Lesson Plan 3:

**Title:** Are the sources credible?

**Grade Level:** 8th grade

**Related Subject Areas:** History of the American West, Communication History, 19th Century American History

**Objectives:**
- Students will gain skills in critical thinking by identifying what historians use to understand the past through the sources available to them.
- Students will practice analytical skills by identifying and categorizing diverse source material.
- Students will personalize history from the 19th century American West using computer-based technology and analytical writing skills.

**Social Studies Standards (District of Columbia):**
- Students identify similarities between present and past.
- Students explain the central issues and problems from the past, placing people on the matrix of time and place.
- Students use geographical knowledge and skills to analyze historical and contemporary issues.
- Students distinguish between relevant from irrelevant information, essential from incidental information, and verifiable from unverifiable information in historical narratives and stories.
- Students assess the credibility of primary and secondary sources, draw sound conclusions, from them, and cite sources appropriately.
- Students assess the credibility and reliability of Internet sources.

**Time Required:** 30 minutes (Pony Express game and Arago activities require 15 minutes each).

**Lesson Plan:**
The teacher will introduce the lesson and classroom activities by emphasizing the differences between primary and secondary sources and showing examples of each using both the NPM website and supplemental classroom materials: pointing out the dates, author, photographer, painter, etc.
Students should be well-versed in identifying primary vs. secondary sources and be comfortable interpreting them to support their existing knowledge in history. The activities in this lesson will give students the skills to discern the quality of the information they draw from their primary and secondary sources raising their analysis to a new level. Content will continue to emphasize 19th century American West and postal history (comparing the past to the present) to help students in a deeper understanding of the differences between primary and secondary sources. Use “Educational Activity 1” as an introductory activity.

Vocabulary List:
1. Credible (Adj.): Capable of being believed; trustworthy; worthy of belief.
2. Verifiable (Adj.): To prove the truth, as by evidence or testimony; substantiate with evidence.
3. Unverifiable (Adj.): Not proven or easily verified.
4. Relevant (Adj.): Connected with the matter at hand; pertinent; suitable or appropriate.
5. Irrelevant (Adj.): Not relevant or suitable.
6. Cite (V.): to quote (a passage, book, author, etc.) especially as an authority; to mention in support or proof.

Essential Question:
1. Can both primary sources and secondary sources be credible? How can comparing and citing different sources help in drawing sound conclusions about the 19th century American West?
2. How do historians assess the credibility of primary and secondary sources?

Educational Activities:
1. Comparing sources for credibility
   a. Each student must compare one primary source to one secondary source informing them about the 19th century American West in order to assess the credibility of different sources. Using the Arago website, [www.arago.si.edu](http://www.arago.si.edu), the teacher instructs the students to compare this preselected 1850 letter as the primary source to one secondary source of their choice. Using the [Citing Sources Worksheet](#), students must be able to answer each question and cite each source properly, showing they know the difference between primary and secondary sources. In this activity, the student becomes a historian and examines each source carefully, as would an actual historian. Teacher encourages the students to look for names, places, people, and issues
that are contained in the two sources by studying the images and detailed descriptions provided on the Arago website.

b. In order to accurately assess the credibility of their two sources, each student must first complete the Citing Sources Worksheet. Then, on the back of the worksheet, write a brief summary (using their answers as a guide) on the credibility of each source to present a clear understanding of the time period. Students will hand in the worksheet to the teacher at the end of the activity.

2. Pony Express Game
   a. Students will play the Pony Express website game individually. This choose-your-own-adventure game is an interactive component intended to engage students with their imagination and take them through a virtual research project by evaluating primary and secondary sources. The game is comprised of multiple questions and choices, depending on the students’ responses; the adventure can go in different and exciting directions.
   b. The game concludes with analysis of the credible sources, with some basic interpretation. The purpose of the game is not to study the facts behind the Pony Express, but rather putting forward different types of objects to examine the difference between primary and secondary sources and how they can be used to study history. Please refer students to the NPM website: [www.postalmuseum.si.edu](http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu) and click on “Moving the Mail West.”

Assessment/Evaluation: Review essential questions after completing the lesson plan and educational activities to reinforce the lesson. Recommend this follow-up activity for evaluation of the students understanding of the lesson plan.

• Web Activity: “My Collection”
   Using Arago’s “My Collection” feature, each student will create and name their own grouping based on the 19th century American West and postal-related history by selecting six sources = 3 primary and 3 secondary). Students will employ observation, evaluation, and identification of different sources for making selections. Using the Citing Sources Worksheet, students will compare primary and secondary sources, assess credibility by drawing sound conclusions, and properly cite the sources they used. Students will e-mail their Arago “My Collection” to the teacher’s inbox, and hand in three Citing Sources Worksheets that correspond to their online selections at the end of the activity.
Materials:
• Computer for Internet Access
• Blackboard, Whiteboard, and/or Smartboard
• Citing Sources Worksheet (downloadable PDF)
• Paper and writing instruments (pens, pencils, and/or markers)

Recommended Websites:
www.postalmuseum.si.edu
www.arago.si.edu