

## **Video Transcript**

### **Art as Primary Sources: A 16th-Century Engraving**

Hello! Thank you for joining us. Today we are going to talk about primary sources and look at an example from the Ackland's collection. Follow along with the text and images and pause the video whenever you need to take a closer look at the image, make an observation or a sketch, or write down some thoughts. A text transcript of this video is available on the Ackland's module page along with resources for further exploration.

Before we begin our discussion, pause the video here to talk about or write down any thoughts you have about what makes something a primary source.

Primary sources are firsthand accounts or direct evidence of an event or period under study. These types of sources include, but are not limited to, letters, interviews, photographs, and cultural artifacts such as coins, everyday objects, and works of art.

By studying these original materials, students and researchers have the opportunity to learn about what was important to the people who lived at that time, discover what life was like through the lens of these objects, and consider ways these sources connect to our lives in the twenty-first century.

There are also secondary sources, which analyze or interpret a primary source. Secondary sources include reviews, textbooks, and articles.

Today we will focus on one work of art as a primary source. Given what you just learned about primary and secondary sources, take a minute to discuss or write down what makes a work of art a primary source.

Art allows us to learn about the social, economic, political, and environmental facets of the people who created it during the time they created it. Because artists work in all different artistic media – like painting, sculpture, photography, drawing, textiles, and ceramics – art can give us a wide variety of information.

Today we are going to look at one work of art from the Ackland's collection. You'll notice that this artwork is made up of an image and text. Both are integral to the experience and understanding of the full artwork.

We're going to begin with observation. Before we learn about this artwork together, spend five minutes or longer just looking at the image on the right side of this artwork. We'll consider the text a bit later. Feel free to make sketches of what you see or write down your observations. Pause the video now to see the full image or let the video play for a zoomed in view. Press play again when you're ready to explore the artwork together.

Now that you've done a thorough observation of the image, let's move into description. Pause the video as it zooms and pans through the image to get a closer look at different sections and details. When you pause, write down your description of the artwork or discuss as a group.

What do you see? How is the artwork organized? Notice that each section is labeled with a capital letter. What do you notice happening in each of these sections? Feel free to write or discuss your answers.

We're now going to move into analysis of this work of art by focusing first on the image, and then on the text from the left side of the artwork. We're going to consider how the different visual or formal elements the artist used to create this artwork, in conjunction with the text, contribute to the overall experience and understanding of the piece.

- Now that you've observed and described the image, let's take stock of it together with an analysis of how it's organized.
  - Let's think about which aspects of the town the artist emphasized. Which visual elements did the artist give the most space to?
  - Which areas did the artist render in the most detail?
  - Which formal elements — such as line, shape, and texture — did he use to emphasize these areas, and what is the effect?
- How does the artist draw your eye around the print? Think about proportion, repetition, value, and scale.
- What do you notice about the people depicted in each section?
  - What kinds of poses do they take and what do they appear to be doing?
  - How has the artist established relationships between the figures?
- Which objects or features of the print are recognizable to you? Which ones are unfamiliar?

Now let's bring in an analysis of the text on the left side of the artwork. The text is written in Latin, but an English version is included in the related resources on the Ackland webpage where you opened this video. Pause the video now to locate and read the text.

We're now going to pull out specific sections of the text to see how they correspond to certain places on the image, like a map. In the text, the letters refer to specific sections of the image. The numbers refer to other images in the publication. Keep in mind that the text, including the English version, was written around 1600, so there will be some aspects that will be clearer than others to modern readers. Follow along with the video to see each labeled section as I read the text aloud.

- The text begins, quote, “Their towns that are not enclosed with poles are commonly fairer. Then such as are enclosed, as appears in this figure which lively expresses the town of Secotam.” End quote.
- I will now read the rest of the text while we zoom in on the corresponding parts of the print. Quote, “For the houses are Scattered here and there, and they have gardens expressed by the letter E wherein grows Tobacco which the inhabitants call Uppowoc. They have also groves wherein they take deer, and fields wherein they sow their corn.
- In their corn fields they build as it were a scaffold whereon they set a cottage like to a round chair, signified by F, wherein they place one to watch, for there are such number of fowl and beasts that unless they keep the better watch, they would soon devour all their corn. For which cause the watchman makes continual cries and noise.
- They sow their corn with a certain distance noted by H; otherwise one stalk would choke the growth of another and the corn would not come unto his ripeness
- G. For the leaves thereof are large, like unto the leaves of great reeds.
- They have also several broad plots C, where they meet with their neighbors to celebrate their chief solemn feasts as the 18th picture does declare:
- and a place D where after they have ended their feast they make merry together.
- Over against this place they have a round plot B where they assemble themselves to make their solemn prayers.
- Not far from which place there is a large building A wherein are the tombs of their kings and princes, as will appear by the 22nd figure;
- likewise they have garden noted by the letter I wherein they use to sow pompions [pumpkins].
- Also a place marked with K wherein they make a fire at their solemn feasts,
- and hard without the town a river L from whence they fetch their water.
- This people, therefore void of all covetousness, lie cheerfully and at their heart’s ease. But they solemnize their feasts in the night, and therefore they keep very great fires to avoid darkness, and to testify their joy.”

Thinking now about the text and the image together, what ideas or interpretations does this text confirm, complicate, or counter? What new observations and questions arise after reading the text? Let’s think about how you might investigate these questions further.

Now that we've analyzed the text alongside the different visual elements of this artwork, let's put our observations, descriptions, and analysis together into interpretation, or what we think is the meaning of the artwork.

The artist, Theodor de Bry, was Franco-Flemish and lived from 1528 to 1598, nearly 500 years ago. The title of this artwork is *The Town of Secota*, plate 20, from Thomas Harriot's *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, Latin edition. "Plate 20" tells us that this print was one of others in a series — in this case, in a book — Thomas Harriot's *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*.

It's important to note that the place described was part of what the English called Virginia at that time, but today it's the coastal areas of the land we now call North Carolina.

This print was made by Europeans depicting the Algonquin village of Secota — that is, one culture representing people and a culture they are not familiar with. This means they might have missed or misrepresented elements that the American Indians would have considered important. So, it tells us what the Europeans thought it was important to share with other Europeans. The print, and the book it was published in, was a European perspective on American Indian people and society, and ultimately served the purpose of promoting European colonization and the exploitation of Indigenous natural resources.

Looking back to what you've written in your analysis, let's think about who this artwork might have been made for. What did you notice in your analysis that tells you who the intended audience might have been? What do you see now that might give you a clue as to who this was made for?

The text that accompanies this image was written in multiple languages. This version is in Latin, but it was also written in English, French, and German. What does the choice of languages tell us about the audience?

Next, let's think about the time period in which this work was made. In 1600 (or the 1590s), what kinds of things did Europeans know about the lands we now call North and South America? How did they know those things? What kinds of interactions had taken place between Europeans and civilizations in North and South America? What happened in the decades that followed 1600?

Pause the video to look, think, and discuss.

We'll now discuss how you might explore some of these ideas and questions further.

When you learned the title, date, and artist of this work, how did that information affect your observations about the image and text? What questions do you still have? How could you learn more?

Possible questions for further research might include:

- Think about the title of the publication that these prints appeared in: *The New Found Land*. What land was that specifically and to whom was it newly found?
- Think about the creators of this artwork and book. Whose voices are missing in the representation of Secota? Where can we find information to learn from these voices?
- What might this text reveal about European perspectives of Indigenous North Americans?
- In what ways does this work contribute to the othering of the Algonquin people?

What other questions do you have?

Based on these questions, some possible avenues for further research, including the use of secondary sources, could be:

- Researching about the Algonquin village of Secota.
- Reading about the natural resources – including the land, flora, and fauna – of this area.
- Learning about European and Native American contact in the 1500s and 1600s.
- We've only looked at one of the prints from this series. You can find more images on the Ackland's webpage where you found this video.

Thank you for joining us at the Ackland to look at this artwork. We hope you'll use the tools you learned today – observation, description, analysis, and interpretation – when exploring other artworks as primary sources. Be sure to check out the other resources on this page to learn more about the artwork, the artist, and the context in which it was published to guide your continued exploration.

When engaging with art, remember to look close and think far.