Eyewitness Account

As you are reading this account and evaluating its usefulness as a **primary source**, think about the author’s point of view and his audience – the people who would probably read this account. Look for words that show **bias**. *Despotism*, for example, is a word for harsh rule. Also examine how much information Young tried to obtain from real people. Information obtained by talking to people instead of merely observing them often strengthens the reliability of a report.

Definitions:

A **primary source** provides direct or firsthand evidence about an event, object, person, or work of art. Primary sources include historical and legal documents, eyewitness accounts, results of experiments, statistical data, pieces of creative writing, audio and video recordings, speeches, and art objects.

A **bias** is an opinion that favours one viewpoint and lacks a neutral perspective.

**Primary Source Background Information:**

**What is it?** An excerpt from an Englishman’s journal kept during his journey to France

**Who wrote it?** Arthur Young

**When?** Sometime in the 18th century

**Why?** To record the events he witnessed

**Tasks:**

With a partner:

1) A) With a yellow highlighter, highlight the statements and/or phrases in Arthur Young’s account that are observed facts.

B) With another colour highlighter, highlight the inferences and the opinions.

C) Discuss the number of facts vs the number of inferences and opinions. Record what this suggests about Young’s account. Is it biased or a neutral account? Is it believable?

2) What emotion does Young inspire within the reader?

3) Individually, write a paragraph (5-7 sentences) and conclude if Arthur Young’s eyewitness account of French peasants is a reliable source. Refer to your discussion points and use evidence from the text to support your ideas.

**Primary Source:**

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| **The Misery of the French Peasants**  All over the country, girls and women are without shoes or stockings… There is a poverty that strikes at the root of national prosperity… The poor people seem poor indeed; the children terribly ragged, if possible worse clad than with no clothes at all… a beautiful girl of six or seven years playing with a stick, and smiling under such a bundle of rags as made my heart ache to see her… one third of what I have seen of this province seems uncultivated and nearly all of it is in misery.  What have king’s ministers and parliaments and states to answer for, seeing millions of hands that would be industrious, idle and starving through the stupid pronouncements of despotism, or the equally detestable prejudices of a feudal nobility…?  Walking up a hill, I was joined by a poor woman… She had seven children… This woman, at no great distance would have been taken for sixty or seventy, her figure was so bent, and her face so furrowed and hardened by labour – but she said she was only twenty-eight… [T]he countrywomen of France work harder than the men, and this, united with the more miserable labour of bringing a new race of slaves into the world, destroys absolutely all symmetry of person and every feminine appearance. |