Post-Visit Worksheet

'Making a Better World? The evolution of a convict settlement'



'Through Their Eyes'

One of the best ways to discover what life was actually like in the past is through examining primary sources. These are 'first hand' sources such as letters, diaries, newspapers, photographs and official records. Examining a primary source is almost like looking through a portal into history, it allows us to take the perspective of a person who experienced an event or a place, and see it 'through their eyes'.

Fortunately, there are many primary sources still available which help us to discover what life was like at the Port Arthur convict settlement, not only for the convicts, but for the soldiers and free men and women who lived there as well. The primary sources below were written by two people with very different perspectives of Port Arthur; one from the point of view of a convict, and the other from the point of view of a visitor to Port Arthur who was a guest of the Commandant.

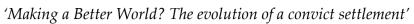
Article 1

After service we accompanied the Commandant to the cook house, where the respective rations were about to be issued. The manner in which this is arranged is admirable. The messes, varying from 12 to 26 men, are berthed in chambers in the penitentiary, affording accommodation for their respective numbers. Each of these messes select, in daily rotation, two delegates, who receive the victuals, and afterwards apportion each man his share... They then sit down and consume all the food, it being one of the imperative regulations that nothing shall be laid by, a measure to ensure the impossibility of husbanding, and thereby obtaining a provision in case of absconding... The meal afforded the convict is not only ample but nutritious, consisting of excellent soup, good wheaten bread (I tasted both), and beef, mutton or pork—such a meal indeed, as would rejoice the heart and gladden the eyes of many an honest, hard-working hungry Briton.

Burn, David, (1905) An Excursion to Port Arthur in 1842, J.W. Beattie, Hobart

The author of this extract, David Burn, wrote many articles about Tasmania both for local and British magazines and newspapers. His account of Port Arthur was published in the Tasmanian in 1842. He also wrote plays including Australia's first published play "The Bush Rangers" in 1829, and later worked as a journalist in both Sydney and Auckland.

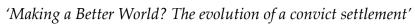
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phrases in the extract which are unfamiliar and then use a dictionary or intern research to discover their meanings. Write the words and definitions below.
What do you think the purpose of this article was? (e.g. to inform, persuadentertain) Give reasons for your answer.

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Do you think that David Burn was biased? Why or why not? Use examples from t text to support your answer.
What other types of primary or secondary sources could you use to discover h accurate the information in this article is? (Hint: you might start by finding out was actually included in a convict's rations!)

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Article 2

He [the convict overseer] conducted us to a saw-pit where there was a large quantity of lumber of various descriptions. "Seize them," shouted he, "and away to the settlement! My bloody eyes; but this will bring you to your senses! But it is nothing to what I've got for you tomorrow." Although seventy pounds was a legal load, according to the settlement rules, some of these sticks weighed from 200 to 300 lbs. I selected as light a one as I could, shouldered it with the greatest difficulty, and staggered away.... When we got halfway to the settlement, we were allowed to rest for five minutes, at the expiration of which, "pick them up!" was shouted and we carried them in, a distance of half a mile, the overseer walking as fast as he could without any load, and continually singing out, "come on, you bloody crawlers; keep up or go to the triangles." The moment the loads were deposited in the lumber yard, "come on," was again shouted and we went back for another load. This time four poor fellows were unable to carry their loads ... Three of the four were flogged in less than an hour.

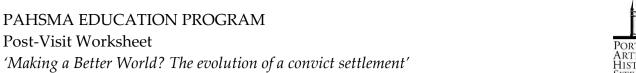
Miller, Linus, (1846) Notes of an exile to Van Diemen's Land, W. McKinstry & co

Linus Miller was an American Lawyer transported to Van Diemen's Land for his part in the rebellion of Upper Canada. He was sent to Port Arthur for leading a mass escape from the Lovely Banks probation station. As an educated man and a lawyer he was considered to be a most dangerous character and a troublemaker. On his arrival at the settlement he was assigned to a carrying gang under the command of a convict overseer who he described as the "devil incarnate".

This extract is written using language which was common in the 19 th century, but may not be as commonly used today. To begin your analysis, underline any words or phrases in the extract which are unfamiliar and then use a dictionary or internet research to discover their meanings. Write the words and definitions below.

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entertain) Give reasons for your answer.
What is Linus Miller's impression of the treatment of convicts at Port Arthur? Is positive or negative? Use examples from the text to support your answer.
Consider Linus Miller's background, was he a typical convict? How might Miller's background (e.g. occupation, education position in society) have influenced his perspective of Port Arthur? You may need to do some extra research to support you
answer.