

What is History? In *Canadian History: Pre-Confederation*, chapter one, John Belshaw asks the reader to consider how we know what we think we know about the past. The author presents somewhat of a cautionary tale as to how a person should apply the acquired skill of critical thinking necessary to flesh out the epistemology of our knowledge of history. That is, to understand the writing of history as a living, breathing entity that is open to interpretation and scrutiny ¹. It is important to consider some of the factors that may have influenced any historical writing, such as context, culture, purpose, politics, and ideologies ². That is, “ideas and values that guide our understanding of society and economy and may also drive political and personal agendas” ³. Belshaw makes a convincing argument that in taking any document at face value we risk a skewed perspective that may or may not serve to explain the relatively fragile ‘truth’ of past happenings in Canada, and how it informs the present. The author suggests that one must look at what *primary* and *secondary* sources were used to inform historical writing; primary sources may come directly from individuals from the past, whereas secondary sources are those that are produced in order to interpret primary sources (such as diaries, government documents, newspapers, etc). We are asked to consider what filter or lens has been applied in order to produce these interpretations. The author makes use of two famous paintings (primary sources) meant to depict real events to drive home his point; each painting presents a different version and begs the reader to question what the differences mean. In doing so, we are better equipped to critically think about other historical information we are presented with. Upon reading this text, I am reminded of its real time application to understanding the news, politics, and even personal interactions and what drives different societal views. In future classes, I would like to discuss how this critical thinking approach can be applied elsewhere.

Notes

1. John D. Belshaw, *Canadian History: Pre-Confederation*, (Vancouver: BCCampus, 2015), 4.
2. Belshaw, *Canadian History*, 6.
3. Belshaw, *Canadian History*, 6.