

The Questions to Ask

Begin teaching about corroboration—more commonly called crosschecking—by modelling out loud the thinking process of corroboration and assessing certainty. Then, in pairs, students can take turns following your lead, each asking questions and making assertions about a different document.

Before the think aloud, you may wish to post questions such as the following to scaffold student thinking:

- What is similar about these sources? How do they differ?
- Why are they similar or different?
- Does this source confirm what I have already learned?
- Does it extend what I know about the topic?
- Does it challenge what I have already examined?
- Do I have enough evidence on this? Can I move on?

Still other questions can assess the relevance of sources, such as

- Why is this source important?
- What makes this source an important piece of evidence?

Sentence stems for thinking aloud or writing about corroboration include the following:

- Source X supports what I have learned so far because it ...
- Source X goes even further than source Y in showing that ...
- Source X contradicts the evidence of Source Y by suggesting that ...
- These pictures show different effects of ...

Expressing a Degree of Certainty

Closely aligned to corroboration is reflection on degree of certainty. Help students understand that we cannot always find definite answers to our questions in history because there are not always enough sources, they may not tell us all we want to know, or they may disagree with one another. Students will need to use adverbs that express uncertainty, such as *probably*, *likely*, and *possibly*, and verbs such as *suggests* or *implies*.

Sentence stems for thinking aloud or writing about degrees of certainty are

- These sources lead me to believe that ...
- These sources clearly show ...
- It is highly likely (based on the sources) that ...
- These sources clearly show ... but we are still uncertain about ...

At some point in teaching corroboration, ask students to extend their learning by asking questions such as

- How do you think comparing sources might reflect the work that historians do?
- Can you think of other times and places when you might want to compare sources?

Activities that Involve Corroboration

1. **Compare an historical account against sources.** Students can study an account of an historic event and then compare it with evidence from primary sources. Provide students with an inquiry question, such as “What kind of evidence is this based on?” The question could be more provocative: “Is this really how it happened? How can we tell?” The textbook may be the first account to put to the test, but for variety and fun you could also look at online movie trailers or history songs such as the account of the French Revolution sung as a delightful parody of Lady Gaga’s “Bad Romance.”²⁴
2. **Build knowledge from sources first.** This can be done in reverse: Give students a wide variety of primary sources on a specific topic, ask them to interpret the documents to build an understanding of the topic, and then invite them to read and critique the textbook. As a culminating task, students write a letter to the publisher expressing their critique. The challenge for you is to find the primary sources. The extraordinary Begbie Contest Society can meet this need for a variety of Canadian history topics from the blockade of the *Komagata Maru* to the struggle for employment equity.²⁵
3. **Compare and rate two accounts using sources.** A third approach is to give students competing accounts and multiple sources, and ask them to decide which is the better account. This is the approach of the activity that follows, about the Battle of Vimy Ridge.
Another example would be to compare competing accounts on a variety of twentieth-century history topics expressed through anglophone and francophone political cartoons at the McCord Museum web page.²⁶ Another good option would be to compare songs about the War of 1812: the American “The Battle of New Orleans” and the Canadian “War of 1812.”²⁷
4. **Use sources to create a new account or interpretation.** Perhaps the gold standard in understanding evidence is an open-ended investigation by which students are required to use a multitude of sources to develop their own accounts. This is the approach in the consolidating activity, **Creating a Classroom Museum** on page 65.

24 For a selection of history songs, see History for music lovers by historyteachers. *YouTube*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/user/historyteachers?feature=watch#p/u/8/wXsZbkt0yqo>

25 Hou, C. (Ed.). (2004). *The Begbie Canadian history contest: The first ten years*. Vancouver: The Begbie Contest Society. Hou, C. (Ed.). (2008). *The Begbie Canadian history contest: Years eleven to fifteen*. Vancouver: The Begbie Contest Society. Hou, C. (Ed.). (2009). *The Begbie Canadian history contest: The first fifteen years* [CD]. Vancouver: The Begbie Contest Society. Also retrieved from <http://www.begbiecontestsociety.org>

26 Anglo and Franco perspectives. (2009). *McCord Museum*. Retrieved from http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/caricatures/page.php?Lang=1&file=156_2.xml

27 Every song tells a story. (2012). *Public Broadcasting Service (PBS): The War of 1812*. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/wned/war-of-1812/classroom/intermediate/every-song-tells-story/>