

## LESSON

# THINKING LIKE A HISTORIAN— INTRODUCTION TO PRIMARY SOURCES

## OVERVIEW

Students will gain historical thinking skills by learning to investigate and analyse primary sources. This lesson prepares students to be familiar with and analyse artefacts and primary sources during the study of the Holocaust.

### DURATION: 45–60 MINUTES

The length of the activity can be adapted by selecting one artefact instead of two or by selecting only certain discussion questions.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will learn to engage with Holocaust-era primary sources and practice using skills of observation, analysis and inference. Guided by the Analysing Artefacts Worksheet (appendix 1), students will become familiar with the Six Historical Thinking Concepts.

### GRADES: 6–12

### NOTE

Before starting this lesson, students should be introduced to, or have basic knowledge of, the Holocaust, including a working definition of the term.

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Before beginning the Pre-Lesson, choose two artefacts from the following list. Information sheets for each artefact are attached as appendices to this teacher's guide.
  - Yellow Star Badge
  - Prayer Book Fragment
  - Stapf Bilderdienst Photograph
  - Postcard Sent to Drancy
2. Distribute documents and assign readings. Individually, or in a group, students read the following study documents, when prompted.
  - Each student should receive two printed copies or a PDF of the Analysing Artefacts Worksheet.
  - Print or send the student reading What are Primary Sources? (appendix 2) to each student.
  - Print or send the information sheets for the artefacts (appendices 3 to 6).
3. Complete Class activity (allow 30 minutes)

## CLASS ACTIVITY

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1. Students read student reading *What are Primary Sources?* either as homework or at the start of the class (5 minutes).

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2. Teacher selects two artefacts.

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3. Teacher passes out one *Analysing Artefacts Worksheet* to each student.

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4. The teacher displays the image of one of the artefacts on the projector or sends the image to the students' devices.

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5. Individually, students examine the artefact image and complete the *Analysing Artefacts Worksheet* (*note: do not pass out the artefact information sheet until after the initial observation is completed*).
  - **Initial Observation (3 minutes)**  
Students study the object without any contextual information, writing down their observations and impressions as guided by the worksheet.
  - **Establish Context (8 minutes)**  
Teacher passes out the information sheet for the artefact. Students read the information sheet and observe the artefact again in light of the contextual information.
  - **Draw Inferences (5 minutes)**  
Students draw inferences as guided by the worksheet.

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6. Students share their observations and conclusions with their neighbour.

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7. Using the second artefact, repeat steps 3 to 5, this time having students work together in small groups rather than individually.

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8. After 15–20 minutes, allow each group to share one interesting fact about the artefact and one question they would like to have answered.

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## APPENDIX 1: STUDENT WORKSHEET

# ANALYSING ARTEFACTS

ARTEFACT	DATE OF CREATION
<b>OBSERVE THE ARTEFACT</b>	
What are your initial impressions of the artefact? What did you notice first?	
Describe the physical appearance of the artefact (colour, size, condition, fragility, etc.).	
What material is the artefact made from?	

Does the artefact appear to be intact or is it missing parts?

**ESTABLISH THE CONTEXT**

Who created the artefact?

Who owned or used the artefact?

When was the artefact created or used?

How was it created or used?

Where was the artefact created or used?

What was the intended purpose or function of the artefact?

What point of view or perspective did the owner, user or maker (e.g., victim, perpetrator, bystander, rescuer, etc.) of the artefact represent?

### **DRAW INFERENCES**

What inferences (conclusions) can you draw from the artefact about life before, during or after the Holocaust?

Many of the artefacts' owners, makers and users risked their lives to create or retain these objects. What do you think was the significance of this artefact to its owner, maker or user?

Why do you think that the owner donated the artefact to the VHEC?

What does this artefact teach you that you might not learn elsewhere?

What questions do you have about this artefact that you cannot answer?

## APPENDIX 2: STUDENT READING

# WHAT ARE PRIMARY SOURCES?

A primary source is an original artefact, record or firsthand account from a historical period that was created by people at that time in history. Primary sources provide direct evidence of the events, practices or conditions during the historical period in question.

In contrast, secondary sources (such as textbooks, documentaries, scholarly books and articles) are created after a historical event and offer a description or interpretation of the event based on an analysis of primary sources.

## WHY WE USE PRIMARY SOURCES

Primary sources provide us with direct evidence of events, behaviours or conditions in the past. By critically analysing primary sources and asking questions, historians act like detectives to re-construct and learn about the past.

Primary sources can take many different forms, including:

- oral histories or testimonies
- photographs
- business documents and contracts
- currency and medals
- diaries, scrapbooks and journals
- propaganda materials
- correspondence
- government documents
- works of art
- physical objects

Primary sources also reflect a variety of perspectives depending on their purpose, who created them, who used them and under what circumstances. When interpreting primary sources, it is important to identify their perspective and to seek out a variety of primary sources to reflect diverse viewpoints. This gives us a more complete understanding of the past.



### DID YOU KNOW?

- The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre holds Western Canada's largest collection of Holocaust-related artefacts, testimonies and archival records.
- The collection is made up of personal items donated by Holocaust survivors and their families, along with gifts from private collectors, military veterans, community members and academics. Each item provides an entry point into a distinct perspective of the Holocaust.
- The VHEC acquires, preserves and makes available these primary and secondary sources as documentary evidence of the Holocaust and its impact on individuals, families and society.
- The VHEC also has a comprehensive library of secondary sources, including books by historians, films, educational resources and a special collection of rare books.

## APPENDIX 3: INFORMATION SHEET

# YELLOW STAR BADGE

### WORN BY TONI NEUMANN

The Star of David is a common and important symbol of the Jewish religion. During the Nazi era, Jews over the age of six were forced to wear a yellow Star of David badge on their outer clothing whenever they were in public. The word "Jew" was imprinted on the badge in the local language. The badge allowed people to easily recognise Jews, making them a target for public humiliation, abuse and persecution.

This yellow star badge belonged to Toni Neumann, a Jewish woman from Germany. The word *Jude* in the centre of the badge is German for "Jew." Toni was forced to wear this badge while she was a prisoner at a concentration camp-ghetto called Theresienstadt. In 1945, a high-ranking Nazi leader agreed to release 1,200 Jewish prisoners from Theresienstadt in exchange for money. Toni and her husband were among the prisoners selected for this rescue and were transported to freedom in Switzerland. Toni's daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren all perished in a concentration camp. After the war, Toni and her husband moved to New York to join their son.

[1993.007.001](#)



## APPENDIX 4: INFORMATION SHEET

# PRAYER BOOK FRAGMENT

### FOUND BY EVELINE ROSENGARTEN ON THE MORNING AFTER KRISTALLNACHT

On November 9–10, 1938, violent anti-Jewish riots were carried out throughout Germany and Austria under the direction of the Nazis. The event came to be known as Kristallnacht (Night of the Broken Glass). Hundreds of Jews were killed, beaten or arrested and their property destroyed. Thousands of synagogues (Jewish places of worship) were burned to the ground.

Eveline Rosengarten, who was ten years old at the time, witnessed the destruction of the Fasanenstrasse Synagogue in Berlin during Kristallnacht. On the morning of November 10, she found this burnt fragment of a Hebrew prayer book in front of the synagogue. The synagogue had been burned to the ground while firefighters stood by, instructed by Nazi officials not to put out the fire unless it spread to non-Jewish buildings.

As Jews, Eveline and her family experienced escalating antisemitism and persecution under the Nazi regime. Because of this, the Rosengartens tried for many years to leave Germany. However, most governments in the world had restrictions against allowing Jewish immigrants into their countries and the family was turned down by several nations. Shortly before the start of Second World War in 1939, Eveline's family was able to emigrate to Shanghai, just weeks before it closed its port to immigrants.

Eveline's son donated this and other family artefacts to the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre.

[2009.004.001](#)



## APPENDIX 5: INFORMATION SHEET

# STAPF BILDERDIENST PHOTOGRAPH

## JEWISH MEN CROSSING WEESPERSTRAAT BRIDGE

This photograph, taken in 1941, shows four orthodox Jewish men walking on the Weesperstraat bridge, which crosses the Nieuwe Achtergracht canal in Amsterdam, Netherlands. In the 1930s, the buildings and warehouses along this canal housed many Jewish families and businesses.

This photo was taken in 1941 by Stapf Bilderdienst, a Nazi-endorsed photographic agency founded by the German photographer Franz Anton Stapf. During the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, Stapf Bilderdienst was given explicit permission by the Nazis to carry cameras and photograph scenes for propaganda purposes.

As a press photo agent for the Nazis between 1940 and 1944, Stapf Bilderdienst photographed daily life in the Jewish quarter of the city, often photographing Jews who fit a physical stereotype. Some photographs also show evidence of anti-Jewish persecution (e.g., storefronts, signage, arrests). Many of the agency's photos appeared in newspapers alongside stories with antisemitic content. Stapf Bilderdienst captured some of the last images of Amsterdam's Jewish community before it was decimated.

This photograph was one of hundreds that were seized from Stapf Bilderdienst's Amsterdam office by Jimmy Sharpe, a member of the Canadian military's investigation unit, in 1945 and brought to Canada as war souvenirs.

[93.07.0177](#)



## APPENDIX 6: INFORMATION SHEET

# POSTCARD SENT TO DRANCY CAMP

## WRITTEN BY SERGE VANRY (WAJNRYB) TO HIS MOTHER

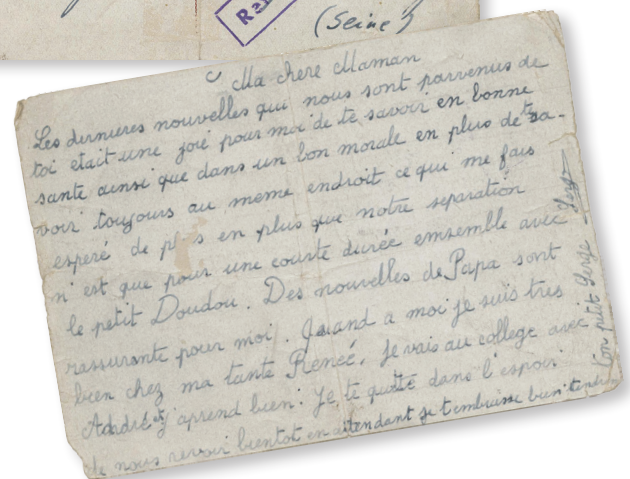
This is a postcard written in 1943 by Serge Vanry, who was 12 years old, to his mother at a Nazi internment camp near Paris. Serge was in hiding in the south of France when he wrote this postcard. However, it never reached his mother. She had been deported from Drancy camp to Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in July 1943. The postcard was returned to Serge marked "Return to Sender" and "Rejected by the Censor."

Before the war, Serge lived with his parents and younger brother Edouard in Paris. The family was Jewish. During the war, northern France was occupied by the Nazis. In July 1942, the Jews of Paris were rounded up and imprisoned in internment camps (including 4,000 Jewish children). From there, they were sent by train to Auschwitz and other death camps in Eastern Europe.

During the round-up of Jews in Paris, Serge's mother removed the yellow star badge from Serge's clothing and told him to run away to avoid arrest. Even though Serge did not want to leave his mother and three-year-old brother, he made his way across Paris to a train station. He took a train to a friend's farm in the countryside and hid there. While Serge escaped the Nazis, his mother and little brother were arrested and imprisoned. They were later deported separately to Auschwitz.

Serge spent the rest of the war in various hiding locations in the south of France (Vichy). His mother survived Auschwitz and was reunited with Serge after three years; his little brother was murdered upon arrival at the death camp.

[2002.014.001](#)



*My dear Mama,*

*The last news that I received from you that you are in good spirits and in good health was a joy to me, as well as knowing that you are still in the same place. This leads me to believe and hope, more and more that our separation will be short lived and that we will be together with little brother Doudou very soon. News from Dad is reassuring to me. As to myself, I am fine with Aunt Renee. I am going to school with cousin Andre and I am a good student. I leave you in the hope that we will see each other soon. In the meantime, I kiss you tenderly.*

*Your little Serge*