



**A teacher's guide**  
created by Marcie Colleen  
based upon the picture book  
written by Nancy Churnin and  
illustrated by Monika Róża Wisniewska

This classroom guide is designed for students in first through third grade. It is assumed that teachers will adapt each activity to fit the needs and abilities of their own students.

It offers activities to help teachers integrate *Valentines for All: Esther Howland Captures America's Hearts* into the curricula.

All activities were created in conjunction with the Common Core and other relevant content standards.

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To learn more about Nancy Churnin, visit her at [www.nancychurnin.com](http://www.nancychurnin.com). To learn more about Monika Róża Wisniewska visit her at [www.monikaroz.com](http://www.monikaroz.com).

## Before You Read...

Before reading *Valentines for All...*

Look closely at the Front Cover ~

- Read the title aloud.
- Describe what you see.
- Who do you think the woman is?
- Strike a pose like the woman in the illustration. How does this pose make you feel?
- When do you think this story takes place? Today or a long time ago? What clues on the cover tell you this?
- Can you guess what the story might be about?

The Back Cover~

- Describe what you see.
- Read the text on the back cover.
- Does this text make you want to read the book? Why or why not?

## English Language Arts

### Reading Comprehension

Now read or listen to the book.

Help students summarize in their own words what the book is about.

- What do you think “Esther Howland had a lot to say” means in your own words?
- Why do you think Valentine’s Day was Esther’s favorite holiday?
- Esther’s father surprised her with a gift from England. What was it?
- How did Esther’s brothers respond when she suggested selling handmade valentines?
- How did Esther’s father support her valentine idea?
- Esther’s brother took twelve of her handmade valentines on a sales trip. What was the result?
- Who did Esther get to help her create enough valentines to fill her orders?
- List at least FOUR ways Esther’s valentines played a part during the American Civil War.
- Why did Esther decide to start creating cards for other holidays, including birthdays?
- How did the printing press impact Esther’s business?
- Although she retired to care for her father and herself, Esther felt proud of what she had accomplished. Explain in your own words why you think she felt proud.

Let’s talk about the people who made *Valentines for All*.

- Who is the author?
- Who is the illustrator?
- What kind of work did each person do to make the book?

Now, let’s look closely at the illustrations.

- Look closely at how people are dressed in *Valentines for All*.
- Print out photos from the Internet of clothing styles of America in the mid 1800s.
- Draw your own character wearing clothing from this time period.
- Display the finished drawings in the classroom.

### Reading Nonfiction

While reading *Valentines for All* aloud to the class, have students take notes in two columns:

- Things We Learned
- Questions We Have

Pause before each page turn to add notes to the columns. These columns can either be individual or hung on the board and worked on as a class.

Things We Learned (Facts)	Questions We Have	Answers We Found

- Once the story is read, discuss the *Questions We Have* column.
  - Were any of these questions answered as the story went along?
  - If so, ask students to find the answer within the text.

- Record the answer next to the question in a third column labelled *Answers We Found*.
- For all remaining questions in the *Questions We Have* column, that have yet to be answered, students will need to take the steps to find answers, either through Internet or book research.
  - Discuss how to find answers to questions through research.
  - Assign students to specific questions to help them focus.
  - Record all answers in the *Answers We Found* column.
- After the answers have been shared with the class, engage in a discussion on research practices.
  - What was the most difficult about finding answers?
  - Was it easier to find answers on the Internet or in a book?
  - Which source is more reliable, the Internet or a printed book? Why?
  - How can you determine whether to trust a source?
  - What tips would you give someone who is about to do research?
- Read the Author's Note at the back of the book.
  - Create an additional chart to document what information in this section was included in the story and what information was not included.
  - Why do you think Churnin chose to include certain information and leave other information to the back matter?
  - Choose three facts from the back matter that was not included in the story and explain why you think each was excluded.

*Extension:* Design and illustrate posters representing each Fact, Question, and researched Answer based on *Valentines for All* and display them within the classroom.

## History

### The 1850s

Not only was the 1850s the decade Esther Howland launched her valentine business by placing an ad in the *Worcester Daily Spy*, it also marked many other notable achievements.

The 1850s was a decade of innovation:

- Gasoline refining was first used.
- Singer created the first practical sewing machine.
- Elisha Otis invents the elevator safety brake making skyscrapers possible.

The 1850s was a decade of political change:

- America became even more divided over slavery, moving closer to Civil War.
- The Republican Party is founded.
- Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.
- America saw its peak on mass migration to the American West, leading to California becoming a state.

The 1850s was a decade of firsts:

- Edwin Drake strikes oil in Pennsylvania.
- First Trans-Atlantic cable completed allowing quicker corespondence between America and Europe.

Many more facts about the 1850s in America can be found online. Try the following links:

[www.onthisday.com](http://www.onthisday.com)  
[www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)  
[www.history.com](http://www.history.com)

Assign groups of 2-4 students a notable event, person or innovation of the 1850s, to research and then present to the rest of the class in an original celebration of the 1850s.

### **Esther's legacy**

A eulogy is a speech that is often given at a funeral to highlight the key events of a person's life and their legacy or what they leave behind.

Write a eulogy for Esther Howland, based on the back matter information provided in *Valentines for All* and your own research.

Then, in groups of 3-4, re-create a "still or frozen image" of a statue you would erect in her honor. Share these statues with the rest of the class as eulogies are read.

## **Social Studies**

### **My Favorite Family Holiday Traditions**

Not every family celebrates the same holidays. And even if they do, they don't always celebrate in the same ways.

Ask students to tell about their favorite holidays/holiday celebrations.

Have students recite the months of the year and create a holiday calendar bulletin board.

Have students describe a holiday celebration in a paragraph and draw a picture to go along with it, if they choose.

### **Make Your Own Vintage-style Valentines**

Be like Esther and create some valentines! Valentines in the style of Esther's were painted pictures on paper and adorned with lace, trims, and ribbons. Create your own with cardstock, black tea, and simple embellishments.

#### You will need:

8.5x11 white cardstock  
One black tea bag  
A small sponge brush  
Glue stick  
Scissors  
Lace, ribbon, yarn, cut-outs  
A brown paper grocery bag

- 1) Use tea-staining to make the white cardstock seem old. Steep one tea bag in boiling water and let it sit for 5 minutes. Using a foam brush, paint the tea onto the white cardstock using uneven strokes. The variance in color will create an authentic look. Allow the paper to dry for several hours. If needed, place a large book on top of the paper to prevent curling.
- 2) Paint a valentine picture on the aged cardstock and write a sweet message (see the Write Your Own Valentines section at the back of the book). Vintage images can also be found at <https://vintageholidaycrafts.com/free-vintage-kids-valentine-cards/> and printed out.

3) Cut your images and messages out in different shapes and paste them on natural brown paper. Paper grocery bags work too.

4) Then embellish with scraps of lace, ribbon, buttons, yarn, etc.

Be sure to mark the back of your valentine with a symbol or letter like Esther Howland did so that others cannot claim your design.

### **Valentines For All**

Every year the Worcester Historical Museum celebrates Esther Howland and her valentine cards by encouraging kids in grades three through six to participate in their annual valentine card creating contest. While this contest is only for students in Worcester, Massachusetts, your class can create your own valentine making contest and come up with awards for each participant -- most frilly, most simple, most creative, most heart-y.

Make, decorate, or sign valentines for someone you don't know -- just as Esther Howland did, showing that valentines and love are for all. You can give a valentine to someone you don't know -- preferably someone who might not otherwise be receiving valentines -- or your classroom might make surprise valentines for another classroom or another school, community group, senior home, or any group of any age that you think might welcome a message that they are cared about.

Please share images of the valentines you are sending and giving or of your valentines being received to [nancychurnin.com](http://nancychurnin.com) and they will be posted on the Valentines For All page of the website so others will be inspired to be kind, too.

You can also send a valentine from your class or school to the Worcester Historical Museum to thank them for honoring Esther Howland's heartfelt legacy. You will find details about the Worcester Historical Museum and their contest at <https://www.worcesterhistory.org/?s=esther+howland>.

## **Language**

### **A Lot to Say**

*Valentines for All* contains lots of little rhyming poems throughout that express how Esther is feeling as her story progresses. For example, when she is struggling to fill the thousands of orders:

Roses are red,  
Dahlias are lime.  
How can I make so many in time?

Have students write their own "Roses are red" poem about their day: what they are feeling and what they are doing.

### **Greeting Card history**

Ask students to bring in greeting cards. Gather an assortment of different occasions. Make sure cards are appropriate in terms of content and reading level. Read and discuss the cards, separating them into categories such as humorous, birthday, anniversary, get-well, etc.

For an additional activity, have students visit the Postcard and Greeting Card Museum online at <http://www.emotionscards.com/museum/history.html> to learn more about the history of the greeting card.