**Determining Usefulness of Sources**

In order to study history, historians must consult and obtain information from a variety of sources. A source may be almost anything. Sources can be written or non-written and are also classified as either Primary or Secondary. However, just because there are many sources for a single event, topic or individual does not mean that they are all useful or reliable. There are many things to consider when you are determining the “usefulness” of a source in history.

***Imagine the following scenario***

*While on a recent shopping trip to Westfield Hurstville you heard a large commotion in the shopping centre. You heard shouting and saw security guards run past the store you were in. When you left the store you heard many other shoppers talking about how police and security guards were chasing a boy who had robbed a store while holding a knife.*

*As you leave the centre, police ask if they can question you about the boy.*

Would their conversation with you be useful to their investigation? Explain Why.

Historians need to determine the useful of sources by asking questions of the sources:

1. Is the source Primary or Secondary?
2. What is the origin of the source? (Who or where the source comes from.)
3. What is the motive of the source? (The reason why it was made, e.g., to record a personal event, to persuade people to vote in a certain way. When you answer this you will also determine how reliable or trustworthy a source is which may affect its usefulness.)
4. What information does the source provide you with? (Does it provide factual information, opinion, data, statistics, personal information?)
5. Does the source have limitations? (Is there information that the historian really needs that is not provided in the source?)

**Historical investigation**

A historian is investigating the lives of the Stolen Generations and how they were affected by their removal.

***Would source 1 be considered useful?***

(Write you answer in the space below. Use responses to the five questions above as the basis of your response.)

**Source 1. A member of the Stolen Generations – Judy Duane, 1997**

*I have my family. A husband and two daughters that are so dear to me. But I have another family. A family that I don’t know. A mum and five brothers, four of whom I didn’t know I had. Taken so young with so few memories of my mum and baby brother. Close to a lifetime lost. I have not seen my mother, she may have passed on. So many questions, so few answers. Time has gone by, I would like my girls to know their uncles and maybe hear stories of their Nan. I want my two families to become one, with tears of joy and sorrow. I want my two families to become one.*