A primary source provides direct or firsthand evidence about an event. Primary sources can offer a lot of information beyond the written words. Use O-R-C-A to help you remember the steps to take when using primary sources.

O – Observe the document. What can you learn from how it looks, before you even begin to read it.
R – Read the document. Go slowly and take informed guesses for words you don't recognize.
C – Comprehend the document. What does it mean?
A – Apply the document. How does this document fit into the history you know?

O – OBSERVE
1. What kind of document is this? (letter, petition, report, General Assembly act, something else?)

________________________________________________________________________________

2. What does it look like? What kind of paper was it written on and with what kind of writing instrument?

________________________________________________________________________________

3. Are there any symbols or other unusual marks?

________________________________________________________________________________

4. Is there anything else unusual about this document?

________________________________________________________________________________

R - READ
1. Who wrote it?

________________________________________________________________________________

2. Who is the intended reader/recipient?

________________________________________________________________________________

3. When was it written?

________________________________________________________________________________

4. Where was it written?
C - COMPREHEND

1. Why did the author write this document? What is its main purpose?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

2. What’s the big idea? Summarize it in 1-3 sentences.
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

3. Choose a sentence from the document that references the big idea and write it below.
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

A - APPLY

1. Where does this document fit in to Rhode Island or United States history?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

2. What did you learn from this document that you can’t learn anywhere else?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

3. What other primary source documents could help you learn about this topic?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________