



## HISTORIC FORT SNELLING

Minnesota Historical Society

# Fort Snelling and the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 Primary Source Analysis

### Abstract

In this activity, students will be asked to explore an online exhibit called “Fort Snelling and the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862.” The exhibit is divided into five sections, each focusing on the experience of a different group of people. Students will be assigned a section, and either individually or in groups, analyze different primary sources, and consider what each can teach us about the past. Students will use the **Primary Source Analysis Sheet** to guide them through the process.

### Materials

- *Fort Snelling and the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862* online exhibit
- **Primary Source Analysis Sheet**

### Activity Outline:

- Divide class into small work groups (ideally 3-4 students) or assign work individually
- Each group will be assigned one of the five topic sections from the online exhibit:
  - Dakota Soldiers
  - Dakota “Peace Party”
  - Non-combatants
  - U.S. Military
  - Memories of War
- Students complete the **Primary Source Analysis Sheet** for their assigned section.
- Groups will share with the class their findings with the class.

### Extension Idea

Students can look at items from their daily lives that could be used as primary sources to describe life today. Have them select several items and analyze them as they did the items in the online exhibit.

## Fort Snelling and the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862

### Primary Source Analysis Sheet

**Directions:**

As you explore the online exhibit look at the primary sources and think about what they can teach us about the past. Explore your assigned section of the online exhibit and, as a group, choose three primary sources which you feel are important. Answer the questions below for each primary source you chose. Next, work with the group across from you to select three sources that you would like to share with the rest of the class.

**Each theme group will report their findings to the rest of the class.**

<p><b>Describe the Source - What kind of source is it?</b> (i.e. interview, diary, newspaper, image, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who created this source?</li> <li>- Who is its intended audience?</li> <li>- When was this source created?</li> <li>- What influences do you think acted on the creation of this source?</li> </ul> <p><b>Example</b> Newspaper Article— <i>Indian War</i></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>News of the Week.</b></p> <p><b>INDIAN WAR.</b>—The Sioux, Chippewas, Yankhonnas, Cutheads, and other wild tribes of Indians are committing horrible depredations on the frontiers of Minnesota. One village has been entirely burned down, and a large district of country laid waste; 500 persons are reported to have been killed, embracing all ages and sexes. The women suffered the worst indignities in many instances. All the barbarous practices of the savages have been re-enacted. The reports represent affairs as horrible. The civilized Indians are represented as more ferocious than the others. Missionaries were slain who had spent all their lives among the Indians. As the savages attacked Fort Ridgely, defended with artillery, it is presumed beyond doubt, that emissaries from the rebels are at the bottom of the war.</p> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oskaloosa (Kansas) Independent</li> <li>• Residents of Oskaloosa, Kansas</li> <li>• August 30, 1862</li> <li>• Fear, lack of solid information about fighting</li> </ul>	<p><b>What can this teach us? What inferences can we make? (<i>Bullet Points- no complete sentences</i>)</b></p> <p><b>Example</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>News spread quickly about the fighting in Minnesota (published less than two weeks since fighting started)</i></li> <li>• <i>Information was not completely reliable; states numerous American Indian nations were engaged in the war.</i></li> <li>• <i>People were afraid; describes fighting in graphic terms, implies no reason for the killing, accuses “civilized Indians” of the worst atrocities</i></li> <li>• <i>Some believed Confederates helped cause war</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>What question(s) does this raise?</b></p> <p><b>Example</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How was information transmitted to newspapers in the 1860s?</i></li> <li>• <i>Did the editors have a biased opinion toward American Indians?</i></li> <li>• <i>Where did the idea of Confederates instigating the war come from?</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Why do you think this source is important?</b></p> <p><b>Example</b> <i>The newspaper article illustrates how news spread around the country quickly after the fighting started. It illustrates that at least some people suspected multiple American Indian nations were involved in the fighting, and that there were suspicions that Confederates could have instigated the fighting.</i></p>
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<b><u>Source 1</u></b>	<b>What can this teach us? What inferences can we make?</b>	<b>What question(s) does this raise?</b>	<b>Why do you think this source is important?</b>
<b><u>Source 2</u></b>	<b>What can this teach us? What inferences can we make?</b>	<b>What question(s) does this raise?</b>	<b>Why do you think this source is important?</b>
<b><u>Source 3</u></b>	<b>What can this teach us? What inferences can we make?</b>	<b>What question(s) does this raise?</b>	<b>Why do you think this source is important?</b>