

Supporting a Thesis Activity

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1. Introduction to the activity

o Goals/Purposes:

Students will:

- analyze primary sources
- choose primary sources to support a given thesis
- select relevant quotes that best support thesis
- learn to footnote quotes

o Explanation of Assignment

- I chose thesis statements that are very easily supported by the documents on the "Web of Memory" site. I encouraged students to write their own thesis statements if possible. I found that students who had written thesis statements before, ended up writing their own or adapting the given thesis statements. Students who had no idea what a thesis statement was were helped dramatically with given thesis statements. Teachers, however, may choose to adapt thesis statements according to students' ability.

2. Student Handout

- o See attached.

The Web of Memory . . .

The Great Chicago Fire "Mini-Essay"

MINI-ESSAY IS DUE: _____

Overview: You will use primary documents to support a thesis about the Chicago Fire of 1871. Using direct quotes from those documents, you will write a "mini-essay"

Step One: Find the website.

- Go to www.chicagohistory.org (This is the Chicago Historical Society site.)
- Click on "Online Projects"
- Click on "The Great Chicago Fire . . .;" Click "Continue"
- Click on "The Web of Memory." (This part of the site shows how people have remembered the Chicago Fire.)

Step Two: Browse the primary documents.

- There are three parts ("Essay," "Galleries," and "Library") You may read the "Essay" sections, but remember that because they were written by a historian and are *secondary sources*, they are only one historian's interpretation of the documents.
- **Focus** on the *primary documents* in the "Galleries" and "Library" sections.

Step Three: Choose a thesis statement that you think you can support with primary source evidence.

Thesis Statements:

1. The people of Chicago were united by the tragedy of the great Chicago fire of 1871.
2. Mrs. O'Leary is unfairly blamed for the Chicago fire of 1871.
3. Chicagoans responded favorably to efforts to commemorate the Chicago Fire with relics and souvenirs.
4. Each media source told a very different story of the Chicago fire in 1871.
5. or . . . use another thesis statement of your own creation . . .

Step Four: Select quotes from at least two different primary documents to support your chosen thesis statement.

Step Five: Write a 3 paragraph mini-essay that introduces the thesis, and uses quotes from the documents to support it.

- Use at least two direct quotes (word for word) like so . . . "blah blah blah."¹

¹ This is a footnote. To get this in Microsoft Word go to Insert, Reference, Footnote. This is where you write the full citation of the source you are referencing. Lucky for you, the only information you have is what is written underneath the link you click on to get the full text. Copy and Paste that info to your footnote. Isn't being a historian fun????!!!!!! ©

Example:

from the *Chicago Evening Post* of October 18, 1871