



## Spiral Questions

A simple technique for developing a classroom activity involving a primary source is to use spiral questions. Spiral questions guide students from lower- to higher-level critical thinking skills so that they become comfortable and adept at analyzing primary sources. The technique can be used with documents, photographs, and other primary sources. There are three levels of spiral questions: description, interpretation, and analysis.

### **Level I: Description**

Write two or three questions that help students identify the primary source. Encourage them to pick out details from the source that explain who and what. Who created the source or is featured in it? What kind of source is it? Is it dated, and if so, what is the date? Make the questions specific to the source you have chosen.

### **Level II: Interpretation**

Write two or three questions that make students formulate ideas or make inferences based on the existing evidence. Encourage them to probe more deeply into the source, thinking about how and why. If the source is not dated, can you make an inference about when it was created? Where it was created? Who is the audience? What do the elements of the source represent?

### **Level III: Analysis**

Write two or three questions related to the primary source that encourage students to put the information they have gathered in the first two sets of questions together and analyze the source. These should be open-ended opinion questions that provoke discussion. For example, what does the source tell you about the time period, region, or culture?