

Lesson Plans for
RESEARCH ACTIVITY: CORROBORATING SOURCES
A 1-hour Class Activity

Learning Goals: To understand that information from a single source may not be reliable
To practice corroborating information and facts by consulting various sources

Teacher Preparation:

- Print one page for each two pupils; cut pages in half so that each child has a half-page worksheet.
- Print one page of the games list for each class. Use a paper cutter or scissors to snip the names apart, fold each, then place them into a basket or box. Students will “draw names” to discover which game each will research.
- Arrange for a library visit and access to computer lab. (If there are several computers in the library, use the library only for better supervision.)

INTRODUCTION: WHAT DOES “CORROBORATE” MEAN?

Today we are going to use the library and computers to find and check information, just like you would do if you were writing a long report. Here is a word I would like for you to know:

(Write on board): **Corroborate.**

Does anyone know what “corroborate” means? (Affirm any close answers or guesses.) Here is the word in a sentence (from Associated Press, November 15, 2005):

NEW YORK - Comedy Central star Dave Chappelle has checked himself into a mental health facility in South Africa, the magazine Entertainment Weekly reported on Wednesday....Entertainment Weekly said it had corroborating sources for its story.

What do they mean by “corroborating sources?” (Affirm good answers, then have someone look it up in the dictionary and read the definition.)

You can see how a news organization might want to be doubly sure that what was going into print could be “corroborated” or *affirmed* or *attested to* or *verified by* another source. Incorrect information can cost them their reputation; people would quit buying their paper, or quit watching or listening to their programs. Also, if their “facts” turned out to be untrue, someone might sue them! It would be important to them to not just take one person’s word for a “fact,” but to check it against other witnesses or records or photographs.

The same is true when you are doing research. You don't want to take just one person's word for something. You want to find out if the information from one source is *corroborated* by other sources. Also, you want to think about how reliable or trustworthy each source might be.

ACTIVITY: CORROBORATING OUR SOURCES

Say: Today we are going to the library to find information about some games. Each person will research a different game to find out where it came from and when people started playing it.

1. You will find information about the origin of your game from three different sources: an Internet source, a library source, and an encyclopedia entry. Do your sources *corroborate* each other?
2. You will then write a sentence giving the facts as reliably as you can based on your three sources. For example: "Tiddlywinks originated in England in the 1880s."
3. Last of all, you will return to your sources and consider which of them seemed to you to be the most reliable. Rate your sources 1, 2, or 3, with "1" being the source you consider most trustworthy.

Let me hand out your worksheets. Please fill in your name, class, and date when you receive yours. (Hand out worksheets.) Please use a pencil as we will be working in the library.

OPTIONAL: HAND OUT "GAMES" TOPIC BY PLAYING A GAME

Say: Since your research is about games, we're going to play a game to let each of you get your game assignment.

I'm thinking of a number between one and ten. (Write on board and cover with your hand.) **Hold up your hands with the number of fingers you think my number is.**

Uncover your number. **Everyone with (5) fingers up, stand up. Everyone else, hands down.** Invite those standing to come up and draw a topic.

Repeat, using "a number between one and five."

Repeat, using "odds and evens"; **right hand if odd, left if even.**

Sort remaining students into two to four huddles to do "One Potato, Two Potato," or another popular elimination game. Reduce number of huddles and repeat. Bring last few students to the front and do "Eeny, Meeny, Miney, Mo" with them until all have received a name. (Or just give up and pronounce "champs" so you can move on!)

Say: Write the name of your game at the top of the chart.

You will use a search engine, an encyclopedia, and one other source in the library to look up your game. Fill in the place and date of origin as each source gives it, then write a sentence telling where and when your game originated. Your sentence can be as simple or as elaborate as the facts require, but, please, just one sentence.

Afterwards, you will rank your sources according to most reliable (1), next (2), and least reliable (3). All may be reliable, or some may be clearly unreliable. Just make your decision and rank them.

There is a bonus question at the bottom for those who might like to think about their assigned game.

If your library lacks books or other resources for completing the games chart, allow students to find two Internet resources. Hint: Some game titles have several meanings; students who are having difficulty with an Internet search can add the words “game” and “history” to their search.

Worksheets should be turned in as they are finished. Students who finish early may work the “Games Wordsearch,” play quiet games such as Tic-Tac-Toe or Hangman, or, if there are board games (checkers, chess, or Chinese checkers) in the library, allow students who finish early to play them.

CLOSURE

When all papers are turned in, discuss the experience as time allows with questions such as:

Raise your hand if all of your sources corroborated each other.

Raise your hand if you found two sources which corroborated each other but disagreed with the third.

Raise your hand if you found that none of the sources corroborated each other completely.

Which game histories were best corroborated? Which harder to find corroborating sources for?

In the case of disagreement of sources, how did students decide what to say in their sentence?

Did anyone find a source which s/he simply did not trust? What was it, and why?

Did anyone find a source which differed when the other two corroborated each other, and trust the differing source more than the corroborating sources? What might you do in that case?

GRADING RUBRIC

Assign grades based on this rubric:

- A. All source information, regions, and dates completed. Accurate, grammatical sentence. Thoughtful ranking of sources.* Library time used well.
 - B. Source information, regions, and dates complete. Good sentence. Thoughtful ranking of sources.* Library time used appropriately.
 - C. Chart incomplete. Sentence inadequate. Source ranking column filled in.* Some library time wasted.
 - D. Source chart mostly blank. Sentence composed poorly or not attempted. Source ranking column left blank or guessed at.* Library time used wastefully.
 - F. Work not attempted. Library time wasted or used distracting others.
- Use the Bonus question to add a “+” to the letter grade.

Note: There is no right or wrong answer to the ranking of sources; instead, filling in this column forces students to consider that not all sources are equal, that one must sometimes use judgment in deciding whether to trust a given source.