The Digital Helen Keller Archive
Lesson Two: Primary and Secondary Sources

Worksheet: Comparing Sources

Primary Source (Source A): Correspondence between M. R. Barnett and Helen Keller | December 9, 1943

Link: *https://www.afb.org/HelenKellerArchive?a=d&d=A-HK01-02-B036-F01-016.1.2&e=------194-en-20--1--txt--Barnett----1943--3-7-6-5-3-------------0-1*

Short link: https://bit.ly/2IqYawT

Arcan Ridge
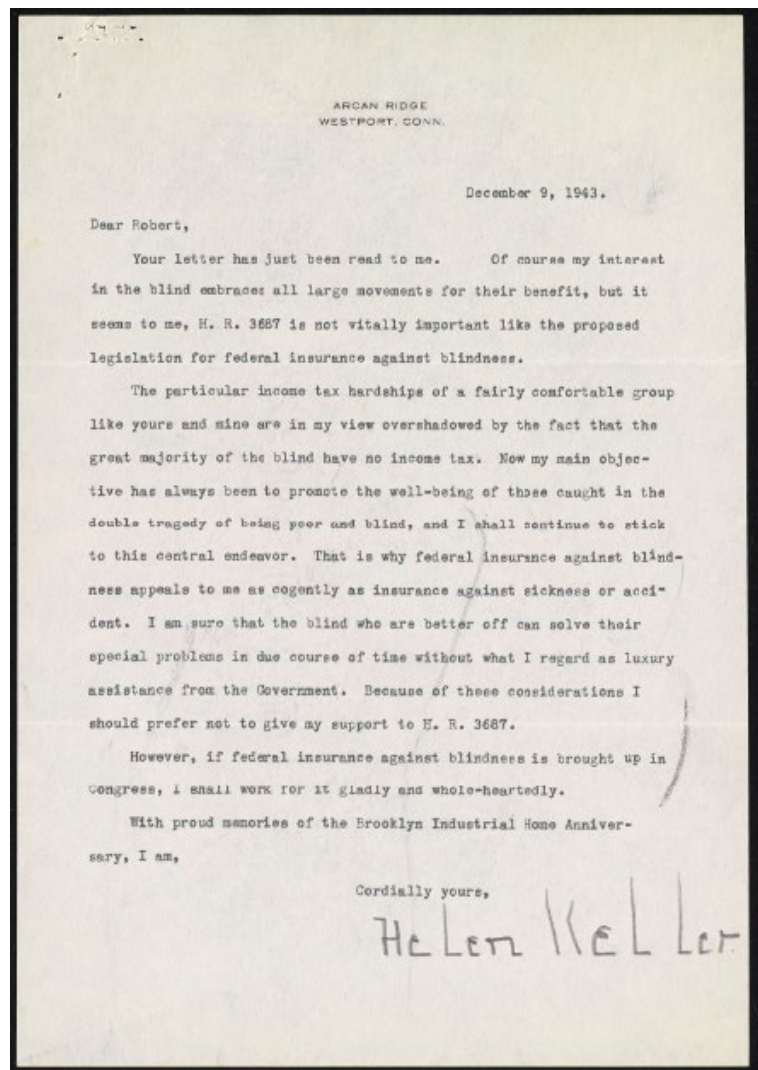Westport, Conn.

December 9, 1943

Dear Robert,

Your letter has just been read to me. Of course my interest in the blind embraces all large movements for their benefit, but it seems to me H. R. 3687 is not vitally important like the proposed legislation for federal insurance against blindness.

The particular income tax hardships of a fairly comfortable group like yours and mine are in my view overshadowed by the fact that the great majority of the blind have no income tax. Now my main objective has always been to promote the well-being of those caught in the double tragedy of be

ing poor and blind, and I shall continue to stick to this central endeavor. That is why federal insurance against blindness appeals to me as cogently as insurance against sickness or accident. I am sure that the blind who are better off can solve their special problems in due course without what I regard as luxury assistance from the Government. Because of these considerations I should prefer not to give my support to H. R. 3687.

However, if federal insurance against blindness is brought up in Congress, I shall work for it gladly and whole-heartedly.

With proud memories of the Brooklyn Industrial Home Anniversary, I am,

Cordially yours,
Helen Keller

Secondary Source (Source B): Kim E. Nielsen, *The Radical Lives of Helen Keller* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), page 53.

Keller apparently complied with the vast majority of those requests [for her support], but sometimes she disagreed and refused. For example, when Robert Barnett asked [Helen Keller] in 1943 to write to the Senate Finance Committee chair in support of a clause in the tax bill, allowing blind persons to take flat deduction of $500 to offset expenses incurred because of blindness, she said no. The legislation was not "vitally important," she declared. She noted that she and Barnett were "fairly comfortable," but the majority of blind people had so little income they paid no income tax. She sought to "promote the well-being of those caught in the double tragedy of being poor and blind." As a result, instead of a tax deduction, she supported federal insurance against blindness. Barnett's letter of reply acknowledged her arguments and made a half-hearted effort to persuade her otherwise, but it seems clear he did not expect her to change her mind.

Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

Worksheet

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Using the metadata provided by the Helen Keller Digital Archive, analyze the following:

1. Who wrote this document? When?

2. To what is the letter responding?

3. What does the author say about the topic under consideration? What alternatives do they propose?

4. Note any unfamiliar names or terms. What additional information would you need to more fully understand this letter?

5. Based on this letter, what can we infer about the economic position of blind Americans in the 1940s?

Review the secondary source you discussed in class and included above (Source B).

Consider the primary source letter and this secondary source together to answer these three questions:

1. Where does the author of the secondary source refer to the letter?

2. What claim does the author make? How does she use the letter to support that claim?

3. What additional information does she provide to contextualize this letter?