



Activity Two

Activity Name	2. Looking at the evidence
Learning Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Introduce the main function of the WSMR and associated themes. ○ Learn something about the social, economic, and cultural factors that made the WSMR possible. ○ Learn how to find out about the past from a range of sources and how to evaluate those sources.
Links to National Curriculum	<p>History</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Knowledge and understanding of events, people and changes in the past ● Victorian Britain ● Unit 18 What was it like to live here in the past? ● Historical enquiry ● Local history study <p>English</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review and comment on what has been read, seen or heard, focussing on both the topic and the writer's view of it
Resources required	2a Four miners at the entrance to Colton Pit; 2b Jack Jewell greasing the rollers; 2c Safety staff; 2d The seal photograph; 2e An accident in a mine; 2f Potatoes and witchcraft; 2g Film of Ebbw Vale.
Activities	<p>1. Identify the evidence Split class into pairs and distribute the source material found in the resources section. They are detectives trying to piece together evidence which reveals what it was like to live and work on the West Somerset Mineral Railway over one hundred years ago.</p> <p>Look at the pieces of evidence found in the resources section. What can be deduced from each piece of evidence?</p> <p>2. What evidence can be trusted? Talk about the difference between primary and secondary sources. Looking back at the evidence of the WSMR: a. Identify each source as either primary or secondary. b. Discuss the pros and cons of each type of evidence. How reliable is it?</p> <p>3. Create two differing accounts a. Select one of the pieces of evidence. b. Write a different eyewitness account of the event the evidence relates to. For example, the person in the photograph, or a miners' version of the accident.</p>



Teacher information

Glossary

Adit: A horizontal underground opening to a mine.

Tallow: A form of beef or mutton fat which has uses in industry.

1. Identify the evidence

Images

2a Miners at Colton Pit



This photograph shows miners with a wagon of iron ore at the entrance to an adit when the mines were re-opened for the Somerset Mineral Syndicate in 1908. The miners are dressed rather smartly considering they are working underground. This is because they only would have had two pairs of clothes, one for every day, and one for Sunday best. The miner at the back of the picture is hunched over. The adit would have been dark, damp and cramped to work in. The photograph looks posed.

2b Jack Jewell greasing the rollers



This photograph, taken in 1890, shows the view down the Incline from two thirds of the way down. The man has been identified as Jack Jewell, whose job it was every morning before breakfast to grease the railway rollers that carried the cables. He is carrying tallow on a stick to lubricate the rollers. The wooden poles carry wires for the semaphore signalling system between the top and the bottom.



Objects

2c Safety staff (on display in Watchet Museum)



This type of staff was used on all single line railways. It was given to the driver by the signalman, and it allowed the driver to take the train along a length of single line, knowing that he would not collide with a train coming the other way, as there was only one staff on each length of line.

On the WSMR, the line seems to have been operated on the principle of having only "one engine in steam" at once, so a collision would have been impossible. Each signal was operated by whichever member of staff was nearest, be he the station master, porter, or even the locomotive fireman!



2d West Somerset Mineral Railway seal

The WSMR seal was created in 1855 by Waterlow's of London. It depicts the main elements in the WSMR's history:

- An engine house stands as a reminder of the heavy mining which went on on the Brendon Hills.
- The train is running on the West Somerset Mineral Railway, an 11 mile line which transported wagons of iron ore mined in the Brendon Hills to Watchet.
- Watchet can be seen with its boats as a busy harbour town. Iron ore was loaded from the trains onto ships, to take it across the Bristol Channel to South Wales.
- In the distance the furnaces of Ebbw Vale in South Wales can be seen. This is where the iron ore was smelted and turned into products such as steel rails.



Written evidence

2e An accident in the mine

This description of an underground accident was written by an Inspector of the Mines for submission to the Secretary of State. It is factually written in formal language with no sympathy expressed for the miner who died. Instead, he is fully blamed, and previous rule breaks are cited, as if to prove the miners' disregard for their own safety. Accidents underground and on the railway were fairly commonplace.

→ See Bearland Ventilation Flue Teachers' Pack for more information about safety on the WSMR.

2f Potatoes and witchcraft

This is a modern account of the sort of diet miners used to eat, and includes a description of a local woman who calls herself a witch trying to make a pig better in the absence of a vet. This is a secondary source (which makes reference to the primary source of someone who experienced living in the village at the time). The woman is recalling the experience eighty years later. How accurate can she be? Why has the author included evidence which may not be accurate?

Film

R2f Film of Ebbw Vale smelting furnaces

This film was commissioned by the Ebbw Vale company in 1947 to describe the production process at the works. A copy of the film was given by the Ebbw Vale company to Mike Jones, who had it digitised.

Title: Pattern for Progress

Date: 1947

Written and Produced by:

Ronald H. Riley

Direction: J. Krish, Raymond S. Elton

Production House: Richard Thomas and Baldwins Ltd.

An RhR in association with The Film Producers Guild

2. What evidence can be trusted?

When historians want to find out what happened in the past they look at the evidence.

Primary sources

Evidence that was created **at the time** of the event is primary evidence.

This includes:

- Letters
- Diary entries
- Newspapers
- Maps
- Photographs
- Objects
- Films
- Oral testimony



Secondary sources

Evidence that was created **after the event**, and is based on a mixture of primary sources, is called secondary evidence. This includes:

- Academic books or studies
- Films

Bias

How can you trust the evidence?

Bias means showing an unfair or imbalanced opinion. To recognise bias try asking the following questions:

- Who wrote the source, or took the photograph?
- Who were they producing the source for?
- Why were they producing the source?
- When did they produce the source, i.e. how long after the event was it?

Bias lets us find out about what people believed or thought about a particular subject. Historians use primary and secondary evidence from lots of different sources so that they can form a balanced opinion about the subject.

Tips on selecting sources

- Visit the local library, archive or record office.
- There is a huge variety of other written sources such as parish records, advertisements, sale particulars, newspapers, and personal documents such as letters and diaries. Hint: some of these written sources will need to be adapted to enable children to use them.
- To find out the businesses which would have been in the area try comparing trade directories with census returns for the same street at around the same time.
- Look at school records to find punishment and attendance records admission registers, log books.
- Inventories or wills are interesting as they list moveable possessions.
- Use reference materials, dictionaries, encyclopedias and CD-ROMS to find out about unfamiliar occupations, merchandise, etc.
- For further information on written sources, see the English Heritage publications *Using Documents and Using School Buildings*.