Teaching Firsthand and Secondhand Accounts
What are firsthand accounts?

A firsthand account is based on an author’s personal experience. In a firsthand account, the person who is writing about the event was actually there to see it take place. The author will tell about the event using the first person point of view with pronouns such as I, me, and we.

In firsthand accounts, the author may include
- his/her feelings or thoughts about what is taking place
- opinions
- specific details

Examples of Firsthand Accounts
- diaries or journals
- interviews
- speeches
- autobiographies
- letters and e-mails
What are secondhand accounts?

A secondhand account is based on an author’s research instead of personal experience. The author is not there to witness the event. Instead, the author completes research by interviewing and reading firsthand accounts before writing.

The author will describe the event using the third person point of view with pronouns such as he, she, and they.

In a secondhand account, the writing focuses on:

- key facts
- general information
- information from several sources

**Examples of Secondhand Accounts**

- encyclopedia entries
- biographies
- textbooks
Identifying Firsthand and Secondhand Accounts

1. Is the passage from a nonfictional resource or fictional account?
2. Is the event told by an eyewitness? Was the person who is telling you about the event present to see it take place?
3. Where did the passage come from?
   - **Firsthand**
     - autobiography
     - letter
     - diary
     - photographs
     - interview with eyewitness
   - **Secondhand**
     - biography
     - newspaper
     - encyclopedia
     - magazine
     - fictional movies
4. Does the text contain opinions?
5. From which point of view is the text written?
6. Does the text list reference sources?
Firsthand and Secondhand Accounts Practice

Use the stories on the **Good News Network**. The stories are inspirational. Some articles include direct quotes. Others contain videos and pictures. Select a few to share with students. Discuss if the articles contain firsthand or secondhand information.

**Better Lesson** [Fourteen teacher-created lessons are provided.]

**Big Learners** [4 Printable Worksheets are found here.]

**Sadlier School** [A four-day lesson plan using Ruby Bridges is provided. You must provide an e-mail address to download the materials.]

**English Worksheets Land** [A printable is included with two articles about the same event plus a Venn-Diagram to compare and contrast the two accounts.]

If you need some additional materials to help teach firsthand and secondhand accounts, you might like to take a look at **Tall Tales** on Teachers pay Teachers: