

Historian Tip # 18: Historians interpret primary sources to help them get an “eyewitness view” of the past.

Today’s investigation: **Legalism**

Outcome of the investigation: Our historians will be able to

1. classify documents as primary sources and secondary sources
2. assess laws from the Tang Legal Code, and state support or opposition to individual laws
3. critique laws they feel are unfair, justify laws they feel are fair
4. attempt to persuade others of their opinions.

Vocabulary: primary sources
secondary sources
Legalists

Materials: The Tang Legal Code

Mini lesson: As historians, we can study two different kinds of sources to learn about the past—primary sources, and secondary sources. Primary sources are records made by people who saw or were a part of an important event. These people may have written down exactly what was said, or created a document during the event. They may have put their thoughts about the event into a journal, or written their story in a letter, poem, or song. They may have painted a picture, made a film, or taken a photograph of the event.

A secondary source is not written by a person who was involved with the event. It is created after the event, and tells about what happened, or about what the person thinks happened. It could be something like a magazine article, book, or encyclopedia entry written by someone who only heard or read about the event.

Today we are going to look at a primary source, some laws from the year 653 in China. You see, while Confucius thought that no laws were necessary because everyone would do their best to be good, others disagreed. Some thought that people will only obey out of fear, not out of respect for others. People who felt strongly that laws were important were called “Legalists.” Let’s look at the first of these laws now.

Activities: Select a few of the laws to look at in class. After reading the actual law, it may be wise to restate it in “kid language.” Ask students to state whether they are in support of the law or opposed to the law. Choose a few students on each side to conduct a brief “mini-debate” in front of the class, providing supporting reasons for their opinions. Small groups can then either receive a law to read and debate on their own, or a series of mini-debates can be conducted as a whole class activity. Ask students how they believe laws were enforced so long ago.

Connecting past to present: In your notebook, record some of the laws that we have in our society. Do you think that laws are necessary? What do you think might happen if we didn't have laws?