

## Threads & Themes Grade 7, Unit 2, Investigation 2 Summative Assessment

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

### PASSAGE 1

#### *Letters and the Living Voice of the Past*

**(1)** A letter from a Civil War soldier to his brother might begin with a complaint about the coffee, a joke about an officer's habit, and a question about whether the family garden is producing the squash the writer remembers from home. Only on the third page does the writer mention that the regiment has been ordered south. A historian who reads this letter recovers something that no battle report or newspaper from the era preserved: one specific person's voice, on one specific day, addressing one specific reader.

**(2)** Personal letters and diaries hold something that other historical records do not. A government document records a decision. A newspaper records what made the news. A letter records what one person said to another person on a particular day. The texture of that private speech — the jokes, the worries, the references and remembrances, the way one generation talks about another — survives in personal correspondence and almost nowhere else. For historians studying daily life, family, friendship, or the ordinary language of a period, letters and diaries provide the closest available record of how people actually lived.

**(3)** Some scholars caution against placing too much weight on letters. They note that letter-writers come from a particular slice of society: those who could read and write, those whose families could afford paper and postage, those whose letters were preserved by descendants. There is real truth to this caution. Personal letters do not represent every voice from a period, and researchers who use them must think carefully about whose voices are missing. But this limit does not erase what letters preserve. A letter is one source among many. When a letter is read with care, it offers something almost no other source can offer.

**(4)** Consider how historians have used family letters to reconstruct the experience of nineteenth-century westward migration. Letters between siblings who left for California and those who stayed in the East preserve the practical details of the journey: what was packed, what broke, what was sold, what was bought along the way. They preserve, too, the emotional texture: the homesickness, the unexpected friendships, the moments when one writer realized the family would not be reunited in the form it had taken before. Government records from the same period preserve names and dates of land grants. The letters preserve how the people inside the records understood their own lives.

**(5)** None of this means that every letter deserves equal weight. A historian asks the same questions of personal records as of any other source. Who wrote this? When? For whom? What did the writer include, and what did the writer leave out, and why? These questions matter and

they shape how the source can be used. But they do not change the basic value of personal records as evidence. A letter or diary, read with care, gives a researcher access to the past in a register that few other documents preserve.

(6) For students learning to use historical evidence, letters are often the source that brings a period alive. A textbook can describe what life was like in a certain era; a letter from that era lets a student hear one specific voice from inside it. The voice is particular, sometimes peculiar, sometimes funny, sometimes sad. It is the voice of one person who lived through a moment that the rest of us can now only study. That voice, preserved on paper and read with attention, is one of the closest things history can offer to a real conversation across time. Teachers who bring such documents into a classroom often find that students engage with the period in a way that secondhand sources alone cannot produce.

### ITEMS — PASSAGE 1

#### Item 1

Read this sentence from paragraph 2 of “Letters and the Living Voice of the Past.”

The texture of that private speech — the jokes, the worries, the references and remembrances, the way one generation talks about another — survives in personal correspondence and almost nowhere else.

**What does the word *texture* suggest about private speech in this sentence?**

- A) Private speech creates a physical reaction in the reader.
- B) Private speech is rough and difficult to interpret.
- C) Private speech includes many small details that give it character.
- D) Private speech follows a pattern that can be predicted.

#### Item 2

**Why does the author MOST LIKELY open “Letters and the Living Voice of the Past” with the description of the Civil War soldier’s letter?**

- A) to argue that letters are more reliable sources of information than newspapers
- B) to prove that letters often delay the spread of news
- C) to show how letters can convey unique information about individuals
- D) to suggest that historians prefer letters from people in the military to letters from civilians

#### Item 3

Read this sentence from paragraph 3 of “Letters and the Living Voice of the Past.”

Some scholars caution against placing too much weight on letters.

**As used in this sentence, what does “weight” mean?**

- A) how heavy something feels

- B) how much importance something is given
- C) how much space something takes up
- D) how often something is repeated

**Item 4**

**In paragraph 3, how does the author respond to scholars who have concerns about relying on letters to learn about the past?**

- A) by rejecting this opinion as unfair to those who wrote the letters
- B) by agreeing that letters should rarely be used as historical evidence
- C) by claiming that the missing voices are not important for most research
- D) by accepting the critique while arguing that letters are a valuable resource

**Item 5**

Read this sentence from paragraph 5 of “Letters and the Living Voice of the Past.”

A letter or diary, read with care, gives a researcher access to the past in a register that few other documents preserve.

Read the dictionary entry below.

**register** (*noun*)

1. an official written list or record
2. a metal grate that controls the flow of air or heat
3. a level or style of language used in a particular setting
4. the range of notes that a voice or instrument can produce

**Which definition BEST matches the meaning of *register* as it is used in the passage?**

- A) definition 1
- B) definition 2
- C) definition 3
- D) definition 4

**Item 6**

**Which statement correctly captures the relationship between government records and letters about westward migration as presented in paragraph 4?**

- A) Government records are more accurate than letters and should be studied first.
- B) Letters describe the journey while government records describe the destination.
- C) Letters were written to correct errors in government records of the same time period.
- D) Government records and letters offer different kinds of information that each have merit.

**Item 7A**

**Which statement BEST expresses the central idea of “Letters and the Living Voice of the Past”?**

- A) Personal letters preserve a kind of evidence about people’s lives that few other records can.
- B) Letters from the Civil War period are the most important source for studying that era.
- C) Scholars should use letters more often than they currently do in their research.
- D) A letter’s value depends mainly on whether the writer was famous or important.

**Item 7B**

**Which sentence from “Letters and the Living Voice of the Past” BEST supports the central idea identified in Part A?**

- A) A newspaper records what made the news.
- B) Government records from the same period preserve names and dates of land grants.
- C) A historian asks the same questions of personal records as of any other source.
- D) It is the voice of one person who lived through a moment that the rest of us can now only study.

**PASSAGE 2**

***Diaries as Data***

(1) When Henry David Thoreau walked the woods around Concord, Massachusetts, in the 1850s, he kept a careful journal of the natural world he found there. He wrote down the day each spring when the first lilacs bloomed. He noted when the apple trees flowered and when the leaves of the blueberry bushes appeared. He recorded when the first robins arrived. He did this on purpose, year after year, because he wanted to understand the patterns of the seasons in his own backyard. He could not have known that more than 150 years later, researchers at Boston University would use his entries to measure climate change. By comparing Thoreau’s flowering dates to those recorded today in the same Concord woods, scientists showed that many plants in the area now bloom at least a week earlier than they did in Thoreau’s day.

(2) The Thoreau study points to something important about personal records. A diary kept by one person, for that person’s own reasons, can later become data that researchers use to study how the world has changed. Some diarists collect this kind of data on purpose. They see the value in the record. Others collect it without ever knowing that the small details they wrote down would matter to anyone outside their family. Both kinds of records have shaped what we now know about the past.

(3) The deliberate kind comes from writers who set out to record something specific. The Marsham family in England kept a record of seasonal events for more than two hundred years, beginning in 1736. Five generations of the family wrote down the first leafing of oak trees, the first flowering of snowdrops, the first call of the cuckoo each spring. Today, biologists use that record to study how British seasons have shifted. It’s one of the longest unbroken nature

journals in the world. Similar deliberate records exist in Japan. There, court officials and temple keepers wrote down the date of the Kyoto cherry blossom festival for more than a thousand years. Climate researchers have used those dates to estimate spring temperatures going back to the ninth century.

**(4)** The accidental kind of data is just as valuable. And sometimes, it's more surprising. A farm wife in Massachusetts in 1880 who wrote in her account book what she paid for sugar, flour, butter, and coffee was not intending to create a historic economic record. She was tracking her household budget. But when modern historians collect entries like hers from many households across many years, the result is a record of what ordinary nineteenth-century Americans actually paid for the staples of daily life. And this record is often more detailed than any government report from the same period. Similarly, letters and diaries from soldiers and travelers, written to share news with family, now help researchers map disease outbreaks, weather events, and the spread of new technologies.

**(5)** Several features of personal records make them useful as data, whether the writer meant them that way or not. They are usually dated. They are usually written close to the event recorded, which keeps the details fresh. They tend to capture the same kinds of observations year after year, which gives researchers comparable measurements across long stretches of time. And they often include the small, ordinary details that no public record bothers to write down: the morning the river finally froze, the day the apple trees bloomed, the price of butter on a particular Tuesday in March.

**(6)** Like any kind of historical evidence, diary data has limits that researchers have to address. The diaries that survive are not a random sample of all the lives lived during a certain time period. They overrepresent wealthy people who could read and write. They also overrepresent writers from certain regions. A diarist's weather note is also shaped by where they lived and what they could see from their window. Researchers working with diary data correct for these limits by drawing on many writers, checking diary entries against other records when possible, and framing their conclusions in ways that reflect what the available data can and cannot show.

**(7)** Thoreau, the Marsham family, and the keepers of the Kyoto cherry blossom records all wrote their entries for their own reasons. So did the farm wife with her butter prices and the traveler with his weather notes. None of them set out to produce evidence for future researchers. But their habits of careful observation, repeated over years and combined with the entries of many other writers, have created something larger than any one of them. That record is now central to several fields of research.

## ITEMS — PASSAGE 2

### Item 8

**Why does the author MOST LIKELY open “Diaries as Data” with the description of Thoreau’s journal?**

- A) to compare Thoreau’s writing style to other nineteenth-century authors
- B) to explain how researchers travel to forests to do their work
- C) to introduce the idea that personal records can later become useful for studying change
- D) to show that Thoreau predicted future climate change in his journal

**Item 9**

Read this sentence from paragraph 3 of “Diaries as Data.”

The deliberate kind comes from writers who set out to record something specific.

**As used in this sentence, what does *deliberate* mean?**

- A) planned on purpose
- B) careful and slow
- C) shaped by chance events
- D) open to interpretation

**Item 10**

Read this sentence from paragraph 6 of “Diaries as Data.”

They overrepresent wealthy people who could read and write.

**Based on the prefix “over-,” what does *overrepresent* mean in this sentence?**

- A) speak on behalf of someone again
- B) show in greater proportion than is accurate
- C) place above other written records
- D) replace the view of one writer with that of another

**Item 11**

**Which phrase from paragraph 4 is MOST similar in meaning to “household budget”?**

- A) “accidental kind of data”
- B) “economic record”
- C) “staples of daily life”
- D) “government report”

**Item 12**

**According to the passage, what is the KEY difference between those who set out to record data and those who do not?**

- A) Those who set out to record data are scientists; accidental data-keepers are not.
- B) Those who set out to record data collect specific information; accidental data-keepers record details for personal reasons.
- C) Those who set out to record data write long entries; accidental data-keepers tend to keep their records short.

D) Those who set out to record data are paid for their work; accidental data-keepers are not.

**Item 13**

Drag each example from “Diaries as Data” into the column that BEST describes it.

**Column headings:**

- 1) Set out to record historical data
- 2) Did not set out to record historical data

- A) Henry David Thoreau’s journal of flowering dates
- B) the Marsham family’s record of seasonal events
- C) the Kyoto cherry blossom records kept by court officials
- D) a Massachusetts farm wife’s 1880 account book
- E) a traveler’s diary written to share news with family

**Item 14**

A short documentary plans to use the Thoreau example from “Diaries as Data” in this way:

On screen: aerial footage of the Concord woods in spring, scored to quiet music. A narrator reads the dates Thoreau recorded about various plants, then the dates researchers record today for the same plants. Side-by-side text shows the two columns of dates as the narrator reads.

**Compared with the written passage, what would the documentary scene MOST clearly add for a viewer?**

- A) a list of other researchers who have used Thoreau’s entries
- B) a fuller explanation of Thoreau’s reasons for keeping his journal
- C) a stronger argument that personal records become useful data
- D) a visual comparison that lets viewers see the change in dates

**Item 15**

**Which statement BEST expresses the central idea of “Diaries as Data”?**

- A) Diaries kept by individuals can become valuable data for researchers studying long-term change.
- B) Records about cherry blossoms provide critical information used in modern climate research.
- C) Researchers should ask diarists to keep more careful records for future use.
- D) Personal records from rural areas are more accurate than records from cities.

**ITEMS — BOTH PASSAGES**

**Item 16**

Select the **TWO** statements that **BEST** describe a difference between “Letters and the Living Voice of the Past” and “Diaries as Data.”

- A) “Letters” emphasizes the value of a single writer’s voice; “Diaries as Data” emphasizes the value of many records combined.
- B) “Letters” describes records mainly through two examples; “Diaries as Data” describes records through several named historical cases.
- C) “Letters” argues that personal records are unreliable; “Diaries as Data” argues that they are reliable.
- D) “Letters” focuses on government records; “Diaries as Data” focuses on data kept by families.
- E) “Letters” argues that correspondence should be kept private; “Diaries as Data” argues that personal writing is needed by the public.

**Item 17**

**A historian encounters a set of letters written by Mrs. Smith in 1880. Mrs. Smith also kept a diary recording data from 1880-1890 about her vegetable garden. Based on the information in the passages, which statement is MOST LIKELY true?**

- A) Mrs. Smith was hoping that one day her letters and diary would be used to learn about the time in which she lived.
- B) Mrs. Smith’s letters will reveal information about her daily experiences, and her diary will reveal information about patterns in nature.
- C) Mrs. Smith was using her letters to share facts about her life, and she was using her diary to share opinions about her community.
- D) Mrs. Smith’s letters will be a less helpful resource to learn from than her diary.

**Media Literacy**

**Item 18**

Read this scenario.

A student is writing a research report on how historians use personal letters as evidence. The student finds four sources:

- (1) a peer-reviewed journal article on letter-writing in nineteenth-century America, written by a professor of history and published in 2024
- (2) an opinion blog post titled “Why Old Letters Matter,” written by an anonymous user last week
- (3) a textbook chapter on primary sources, published in 2010 by a major educational publisher.
- (4) an magazine article written in 2023 about the lost art of letter-writing that argues that people should return to this practice

Which source has the **STRONGEST** authority for a research claim about how historians use letters as evidence?

- A) the journal article
- B) the blog post
- C) the textbook chapter
- D) the magazine article

**Item 19**

Read this scenario.

A student is researching how diaries have been used as historical evidence. The student finds two sources that both make the same claim: personal diaries have been used to track long-term changes in climate. The first source is a museum exhibit catalog from 2015 that discusses the use of diaries in climate research. The second source is a peer-reviewed scientific article from 2008 that reports a specific study using Henry David Thoreau’s journal entries to measure changes in flowering dates in Concord, Massachusetts.

**Why does the second source MOST strengthen the student’s research, even though both sources support the same claim?**

- A) It is older, and it is therefore more trustworthy.
- B) It is shorter and easier for the student to summarize.
- C) It comes from an article, which is more credible than other sources.
- D) It reports a specific study with named evidence.

**SPELLING**

**Item 20**

Write the spelling word you heard:

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**Item 21**

Write the spelling word you heard:

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**Item 22**

Write the spelling word you heard:

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**Item 23**

Write the spelling word you heard:

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