

PRIMARY DOCUMENTS

OF THE MEXICAN

REVOLUTION

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Primary sources are the raw material of history - they are the actual document written and created during the time period. Primary documents shape our understanding of how history took place. By examining primary sources, we enable students to take agency over their own learning, to critically consider that there are always multiple versions of history (whose story is told and by whom and how). In the process of working with primary documents, students develop strong analytical skills.

In this exercise, students will consider one or more primary documents from the Mexican Revolution: Plan of San Luis of Potosí, Plan of Alaya, Plan of Guadalupe, and Plan of Agua Prieta. Through this activity they will see how different revolutionary leaders communicated their thoughts and beliefs about the political and/or social changes necessary for Mexico.

You may choose to have students read all three documents, just one document, or divide the class into three groups and assign a different document to each group. The students can read the documents individually, with a partner, in a small group, or as a whole class. Group work may make it easier for students to delve into the analysis.

A brief overview of each document is provided below for reference. For more information concerning each document's context and the respective authors, please see the background information provided earlier in this guide. Each primary source document is provided in English and Spanish in the appendix of this guide.

Plan of San Luis of Potosí

Attributed to: Francisco I. Madero

Date proclaimed: October 5, 1910

Description: In the 1910 presidential elections, Francisco I. Madero was arrested for daring to challenge Mexico's longstanding ruler, Porfirio Díaz. Madero escaped from prison and fled to San Antonio, Texas where he proclaimed the Plan de San Luis Potosí, declaring the 1910 elections illegal and calling for armed rebellion against the federal government.

The Plan abstractly cited effective suffrage and no-reelection as the primary goals of Madero's

movement. Strikingly absent were calls for substantive land or labor reform, foreshadowing Madero's failure to adequately incorporate those principally important issues into his short-lived presidency.

Plan of Ayala

Attributed to: Emiliano Zapata

Date proclaimed: November 25, 1911

Description: Disenchanted with the recently installed President Madero's slow-moving social reforms in 1911, Zapata proclaimed the Plan de Ayala, calling for immediate and comprehensive land reform.

The Plan was proclaimed in Ayala, in Zapata's home state of Morelos and reportedly authored by Zapata and a local schoolteacher named Otilio Montaño. The Plan demands restitution of indigenous lands taken during the Porfiriato. It does not distinguish Madero from Díaz, recognizing that false men and traitors make promises like liberators and then forget those promises upon arriving in power. Zapata and his followers would pursue the aims of the Plan de Ayala by taking arms against the next three Mexican presidents.

Plan of Guadalupe

Attributed to: Venustiano Carranza and Álvaro Obregón

Date proclaimed: March 23, 1913

Description: In 1913, Victoriano Huerta overthrew and executed the revolutionary President Francisco Madero in a coup. Venustiano Carranza proclaimed the Plan de Guadalupe, denouncing the traitor, Huerta, and declaring himself the interim President of Mexico.

The Plan had no proposal for any type of social reform whatsoever.

Plan of Agua Prieta

Attributed to: Álvaro Obregón

Date proclaimed: April 23, 1920

Description: Obregón proclaimed the Plan in Agua Prieta, a border town in Sonora. To produce and proclaim it, he allied with two other Sonorans: Adolfo de la Huerta and Plutarco Elías Calles. Together, they promoted the Plan as a way to give the Sonoran-led Obregonistas a reason to rally.

The Plan's primary thrust was to repudiate the Carranza administration, accusing it of making a farce of suffrage, violating the political sovereignty of the states, and of betraying the original principals behind the Revolution. The Plan furthermore declared that Adolfo de la Huerta would be the supreme chief of the army. Within two weeks, Carranza had fled the capital and Obregón was in charge of the country.

MATERIALS

- Copy of primary source analysis document(s) for each student (either in English or Spanish)

PROCEDURE: BECOMING HISTORIANS

1. Select one of the primary source documents to use with your students and print enough copies so that each student may have his or her own copy upon which to write. You can choose to explain the author/purpose/date of the document initially, or wait until after the group discussion.
2. It may be useful to also project the document on a common screen for all of the students to reference together. If you want to emphasize the historical nature of the document in question, you can obtain a high-quality digitized version of the Plan of Ayala online through the World Digital Library: <http://www.wdl.org/en/item/2970/>.
3. This process is meant to build upon earlier conversations about the timeline and critical players engaged in the Mexican Revolution. Now is the moment at which you encourage students to stop and reconsider how we know what we know about the Revolution. Discuss the definition of “primary source” and explain that primary documents are open to interpretation. Historians must critically and carefully analyze primary documents, and think as much about what is written as what is left out.
4. If time permits, extend the conversation to discuss history more broadly. Emphasize that history is complex and open to interpretation. Allow students to discuss either as a class or in small groups the question of whether the history of the world (or a country, or a city, or a classroom) is singular. Can there be multiple histories? How do we determine whose history(ies) are recognized and retold? What roles do primary documents play in helping to make that decision?
5. Now, encourage students to become historians themselves and to closely observe each primary source. They can work individually or in small groups. Guiding questions you might use include:
 - Who wrote the document?
 - Why did they write it? What was their primary purpose?
 - When did they write it?
 - Where were they when they made it public?
 - What was happening around them at that time?
 - What key words, sentences, or rhetorical devices did the writer use to convey his or her point?
 - Who is the intended audience?
 - Is there any information that you think should be included that isn't? If so, write a question to the author.
 - What other information might be useful for understanding this document?

6. Reconvene students and begin to collect their answers on a common space (Promethean Board or butcher block paper).
7. As everyone comes back together, begin to collect the individual or group responses and write them in the common space. Try to triangulate commonalities and differences, using those convergences as springboards for further discussion.
8. Use this as an opportunity to elaborate on the messiness of history and reiterate the importance of critically considering and analyzing written sources.
9. If you have not already done so, discuss the plan's author/purpose/date with your students and resituate the conversation in the broader context of the Mexican Revolution.