Evaluating historical sources

It is important that you do not accept pictures and photographs without question. Especially with a picture or a cartoon that has been created by someone, for some purpose. Ask yourself, *why did the cartoonist/painter/photographer draw/paint/shoot this the way they did?* You need to acknowledge in history that all sources are someone’s version of the event(s) they depict. Thus, they may be more or less reliable as evidence when forming an historical argument.

**\*Please fill out the table below in relation to the source your teacher gives you. When you are finished, glue it in your notebook.**

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| **Evaluating a picture as historical evidence** | | |
| **Features of evidence** | **Example questions** | **Your thoughts/responses.** |
| 1. **Origin** (source kind and type: is it primary or secondary, who created it, when and where?) | * Are these primary or secondary sources? * What kind of sources are they? * Who took the photos/wrote the article? * Where did it come from and what was the context? * What experiences did the source’s creator have? | More than “it’s just a photo.” Ask yourself: Why was this particular photo of this particular street, from this particular angle taken? |
| 2. **Purpose**—Why did they create it? | * What/who was the intended audience? * Why does it have the particular ‘take’ on the subject that it does? * Is it intended to persuade/convince, inform, entertain, record, analyze or evaluate? | Even if this is what Ypres looked like around 1918, does it prove that all of Belgium was destroyed to this extent? Explain why, or why not. |
| 2.1 **Motives** (this is part of the above, but Dr Pearce treats it as a separate category to nuance it a bit better). | * What motivated the creator to frame it like this? * What motivated them to be a part of this? |  |
| 2.2. **Values** (Also, part of purpose, but the intended audience might be very different from the values of the creator, so it is worth asking). | * What did the creator(s) value? * What ethics did they have? |  |
| 5. **Usefulness**? | * How is this source relevant to or useful for our inquiry (**the Key inquiry question!)** * What does it tell us? * Does it have the kind of information we need? |  |
| 6.**Reliability**?  From [History Skills](https://www.historyskills.com/source-criticism/analysis/bias/):  “Bias is when the creator’s perspective is so strongly for or against something that the information in the source is clearly unbalanced or prejudiced. All sources contain some degree of bias, but it is not always possible to detect it.” | * Return to why this source was created and by whom? * Can we be certain that these are accurate pictures of Ypres (Belgium) in 1918-19. Why/why not? * Can we be certain that this photograph is reliable? From where and whom does the information come to us? Can we rely upon it to construct an accurate picture of who suffered most in WWI? Explain why or why not. |  |
| 7. **Extra points! Overall evaluation of the source**. | * Overall, how valuable do you think this picture would be to someone studying the causes of The Second World War? Give reasons. * Think: two sources might be incredibly useful, but one is more valuable than the other… |  |