

A' Adam's Bairns?

Background information

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What is Bias?

Bias is when we introduce a preference or prejudice for or against a person, group or idea that is based on personal opinion rather than objective facts. When we write from a particular perspective or point of view, it becomes biased.

Historical Sources and Bias

One of the roles of a historian is to get to the closest understanding about the truth as possible. To do this, we need to understand that history is riddled with bias. Primary sources often contain bias as those who experienced events possibly had strong feelings and opinions about what was happening around them, or described the event or period through their own lens and experience. Those 'making' history or events would be thinking about their reputation and legacy - and have motive to give their version of events. Secondary sources can be influenced by things such as nationality, race or gender of those studying and writing about the period of history.

Identifying Bias in Sources

Bias is not necessarily a bad thing: it lets us find out about what people believed or thought about a particular subject. Historians need to try and find evidence from lots of different sources so that they can form a balanced opinion. Bias is not always obvious within a source and it may involve looking closely at tone, language and underlying inferences. When trying to identify bias within a source, it can be helpful to consider:

- Content (what is the source telling you, consider language and tone and the way the information is conveyed)
- Origin (who created the source, where and when)
- Purpose (why was the source created? Who was the intended audience?)
- Supported (is there other evidence or information to corroborate the information in the source?)