

## **Be a Guest of the Past**

**Lesson Title:** Attic History: Reading Primary Source Documents

**Objective:** TLW understand the concept of primary source documents

**Materials:** Dice, paper, and pencil

**Introduction:** What happens to documents when we introduce the element of time? Chance takes a hand -- water, fire, war, carelessness; so many things conspire to destroy documents.

**Student Activity:** Each student creates a primary document by writing about what happened the previous morning. Their written accounts are the only primary documents about yesterday's happenings. The teacher "speeds up time" on the documents. Students roll the dice and write the number rolled on the top of their primary documents. If student rolled a:

- #1 The document was destroyed by water damage, perhaps it was stored in a damp basement or a leaky roof in the attic was the culprit.
- #2 The document was destroyed by fire.
- #3 The document was destroyed in a war.
- #4 The document was lost by carelessness.
- #5 The document was nibbled on by mice.
- #6 The document was the only account of the previous morning's activities.

Read the surviving account out loud, and the class determines what details were lost. (From: Teaching History, John Fines, Ed., Holmes McDougall Seminar Series, Edinburgh, 1983)

This is only the beginning of what we call the life cycle of a primary document. This document has to be saved and stored and cared for. It is valued because it has survived.