From Many, One
Maria Isabel Solis Thomas, Shipyard Worker

Student Worksheet

Historical Context:
World War II scrambled American society. Jobs in shipyards brought men, women, and families to parts of the country they had never visited before. In their new homes, they often lived and worked among people of many different backgrounds. At the peak of wartime production in 1943, women made up more than 10 percent of the work force in most of the shipyards. Listen to the story of Maria Isabel Solis Thomas, to gain an understanding of the immense changes World War II caused within American society.

Instructions:
Answer the questions on these two pages using the accompanying primary sources found at: http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/oral_histories/maritime Voices/thomas.htm.

These questions are based on the accompanying primary sources. They are designed to help you practice working with historical documents. Some of these documents have been edited, but all are authentic. As you analyze the documents, take into account the source of each document and any point of view that may be presented in the document.

Questions:
1. After carefully listening to Mrs. Thomas’ recorded statements, describe where her co-workers were from. What possible inferences could you make regarding her feelings about living and working among people of many different backgrounds? Pay close attention to her tone of voice, the frequency with which she describes where her co-workers were from, and the context of these statements.
2. Citing evidence from the recorded statements of Mrs. Thomas and at least one supporting primary source, what was she proud of and what is her reason for taking on such dangerous work?

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3. According to the recorded statements of Mrs. Thomas and both supporting primary sources, which job do you think had the most female shipyard workers?

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