

RESEARCH

The 'Heart & Soul' of it!

Research is the foundation of your NHD project. The stronger the foundation, the stronger the project. You have to remember that a successful researcher is:

- Informed – She knows how to find information
- Organized – She keeps track of her notes and sources

Where do I start?

After talking with your teacher about a possible topic you need to get a good introduction to it. For that you need to visit your school media center or public library where you can find an encyclopedia. An encyclopedia article is basically an overview of its subject. It introduces you to the basic understanding that's developed surrounding the topic. A good discipline specific encyclopedia will have articles at the end of which the author lists basic sources for further reading (mostly secondary but sometimes primary). Articles containing these 'suggested readings' or 'bibliographies' are GOLD!!!! Not only does the article give you a general introduction but it gives you the beginning of a bibliography! You can then get the titles in that 'suggested reading' list and before you know it you're rollin'!

Remember though that an encyclopedia is only the beginning. It gets you started but you should not depend solely upon it. Your research needs to be dominated by scholarly secondary sources and primary sources.

How do I find more sources?

As you get further into your research you will want to search for additional sources, more unique sources, both primary and secondary. To do that you might visit

- **College or University Libraries:** These academic libraries house sources a public library or your school library usually can't, including academic journals, books written by leading scholars in the field you're studying (secondary sources) and primary source collections like historic newspapers.
- **Historical Societies:** Local and regional history topics can make for very powerful history day projects. If your topic is local or state history, you'll want to visit a regional or state historical society. These institutions collect and preserve information about Georgia.
- **Interviews:** Although they are not required, an interview with someone connected to your project can be very helpful. If the person was involved in your topic, you'll be conducting an oral history interview. Contact your subject in advance and get their permission to be recorded in writing. Prepare your questions in advance and come equipped to either take notes or record the session. If you can't meet in person, you can talk by phone or via email. Remember to thank your interview subject and send a thank you note afterward.
- **Talk to a Librarian:** Librarians are arguably the best resources for finding information. Librarians are professional information-gatherers and keepers. If it's out there, they'll find it!

PRIMARY & SECONDARY SOURCES

When historians study a topic they try to gather material from a wide variety of sources. They do so that they can understand their topic in its **historical context**. They also need to understand what questions about their topic have already been answered by scholars. In the end, historians (like lawyers) need evidence to “make their case.” There are two basic categories of sources historians use: **Primary** and **Secondary**. You need to use **both** to have a successful History Day project.

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources are published books or scholarly articles composed by an author who is offering an analysis/interpretation of the topic. This analysis and interpretation is based upon primary sources but the author **is not an eyewitness to, or a participant in, the historic event**. Most of the books, encyclopedias, and websites you’ll consult are secondary sources. These sources are fundamental to your work because they provide the background information you need. They give you an understanding of a topic’s historical context as well as a sense of what scholars are saying about your topic. The **footnotes and bibliographies** of secondary sources will lead you to additional secondary and critically important primary sources.

Examples of Secondary sources

- ✓ Encyclopedias
- ✓ Biographies
- ✓ Textbooks
- ✓ Media Documentaries
- ✓ Books about your topic
- ✓ Interviews with scholars/experts
- ✓ Articles about the topic
- ✓ Websites

Primary Sources

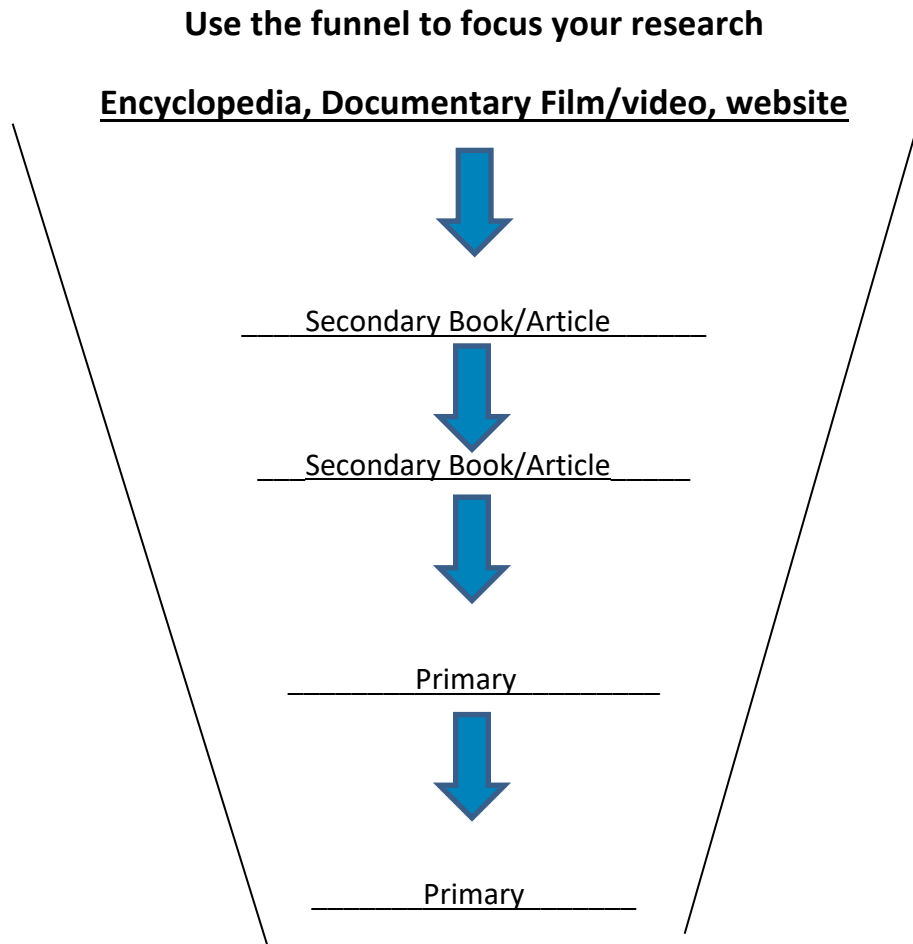
Primary sources are materials **produced by people in the place, at the time your topic occurred**. They provide a first-hand account about a person or an event because they were produced in the time you are studying. These are eyewitness accounts, documents published at the time of the event.

Examples of Primary sources

- ✓ Historic objects
- ✓ Government records
- ✓ Photographs
- ✓ Manuscript collections
- ✓ Newspapers from the era
- ✓ Music of the era
- ✓ Interviews with participants (oral history)/ Letters
- ✓ Original film footage

✓ Autobiographies

Remember to funnel your research the way you funneled your topic. You want to move from the general to the specific, from secondary to primary. We always want to jump right to the primary sources but the only way to get the most out of your primary sources is to have first grounded yourself in the secondary scholarship. So, think of the funnel!



Keep in mind that your students will want to dive into the primary sources first. It is indeed the case that they should investigate to insure that there is sufficient primary source material readily available to them but students need to develop an understanding of their topic through secondary sources first. Notice the funnel is very intentional – it places primary sources at the bottom. These are analyzed by students only after they have become grounded in the secondary scholarship on their topic.

Your students can visit the NHDGeorgia Website for additional resources. NHD has also produced “NHD Quick Tip” videos on primary/secondary sources. Your students can view them at the program website as well as on YouTube. They include:

- [What is a Primary Source?](#)
- [Finding Primary Sources in Secondary Sources](#)
- [What is a Secondary Source?](#)
