



## Sharing the Art and Story of Holocaust Survivor Esther Nisenthal Krinitz

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### UPSTANDERS, BYSTANDERS AND VICTIMS: ANALYZING ART AS A PRIMARY HISTORICAL ACCOUNT

**Resources:** [Memories of Survival](#) (book), [Fabric of Survival Gallery](#), [Fabric of Survival: An Interactive Gallery](#) (Sutori), [Fabric of Survival Graphic Organizer](#) (provided on Page 5 or [fillable PDF](#)), [Esther in Her Own Words and Images](#) (Sutori) for suggested images

**Subject Areas:** History, Social Studies, Art, English/Language Arts

**Grades:** 5-12

**Topics/Themes:** World War II (Europe), Holocaust, First Person Accounts, Jewish Life, Poland, Primary Sources, Art, Victims/Perpetrators/Heroes/Upstanders/Bystanders

#### OVERVIEW:

This lesson uses the artwork of Esther Nisenthal Krinitz and demonstrates how non-photographic records of war can be important primary sources and how survivor's stories can capture events that took place in history. In this exercise, students will view and analyze the artwork of Esther Nisenthal Krinitz as a primary account to better understand World War II (WWII) and to learn about the victims, perpetrators, heroes/upstanders and bystanders.

This activity can be a complementary lesson to those who are studying about bystanders in history, about combatting bully behavior, or to those related to primary sources and/or art work of Holocaust survivors. The students will visually analyze the artwork and will discuss the moral dimensions of the Holocaust as they learn about Esther, her family, her community, and her journey. The English/ Language Arts and Social Studies standards-aligned lesson combines viewing artwork, analyzing accompanying first person accounts and an accompanying narrative.

#### OBJECTIVE:

**Students will be able to:**

- define what it means to be a victim, a perpetrator, a bystander and a hero/upstander.
- explain the role of the bystander - in events both from the past and present.
- gather evidence through primary sources.

- analyze artwork and primary sources.
- recognize the danger of being a silent bystander when a wrong is being committed and recognize that they have the responsibility to speak out.

**LEARNING STANDARDS:**

- Research to build and present knowledge
- Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- Comprehend and collaborate
  - Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
  - Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
  - Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
- Present knowledge and ideas
  - Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Historical research, evidence and point of view
  - Analyze societies in terms of the following themes: military, political, economic, social, religious, and intellectual.
  - Differentiate between primary and secondary sources and know examples of each.
  - Pose relevant questions about events they encounter in historical documents, eyewitness accounts, oral histories, letters, diaries, artifacts, photographs, maps, artworks, and architecture.
  - Use non-text primary and secondary sources, such as maps, charts, graphs, photographs, works of art, and technical charts.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:**

1. What lessons does the Holocaust teach us about bystanding? About victims and perpetrators? About heroes?
2. To what extent have these lessons from the Holocaust been learned?
3. What aspects of human nature were highlighted by the events of the Holocaust?
4. Why is artwork by a Holocaust survivor an important historical documentation?

**ACTIVITY: ANALYZING ARTWORK AND PRIMARY ACCOUNTS ACTIVITY:**

**Activity Setting:** Classroom. This can be an individual or a collaborative activity. Break class into small teams to analyze one image; each team or individual will share what they discovered.

**Materials:** [Memories of Survival](#) (book), [Esther in Her Own Words and Images \(Sutori\)](#) and *Fabric of Survival* graphic organizer (see Page 5 and [fillable PDF](#))

**Duration:** 60-90 minutes

**1. START THE LESSON BY DEFINING: VICTIM, PERPETRATOR, BYSTANDER, UPSTANDER.****Definitions:**

- A **victim** is a person harmed, injured, or killed as a result of a crime, accident, or other event or action.
- A **perpetrator** is a person who carries out a harmful, illegal, or immoral act.

- A **bystander** is a person who, although present at some event, does not take part in it; an observer, witness or spectator.
- An **upstander** (hero) is a person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities.

## 2. HAVE STUDENTS USE PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OR RESEARCH TO ELABORATE ON EACH OF THE DEFINITIONS RELATING TO WORLD WAR II.

Sample responses adapted from [University of Wisconsin System School Library Consortium](#)

## 3. ASK STUDENTS IF THEY THINK THAT THESE “ROLES” CAN OVERLAP OR CHANGE OVER TIME.

### Sample expanded definitions:

- **Victims** – During the Holocaust, several groups of people were targeted as victims. They were targeted because of who they were or because of what they did. Groups who were targeted because of “who they were” were identified by their genetic, cultural origins, or health conditions. These groups included Jews, Gypsies, Poles, Slavs, and people with physical or mental disabilities. Groups who were targeted because of “what they did” included Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals, dissenting clergy, Communists, Socialists, and political enemies.
- **Perpetrators** – Perpetrators were the people who committed and executed the crimes against the various victim groups, mostly the Jews. This group of people carried out the policies of discrimination and murder set forth by the Nazi Party. Adolf Hitler is considered the chief perpetrator; however, people from all walks of life and educational levels were perpetrators. This group had several reasons for committing these crimes including a desire for power, financial gains, displaced anger, an ideology of racial cleansing, and “following orders.”
- **Bystanders** – People who did not openly persecute the Jews and other victim groups or did not actively help them are considered bystanders. Many bystanders complied with the laws against Jews and other victim groups; however, they tried to avoid terrorizing activities. Many were fearful of the consequences for helping and/or profited from the dispossession and murder of the Jews and others.
- **Upstanders** – Rescuers/Helpers - This group was the smallest group of people during the Holocaust, but the most courageous. Rescuers took great personal risk to help members of the persecuted groups, especially the Jews. These were ordinary people who became extraordinary. Rescue took many forms including leaving food by ghetto fences, hiding one person (or more) in their home for up to several years, and creating bureaucracy to help Jews to emigrate. Rescuers were politically driven, morally driven, or had established a relationship with a person or group. They did not view Jews and other victims as the enemy, but as human beings.

## PRE-ACTIVITIES:

- Have students write a short answer to the following question: What do you think this Elie Wiesel quote means: “Whoever reads or listens to a witness, becomes a witness.”?
- For students who have already learned about victim/perpetrator/bystander/upstander-hero/helpers, they can quickly review the definitions and go over Content and Context questions on the graphic organizer.
- Students can view a short 7-minute video by United States Holocaust Memorial Museum [Some Were Neighbors: Collaboration and Complicity in the Holocaust](#).

- For homework the evening before this lesson, students can read the article or listen to the podcast about Jedwabne, [Poland and the Massacre of Jews by Their Neighbors](#).

### LESSON WITH GRAPHIC ORGANIZER (PROVIDED ON PAGE 5 OR [FILLABLE PDF](#)):

- When each student or each team has the graphic organizer, go over the Content and Context questions and give students about 5 minutes to complete their responses to Question 1 about Esther as a survivor and artist.
- Select the artworks for the assignment from the suggested artwork: *Toothache*, *Dawn Raid I*, *Zebina*, *The Bees*, *Freedom* in [Esther in Her Own Words and Images](#) (Sutori) or any of the artworks in [Memories of Survival](#) (book), the [Fabric of Survival Gallery](#) or [Fabric of Survival: An Interactive Gallery](#) (Sutori).
- Give students the assigned art to analyze and give each group/individual 10 minutes to locate the portrayals of victim, perpetrator, bystander, hero/upstander just by looking at the visual component. After, they may read the captions (primary accounts) and add details to their answers
- Give students about 5 minutes to read the accompanying narrative and complete their answers.
- Give another 5 minutes to consider which historic events were taking place during this period. If students have done the Timeline activity from the *World War II in Poland* [lesson plan](#) or [Sutori](#), have them refer to that body of work.
- Allow time to share the Content and Context section, then have students dive deeper and answer the bottom of their organizers, using their prior knowledge and what they discovered during the sharing, to complete the Observe, Explain, Infer, Wonder and What I Learned sections.

### POST ACTIVITIES:

- **Option 1:** After hearing from each group, have students write or record a brief response to this question: Thinking about the role of neighbors, how were Esther's neighbors complicit or collaborative in what happened to the Jews of Esther's village?
- **Option 2:** If students watched the 7-minute video from the Holocaust Museum, ask them: What were some of the similarities in Esther's journey? Was she let down by those who were supposed to be friends, family, neighbors? Give a brief example.

FABRIC OF SURVIVAL GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ CLASS: \_\_\_\_\_ TEACHER: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Title of Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Year of Depiction: \_\_\_\_\_

Suggested Artwork: The Dentist (Toothache), Prelude to the Final Solution (Dawn Raid), We Find No Refuge (Zebina), The Bees Save Me, Russian Infantry March In (Freedom)

CONTENT AND COMMENT	<p>The artwork was created by Esther Nisenthal Krinitz based on the memories of her incredible journey of survival through the Holocaust in Poland. What do you know about her as a young girl? What do you know about her as an artist?</p>				
	<p>Read the narrative at the bottom of the artwork you are analyzing. What details does this primary source provide?</p>				
	<p>Read the additional commentary written by her daughter Bernice. What did you learn? Was this information portrayed in the artwork?</p>				
	<p>Describe the historical context. What was happening during this event or time period?</p>				
	<p>Look at the image and find the following: (Not every piece will have each portrayal.)</p>	Victim	Perpetrator	Bystander	Hero/Upstander
Describe:					
<b>OBSERVE</b>	<b>EXPLAIN</b>	<b>INFER</b>	<b>WONDER</b>	<b>WHAT I LEARNED</b>	
<p><b>MEANING:</b></p> <p>Once you have located the portrayal of victim, perpetrator, bystander, and hero, discuss what they are doing in the image.</p> <p>What do you observe? Consider the images, people, objects, activities, actions, words, phrases, facts, and numbers.</p>	<p><b>MESSAGE:</b></p> <p>What sentiment (attitude or feeling) do you think the artist is trying to convey through the source? What, based on the source, can you infer about the historical event or time period?</p> <p>What is the meaning of the objects, words, symbols, etc.?</p>	<p><b>QUESTIONS:</b></p> <p>Using your prior knowledge about WWII and the Holocaust, what can you infer about the image?</p> <p>Is it possible for somebody to fall under more than one category (victim, perpetrator, bystander, upstander)? Give an example.</p>	<p><b>IMAGINE:</b></p> <p>What about the source makes you curious? What questions still remain? What additional information would you need to know in order to deepen your understanding of the ideas expressed in the image?</p>	<p><b>REFLECT:</b></p> <p>After viewing my image and listening to my peers, these are two things I learned...</p>	

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## COMPLEMENTARY LESSONS, RESOURCES AND EXTENSIONS:

**Art and Remembrance** – While viewing the film [Through the Eye of the Needle](#), identify the people who were victims, heroes (upstanders), perpetrators and bystanders.

Use the [Through the Eye of the Needle Viewing Guide](#) pre and post questions for a deeper discussion.

**Post Viewing:** The closing title of the film contains the quote from Elie Wiesel, “Whoever reads or listens to a witness, becomes a witness.” Have students respond or if they already did in the preactivity, have them discuss how the quote inspires them to share Esther’s story and artwork.

**Where We Stand** – This is the first lesson of Teaching Tolerance’s series, “Dealing with Dilemmas: Upstanders, Bystanders and Whistle-Blowers,” which invites students to examine how they would respond to everyday dilemmas that test their character and value system. By working through three or four scenarios, students will figure out where they stand, literally and figuratively, when conflicts arise. What would they do? What choices would they make?

They will also have the opportunity to think about how and why the actions of their classmates influence their choices.

**Holocaust Bystanders and Upstanders** – From Facing History Facing Ourselves’ “Unit on Decision Making in Times of Injustice,” this lesson plan helps students understand the events that led to the Holocaust and the complexities of human nature.

**Some Were Neighbors** – This lesson plan, from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, can be done before, after, or simultaneously with the “Analyzing Artwork and Primary Accounts” activity. It involves analyzing photographs taken before, during and after the Holocaust, and looks at collaboration and complicity of bystanders during WWII.

Visit the [Art and Remembrance](#) website:

- See more [lesson plans](#).
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