



Sharing the Art and Story of Holocaust Survivor Esther Nisenthal Krinitz

ESTHER IN HER OWN WORDS AND IMAGES: ARTWORK AND TESTIMONY AS A PRIMARY SOURCE

Resources: [Interview with Esther](#) (13-minute video) and photographs available on [Esther in Her Own Words and Images](#) (Sutori), [Memories of Survival](#) (book), [Through the Eye of the Needle](#) (30-minute film), [“Meet Esther” close read](#) (PDF), [Firsthand Account vs. Secondhand Account chart](#) (fillable PDF)

Subject Areas: Math, History, Geography, Social Studies, Literature

Grades: 5-12

Time Allotment: 90-120 minutes

Topics/Themes: Informational Text, World War II (Europe), Holocaust, Artifacts, Art, Testimony, First Person

OVERVIEW:

Giving students the tools to recognize, analyze and draw conclusions from historical documents and artifacts with first person accounts and primary sources is an important skill. Students develop critical thinking skills, by examining meaning, context, bias, purpose, and point of view.

Because primary source documents, both public and personal, paint a vivid picture of a specific event and or a period of time, they give students a unique window into periods of time or events. Produced by the people who participated in and witnessed the past, primary sources offer a variety of points of view and perspectives of events, issues, people, and places.

Students who have the opportunity to use a variety of sources for research and understanding are able to construct a better understanding of events and realize that history exists through interpretation that reflects the viewpoints and biases of those doing the interpreting.

This lesson will give students the opportunity to discover a first-person account, analyze artwork as a primary source/artifact and learn the importance of using both first and secondary sources in research.

OBJECTIVE:**Students will be able to:**

- differentiate and compare/contrast primary and secondary sources.
- be aware of the importance of first-person accounts.
- recognize the different types of primary sources/artifacts.
- become familiar with analyzing informational text.
- recognize point of view and use critical thinking skills to analyze text.

LEARNING STANDARDS:

- Explain, analyze, interpret, synthesize and evaluate historical sources for multiple perspectives
- Explain, analyze and evaluate the fundamentals of historical interpretation including differentiating fact from opinion, multiple points of view, cause and effect, illustrations in historical stories, author's or source's point of view, and the central or main idea
- Describe, explain, analyze, interpret, synthesize and evaluate historical research such as historical events, facts, folklore, fiction, historical questions, primary and secondary sources and project-based assessment

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

1. What are examples of primary sources?
Secondary sources?
2. How do historians learn about the past?
3. How can primary source documents help us
to understand the past?
4. Why is it important to have a diverse
variety of sources?

“MEET ESTHER” ACTIVITIES:

Activity Setting: Classroom. These activities can be done individually or collaboratively, with the class broken into groups to analyze specific resources or to explore one of the activities as a team.

Materials: [Esther in Her Own Words and Images \(Sutori\)](#) (for images, artifacts, related links), [Memories of Survival](#) (book), [Through the Eye of the Needle](#) (film), the Meet Esther Close Read Resource (below and [PDF](#))

Duration: Varies from 30-90 minutes per activity.

ACTIVITY ONE: GETTING STARTED “MEET ESTHER”

Explain to students that you will be exploring the life of Esther Nisenthal Krinitz through items she created, stories she told and memories she shared. Like all primary sources both private and public, records and artifacts can be found in a home, a museum or a government archive. Tell students you will be sharing one of her first art pieces, her “green card” (Alien [Permanent] Resident Receipt Card), a video-taped interview and personal photographs. Ask students which items are primary sources (answer: all are primary sources representing different types) and where they think they were found. Most importantly, remind students that in order to truly be a primary source or primary account, these items were used or created by someone with firsthand experience of an event.

Before starting any of the activities have students complete the following:

- Have students watch the 13-minute documentary, [Interview with Esther Nisenthal Krinitz](#), and discuss what they learned from Esther’s first-person accounts.
- Ask students how emotion is an important factor in first person accounts.
- Have students read “Meet Esther” (below or [PDF](#)).
- Ask what other information they would add to the short description. As “historians”, what other questions do they have and how can they start to get answers?

ACTIVITY TWO: ASK STUDENTS TO GIVE EXAMPLES OF PRIMARY SOURCES

Explain to students that primary sources are not just documents and written records. There are many different kinds of primary sources, including: first-person accounts, documents, physical artifacts, scientific data that has been collected but not interpreted, and interviews with participants or observers with specific knowledge or expertise. Primary sources also take a variety of formats—examples of these are listed below.

- Audio - oral histories or memoirs, interviews, music
- Images - photographs, videos, film, fine art
- Objects - clothing (fashion or uniforms), tools, pottery, gravestones, inventions, weapons, memorabilia
- Statistics - census data, population statistics, weather records

- Text - letters, diaries, original documents, legal agreements, treaties, maps, laws, advertisements, recipes, genealogical information, sermons/lectures

ACTIVITY THREE: ASK STUDENTS HOW PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES DIFFER

While primary sources are the original records of an event created by firsthand witnesses, secondary sources are documents, texts, images, and objects about an event created by someone who typically referenced the primary sources for their information. Textbooks and biographies are excellent examples of secondary sources.

(You can use the Firsthand Account Vs. Secondhand Account chart provided (on Page 5 or [fillable PDF](#)) as a projection or a print-out).

1. Have students explain how the additional information Esther's daughters and the experts gave in the film helped them learn about Esther's life.
2. Ask if these are examples of secondhand accounts.
3. Ask why secondhand accounts are important in understanding events.

ACTIVITY FOUR: ASK STUDENTS WHAT THEY KNOW ABOUT ESTHER'S CHILDHOOD.

1. Let students know that there are no known photographs or records of Esther's childhood. Ask the students to speculate why few primary sources of her childhood exist.
2. Ask students why, in cases where few records exist, interviews and first-person accounts are critical.
3. Ask students how they think historians use primary sources, primary accounts and artifacts.
4. Let students know that you have learned a lot about Esther but you want their help in filling in some of the blanks.
5. Show students the following image: [My Childhood Home](#).
6. Ask students to tell you about the village from what they see. Have the students read the text narrative and to estimate what year the artwork depicts and why they guessed that period of time.
7. Ask students about the significance of October 15, 1942.
8. The narrative was written by her daughter. Why are these additional comments and observations important to understanding Esther's youth?

Enrichment/Extension

Have students listen to other first person accounts, provided on [Esther in Her Own Words and Images](#) (Sutori) and ask them to share similarities and differences in their stories. Ask them why it is important to have different points of view when examining an event or period of time.

“MEET ESTHER”: A CLOSE READ RESOURCE

Esther Nisenthal Krinitz, Holocaust survivor, immigrant, businesswoman, and artist, was born on February 8, 1927, in the village of Mniszek in Central Poland.

Before World War II affected her village, Esther had a peaceful childhood. Living in a farming community with both Jewish and Christian neighbors, the years before the war were relatively peaceful. Esther’s father, Hersh, was a horse trader, and Rachel, her mother, raised chickens and geese and sold eggs and poultry at the local marketplace.

Esther attended the village school and had Hebrew lessons with a local rabbi. As a young girl, Esther went to the local dressmaker as an apprentice, starting at age 9. At home she cared for the family chickens and helped her father with the livestock. She had an older brother and played with and cared for her three younger siblings.

When Esther was 12, her once peaceful childhood and calm village were overtaken by German soldiers who occupied her village for three years.

In 1942, when she was 15, the Germans ordered all the Jews to leave their homes and report to a nearby train station. Esther refused to go. Instead she chose to separate from her family, taking her younger sister Mania with her. It would be the last time she saw her family. After being turned away by friends and neighbors too frightened to take the two sisters in, Esther and Mania made their way to another village where they were not known. Pretending to be Polish Catholic farm girls who had been separated from their family, the sisters found work and stayed in the village until liberating Russian troops arrived in 1944.

After the war ended in 1945, Esther reunited with Mania and travelled to Germany, making their way to a Displaced Persons camp. While at the camp, both sisters met the men they would marry. In November 1946, Esther married Max Krinitz in a ceremony conducted in the camp. The following year, pregnant with their first child, Esther joined Max in Belgium, where he had gone to work in the coal mines. After Max contacted a cousin who lived in the United States, she agreed to arrange for sponsorship of his immigration. In June 1949, Esther, Max and their daughter arrived in New York.

Esther raised two daughters, frequently telling them stories of her childhood and war experiences. She went on to open her own clothing store, first in New York and later in Maryland. She continued sharing her stories with her grandchildren.

Esther began her series of fabric pictures in 1977, at the age of 50, with a depiction of her childhood home and her family. Although trained as a dressmaker and highly skilled in needlework, Esther had no training in art and no conception of herself as an artist. Yet, her first embroidered pictures were so well received by her family and friends and so personally satisfying that she would later create another 34 pieces, unveiling a sequential narrative series of increasing complexity. With the addition of text, Esther's art became an exquisite embroidered testimony to her true story of survival.

In June 1999, exactly 50 years after she left Europe, Esther returned to her village with her immediate family to see what remained. There, she encountered a landscape even more impoverished than the one she had last seen, with few signs of the vitality she recalled. Although the Jews were gone, Esther was able to meet again with some of the friends and neighbors from her childhood.

Immediately following her return from Poland, Esther became seriously ill; she died in 2001 at the age of 74.

FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT VS. SECONDHAND ACCOUNT MULTIPLE ACCOUNTS OF THE SAME EVENT

First Person Point of View

A firsthand account is a primary source

A description of an event that comes from someone who was there to see or experience it

- photographs
- interviews
- autobiographies/Diaries
- speeches
- letters
- artwork

May Include:

- personal opinions
- emotions and feelings
- very specific details

Third Person Point of View

A secondhand account is a secondary source

A description of an event based on research
Written or told by somebody who was not there to see nor experience the event

- biographies
- accounts from family, friends, etc.
- some newspaper and magazine articles
- textbooks/ Encyclopedias

May Include:

- key facts
- information from additional source

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