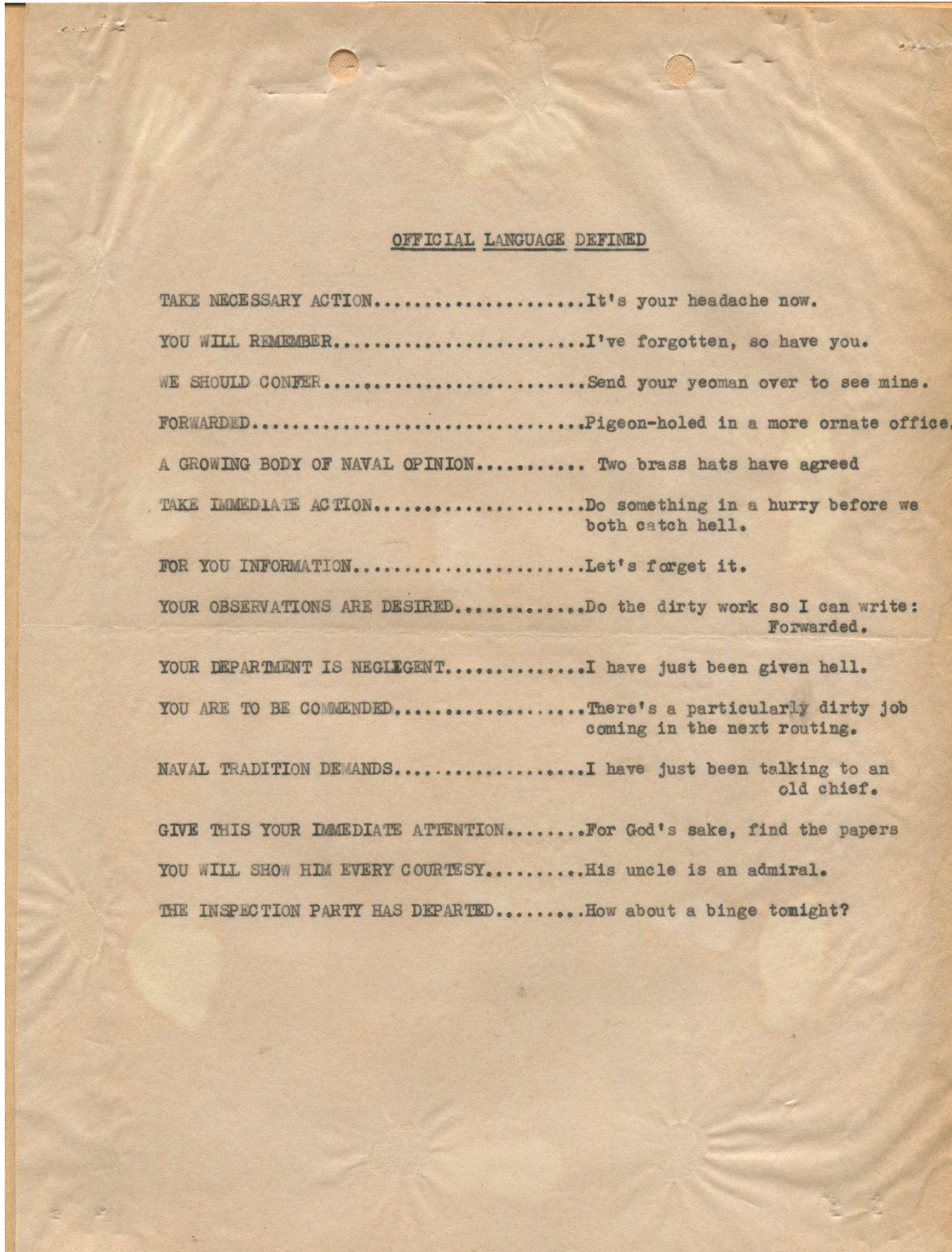
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January 22, 1944

Today at 10:30 am we entered the Elice Islands [Ellice Islands, now known as Tuvalu](sic) and dropped anchor at 11:04 am. There was lots of smoke from ships waiting for us. We refueled. I was on guard from 8pm to 12:30am.

Sammy came to visit me. He's on the deck. It's been a long time since I've seen him. We crossed the international line and we won the day.

Document B



Credit: Collection of Battleship New Jersey, 2020.003.0264(38)

Transcript:

Heading: Official Language Defined

Take necessary action... It's your headache now

You will remember... I've forgotten, so have you.

We should confer... Send your yeoman over to see mine.

Forwarded...Pigeon-holed is a more ornate office.

A growing body of Naval opinion... Two brass hats have agreed.

Take immediate action...Do something in a hurry before we both catch hell.

For your information... Let's forget it

Your observations are desired...Do the dirty work so I can write: Forwarded.

Your department is negligent... I have just been given hell.

You are to be commended... There's a particular dirty job coming in the next routing

Naval tradition demands...I have just been talking to an old chief.

Give this your immediate attention...For God's sake, find the papers

You will show him every courtesy... His uncle is an admiral

The inspection party has departed... how about a binge tonight?

Document C

JULY 4, 1958 USS INTREPID CVA-11 3

PEOPLE TO PEOPLE!!

Award-winning Stewardman Happy and Sincere Worker

The almost forgotten lads in S-5 division have been long overdue for the nomination of a Sailor of the Month. This issue we're taking you into the senior officers' wardroom to meet Diosdado E. Dizon, who prefers to be called 'Tony'.

Tony is a TNSN and his duties are numerous. He performs his most important job at the senior officers' table, where he has to be sharp and efficient.

Twenty Two Years Old.

He was born on September 8, 1935 at San Roque, Cavite City, Philippine Islands. During his high school days at Cavite High, he was very active in basketball, soccer, track and swimming.

After graduating from high school in 1954, he worked at the Navy Exchange at Sangley Point, Philippines.

Attends Steward School

Tony joined the Navy January 22, 1954 and received his boot training at San Diego. From boot training he attended steward's school and completed the course with very high grades, which gave him



FUN TIME, CVA-11: A fine time was had by all last Saturday afternoon in hangar bay one. Approximately 250 young ladies were on hand for the dance. Band 147 provided the music.



AMBASSADORS THREE: Get-togethers like this in the Lisbon Zoo were prominent throughout Lisbon bolstering good relations.



HAPPY SMILES: One hundred, eight of them. Pennants, candies and helpful crewmembers created these children's delight.

Lisbon Children Given Afternoon Aboard Intrepid

A total of 108 boys and girls were the personal guests of the USS INTREPID, on Friday, June 27. The children ranging from the ages of nine through 14 were obtained by the Naval Attache in Lisbon, and were escorted by the Vice Counsel's wife, Mrs. Helen Stanfield.

Once aboard the 'Mighty I', each child was placed in the hands of an INTREPID sailor. The children had a real time aboard the ship with having their pictures taken and looking over the aircraft, for this was their first time aboard any ship.

The three hour visit included cartoons, a trip to the galley for cold drinks, cookies and ice cream, and to top off the affair, they were given gifts of toy model airplanes for the boys and lapel pins for the girls.

Each child received a picture of the ship and an INTREPID pennant flag.

Oslo is about the size of Kansas City, Missouri.



Dizon
"greatful to serve..."

a pick of his next duty station.

He chose the USS INTREPID in hopes that the ship would be sent to the West coast. He likes the 'Mighty I' and has enjoyed the cruises.

Undecided

Tony is undecided about what his plans will be when his enlistment is up in 1960, but he does know that he wants to see his family in the Philippines and that he likes the Navy.

While interviewing Tony, he has this to say, 'I am very grateful to serve in the United States Navy, which has been very beneficial to my country, my folks, and to the loved ones back home'.

The S-5 division officer, LTJG G.S. Minnier, commented that "Tony has worked all phases of S-5 division including working in third deck rooms, the pantry, and serving in the Captain's and Admiral's mess. His work has always been outstanding. His present duties are serving the senior table in the wardroom and acting as room steward for the Executive Officer. He is well liked by all officers and is a tremendous help to the wardroom morale."

Ketcher July 4 1958

Credit: Collection of the Intrepid Museum. Gift of printed material and photo, produced in Intrepid Print Shop – Donated by Richard Maxwell LI-3, USS Intrepid 1958-60. A2013.168

Transcript:

Large Heading: Award-winning Stewardman Happy and Sincere Worker

The almost forgotten lads in S-5 division have been overdue for the nomination of a Sailor of the Month, This issue we're taking you into the senior officer's wardroom to meet Diosdado E Dizon, who prefers to be called "Tony". Tony is a TNSN and his duties are numerous. He performs his most important job at the senior officers' table, where he has to be sharp and efficient.

Subheading: Twenty Two Years Old.

He was born on September 8, 1935 at San Roque, Cavite City, Philippine Islands. During his high school days at Cavite High, he was very active in basketball, soccer, track and swimming. After graduating from high school in 1954, he worked at the Navy Exchange at Sangley Point, Philippines.

Subheading: Attends Steward School.

Tony joined the Navy January 22, 1954 and received his boot training at San Diego. From boot training he attended steward's school and completed the course with very high grades, which gave him a pick of his next duty station. He chose the USS INTREPID in hopes that the ship would be sent to the west coast. He likes the "Mighty I" and has enjoyed the cruises

Subheading: Undecided

Tony is undecided about what his plans will be when his enlistment is up in 1960, but he does know that he wants to see his family back in the Philippines and that he likes the Navy. While interviewing Tony, he has this to say, "I am very grateful to serve in the United States Navy, which has been very beneficial to my country, my folks, and to the loved ones back home." The S-5 division officer, LTJG G.S Minmier, commented that "Tony has worked all phases of S-5 division including working in third deck rooms, the pantry, and serving in the Captains and Admiral's mess. His work has always been outstanding. His present duties are serving the senior table in the wardroom and acting as room steward for the Executive Officer. He is well liked by all officers and is a tremendous help to the wardroom morale."

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Document D

260 West 139 Street
New York 30, New York
November 27, 1957

Chief, Bureau of Naval Personnel
United States Navy Department
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

I served in the Womens Reserve of the United States Naval Reserve on active duty during World War II from November 15, 1944 until my separation from service effective February 9, 1947. At the time that I was processed for separation on December 18, 1946, I received the World War II Victory Medal to which I was entitled. However, I did not receive the American Theatre Campaign Medal to which I was also entitled because The Brooklyn United States Naval Hospital where I was assigned temporarily for separation had run out of medals.

I was told that I would receive it at a later date, but I have never received it. This seems to be a small thing, but I have two nephews who had no male relatives serving in the armed forces during World War II and so, have to depend upon this female aunt for whatever medals the family garnered. I would appreciate receiving the medal even at this late date.

Enclosed is my copy of Alnav 351 establishing my eligibility for the American Campaign Medal and authorizing me to wear the American Campaign ribbon, which I believe verifies my statements. Enclosed also is a copy of my separation papers giving all necessary data about me and my service. I wish to have both of these enclosures returned.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this request.

Respectfully yours,

Harriet Ida Pickens

Ex-Lt. W, USNR

417592

Credit: Collection of New York Public Library

Transcript:

Chief, Bureau of Naval Personnel

United States Navy Department

Washington, D.C

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Respectfully yours,

Harriet Ida Pickens

Ex-Lt. W, USNR

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ACTIVITY: ANALYZING A WRITTEN DOCUMENT

Directions: Read the document assigned to you and answer the questions below.

1. Who wrote this document?
2. Who would have read it? Who was the intended audience?
3. Write one to two sentences summarizing the document.
4. Why did the author write this?
5. Share a quote that tells you the author's purpose.
6. What might have been happening in history that impacts the author's purpose?
7. What can this document tell us that you might not learn anywhere else?