

Interrogating Primary Sources
Shannon King
College of Wooster

Here are some questions that can help you interrogate primary sources (as well as secondary sources, such as articles, books, and other source material). These questions should help you think about how primary sources in general reflect a particular historical period, as well as, the role primary sources play in helping us understand and think about a historical period.

Identification Related Questions:

What kind of primary source is this?

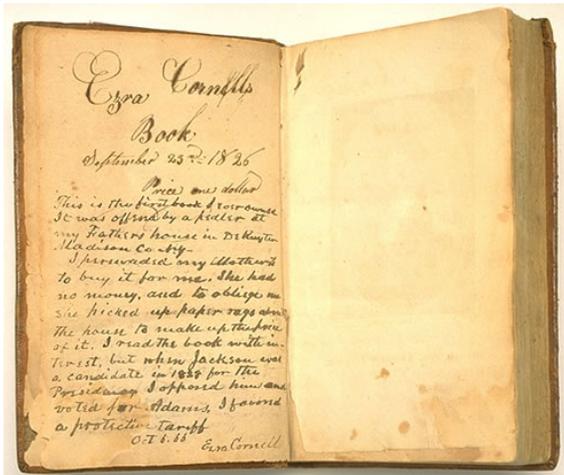
Is it a chronicle, speech, report, poem, interview?

Who produced this source?
For what reasons?

What historical period does this document describe?

What is the subject matter of the document? Does the date, as well as the subject matter, of the document parallel any historical events?

What historical forces does it address? Does it address economic, political, social, cultural forces?



Is it representative of the ideas of an individual, institution, and/or organization? Why does this matter?

Who would have access to the document and/or what audience, reader, or constituency does the document speak to?

What are the major themes of this document? Is there a main argument? Is it a set of inter-related main arguments? Are you convinced of the argument?