

DOCUMENTING HISTORY: PHOTOGRAPHS AS SOCIAL COMMENTARY

Ohio Standards

Connections:

STANDARD: VISUAL
ARTS: CREATIVE
EXPRESSION AND
COMMUNICATION

BENCHMARK B: Create expressive artworks that demonstrate a sense of purpose and understanding of the relationships among form, materials and techniques and subject matter.

INDICATOR 11.3: Create artworks that demonstrate a range of individual ideas, subject matter and themes with at least one idea explored in depth.

STANDARD: VISUAL
ARTS: ANALYZING AND
RESPONDING

BENCHMARK C: Critique their own works, the works of peers and other artists on the basis of the formal, technical and expressive aspects in the works.

INDICATOR 9.5 :
Analyze and describe the visual aspects of their own artworks and the work of others

STANDARD: VISUAL
ARTS: VALUING THE
ARTS/AESTHETIC
REFLECTION

BENCHMARK B: Identify and analyze a variety of viewpoints on aesthetic issues and themes in visual art and develop a personal point of view.

INDICATOR 11.4 :
Compare and contrast

Lesson Summary:

Students examine photographs that make social statements, resulting from events that occurred during the artists' lives. Suggested activities encourage students to identify the social statements related to historical context, content or subject matter, purpose, visual impact, symbolism and their personal reaction to each.

Estimated Duration:

The lesson will take three to ten 50 minute sessions depending upon the interdisciplinary activity or activities chosen.

Commentary:

Throughout the 1930s and 40s the United States government hired a number of artists including photographers to document events of both everyday life and WWII. Might we see these same issues of life and war today? We will view artwork, discuss and make connections. The teacher may wish to review information found in the related lessons entitled Urban Poverty and Racial Bias found on this website.

www.artandsocialissues.com

Pre-Assessment:

DISCUSS AND/OR ASK STUDENTS TO REFLECT IN THEIR NOTEBOOK:

We live in a society that proclaims 'liberty and justice for all.' Is this reality? Are there inequalities in social or economic conditions? What are some of the economic or social issues that America faces today? How might we correct these problems?

Scoring Guidelines:

Did each student participate in the discussion or write in their journal?

Post-Assessment:

Review the performance activity with the rubric.

Scoring Guidelines:

Attached rubric, page 12

Instructional Procedures:

View the following images:

Morris Huberland, *Bread Line*
George Gilbert, *American Faces*
Jack Delano, *Miner at a Dougherty's Mine*
David Robbins, *Antiwar Demonstration*
Rosalie Gwathmey, *Shout Freedom*

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responses to works of visual art on the basis of how well the works communicate intent and purpose.

STANDARD: VISUAL ARTS: CONNECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS AND APPLICATIONS

BENCHMARK A:
Demonstrate the role of visual art in solving an interdisciplinary problem
INDICATOR 7.1 :
Create artwork that expresses a personal comment about a social, environmental or political issue.

STANDARD: HISTORY: CONNECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS AND APPLICATIONS

BENCHMARK A:
Demonstrate the role of visual art in solving an interdisciplinary problem
INDICATOR 7.1 :
Create artwork that expresses a personal comment about a social, environmental or political issue.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What do you see in this photo?
2. What is the mood or tone of the photo?
3. Do you have an emotional response to the photo?
4. Photographs from the New York Photo League often reflected the social and economic conditions produced by war. Select a photograph and identify how it portrays a social or economic condition. What symbolism can you identify?
5. What do you think the photographer was trying to say?
6. What makes a photograph a documentary photograph?

Performance Activity:

Review background materials on pages 7-11

War and the social and economic conditions as a result of war profoundly affected the photographers who were members of the Photo League. In response, members directed their attention towards documenting the way of life of the working class and explored the concepts of social and documentary photography. Students should create a photo collage that represents a documentary about a present social or cultural issue.

1. Students may collect images from newspapers, magazines, the internet or from their own photographic work. Discuss the use of overlap, value (light and dark tones) and color (emotional impact of colors) before students begin work. Will the work have greater impact if it is a black and white image or color? Students may wish to try each.

If students are creating their own images the class will need access to cameras and a darkroom or computer (digital photos).

2. Mat collage, display and give it a title.

3. Critique the work as a class. What is the message the photographer is trying to communicate? Does it work without the title? Is the title appropriate? Are the images appropriate? Is the composition well conceived? Is there good use of overlap, value and shape? See attached rubric.

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Differentiated Instructional Support

1. Students may choose to use a single image to communicate their idea.
2. Students may write or dictate a poem or song that communicates an idea that portrays the same concepts as the Photo League images. How can the tone of the music express a social issue? Are the words to the poem or song expressive of the social or economic issue?

Extension

1. Students may wish to create a portfolio of work about one or more of the issues about which they are currently concerned.
2. Students may wish to read literature related to the issues portrayed in their photo collage. Compare and contrast similarities between the problems and/or solutions in the image(s) and the novel.
3. Students may wish to investigate the work of the Photo League online or in the library and prepare a written report.

Homework Options and Home Connections

1. Students may need to bring in images from magazines or newspapers from home.
2. Students should compose a journal entry about the events of a specific war and results of that war. They should incorporate visual illustrations in their responses.

Interdisciplinary Connections

Language Arts: One of the major activities of the Photo League was the publication of a monthly bulletin called *Photo Notes*, which was an important source of news and ideas about photography. Have students review an editorial published in *Photo Notes* and identify any social, economic or social issues presented in the publication and create a written response to the editorial.

<http://www.nypl.org/research/chss/spe/art/photo/league/text.html>

Mathematics: Using the World Almanac, have students graph the loss of human life by the Soviet Union, England, Germany, France, Japan and the United States in WWII. Graph the total male population in each of these countries before and after the war.

History: Students can develop a visual documentary of the Depression, WWI or WWII using photocopies of 10 to 20 photos taken during the war. Students should select images from the Art and Social Issues website, books or internet that are the most effective in

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conveying their personal response to the social climate at that time. Students should write a caption for each picture that explains the image and its significance. Finally, they should write an introduction to their photo essay that briefly explains the message they want to communicate.

Visual Arts/Social Studies: After reviewing the Bill of Rights students should select one of the original provisions or an amendment or portion of an amendment for further study. Ask the students to photograph something or create a photographic transfer collage that illustrates what life might be like without the amendment and have them discuss why the amendment is important.

Social Studies/ Government: Using the photos from the Photo League ask the students discuss which rights from the Bill of Rights might be illustrated and how it is represented.

Materials and Resources:

<p><i>FOR TEACHERS:</i></p>	<p>Attached handouts:</p> <p>Background of photographic images.</p> <p>Rubric</p> <p>Copies of Images</p> <p><u>World Almanac</u> with information on population of European countries and America before and after the war including deaths of soldiers fighting. (Not included in museum resources)</p> <p>Cass, Claire; Daiter, Stephen and Tucker, Anne Wilkes. <u>This Was the Photo League</u>. Chicago: Stephen Daiter Gallery. 2001.</p> <p><u>Computer to Link:</u></p> <p>More information on the New York Photo League: http://photography.about.com/library/weekly/aa100801e.htm</p> <p>Photo Notes: This site is the only actual copy of a Photo Notes article that could be found. http://photography.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.h</p>
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	<p>http://photography.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site= http://nnewdeal.feri.org/pn148.htm Bill of Rights: http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/bill_of_rights.html America from the Great Depression to WWII, Black and White Photographs from 1935-45 http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fahome.html</p> <p>BOOKS: <i>The Eye of War: Words and Photographs from the Front Line</i> by John Keegan and Phillip Knightley</p> <p>DVD/VIDEOS: American Photography: A Century of Images “This is the story of pictures we have taken and where they have taken us. The series traces the profound effect photographs have had on American life. It included images from Dorothea Lange during the Great Depression, Robert Capra’s WWII images, glamorous fashion shots, etc. What is the role of the photographer as a recorder of public events, history and artistic expression?” PBS. Set of 3 videos. Total 161 minutes</p> <p>Collage:Texture and Techniques.Claudine Hellmuth. Creative Catalyst Production. 2005.DVD</p>
<p>FOR STUDENTS:</p>	<p>Newspapers, magazines, access to internet for images</p> <p>Paper, glue, scissors for collage</p> <p>Acrylic matte or gloss medium for photo transfer (Mod Podge also would work) or clear packing tape, bowl with water to soak images</p> <p>Computers for research of Photo Notes</p> <p>Cameras; access to photo development or computer and printer (if digital camera) to create their own images.</p> <p>Journal and pencil</p>

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Key Vocabulary

Photograph-Historically, an image formed on film by a camera and developed with chemicals to produce a print. Today many photographs are printed digitally onto paper with the use of a computer and computer printer.

Photography-the act, process, art or profession of making photographs

League-a group of people or organizations working together for a common goal

Documentary-a film or photograph that shows social conditions or records actual events without fictionalizing them

Technology Connections

Students will need to utilize a computer to research the Photo Notes of the Photo League, WWII including populations of people in European countries and America, and additional photographic images.

General Tips

When creating a collage encourage students to overlap and have a nice variety of tones, shapes and color. If they wish to portray something sad they might consider using a darker tone or color overall for the collage. Glue sticks work well since the image cannot be oversaturated with liquid glue. **TO CREATE A PHOTO TRANSFER:** Take photo, newspaper or magazine clipping or computer printed page and cut to approximate size needed for collage. If the photo is an original make a photocopy of the image for this activity so as not to damage the original. Paint the image with a thin coat of a clear medium such as Mod Podge or other acrylic medium (matte or gloss). These are available at art and craft supply stores. Let dry. When medium has dried, soak it in a bowl of warm water for a few minutes. Pull out of bowl, let excess water drip into bowl. Gently rub the paper off the back of the image. The back of the paper will crumble off and leave you with the ink adhered to the medium. Cut to exact size and glue to the collage. **OPTIONAL PHOTO TRANSFER METHOD:** Take photo, newspaper or magazine clipping or computer printed page and cut to approximate size needed for collage. If the photo is an original make a photocopy of the image for this activity so as not to damage the original. Cut a piece of clear packing tape a bit longer than the image. Tape it to the image. Cover all parts of the image that you want to

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transfer. Rub with a tool such as the back of a spoon to strongly secure. Once secure, soak the taped image in a bowl of warm water for several minutes. When you remove the image from the water, gently rub the paper off the back of the image. You will be left with a shiny image that is adhered to the tape. Glue to the collage.

Attachments

Social Photography in the U.S.

Description of Photo Images

Rubric

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Social Photography in the U.S.

The 20th century in the United States saw the increased use of photography in the early 20th century to raise social consciousness. Photographs made it possible to capture the dismal conditions of the working class throughout rural and urban America. Members of the Photo League in New York City played an important role in this expanse of photography as a means of increasing social awareness.

The establishment of the Photo League in 1936 helped advance the use of photography for social awareness. The Photo League was a non-profit, volunteer organization based in New York, (1936-1951) of amateur and professional photographers committed to the transformative power of photography to effect social change. Many of the artists, relatively unknown at the time, became the most important photographers of the 20th Century.

The Photo League was an outgrowth of the Film and Photo League. Members were drawn to the League because of its function as a cooperative center for education and exhibitions. During the time of the Photo League, few photography schools existed and those that did charged tuition nearly double that of the Photo League's \$15 dues. Not only did it give photographers an opportunity to develop their skills, but also asked them to create images of the conditions of the working class. Artists in the Photo League created works entitled “Harlem Document,” “Chelsea Document,” and “The New Ghetto.” As the league matured, it began broadening its appeal to include creative photography as well as documentary. Over time, the Photo League covered such issues as tenements, the Catholic worker movement, immigrations, and the conditions of laborers, ghettos and the rural poor.

However, photography was being used prior to the beginning of the Photo League to promote greater consciousness. In 1904 the National Child Labor Committee was formed to persuade Congress to regulate child labor. The committee estimated that over two million children under the age of sixteen were employed in the U.S. Then, in 1908, the committee hired Lewis Hine as their staff investigator and photographer. Hine was employed to travel throughout the country and photograph the conditions of child laborers. Hine would later become a member of the Photo League. His work focused on

immigrants at Ellis Island, housing and labor conditions within the U.S. and the conditions of the working class.

The U.S. Government also used photography to document the conditions of its citizens. Due to the Great Depression, President Franklin Roosevelt hoped to combat the poverty found throughout the rural U. S. by establishing the Federal Security Administration (FSA) within the Department of Agriculture. The FSA was founded in 1937 and was faced with the challenge of supporting small farmers and refurbishing the land and communities that had been wiped out during the Depression. The FSA hired a team of photographers to document the conditions of the rural communities and the progress of the FSA. The photographers hired included Arthur Rothstein, Jack Delano, and John Vachon, all members of the Photo League. The project emphasized the impact of the Great Depression, farm mechanization, and the Dust Bowl on rural life. Then in 1942, the photographers were transferred from the FSA to the Office of War Information (OWI). Due to the outbreak of WWII, the photograph became a crucial aspect of the government propaganda agency, focusing on topics such as aircraft factories and women in the workforce.

When taking a look at the works of the artists involved in the Photo League it is easy to see how their art raised social awareness and the aforementioned are merely a few of the Photo League's members. Activist groups and government agencies that hoped to improve conditions for people recruited photographers to document the circumstances of those they hoped to help. The photographer had taken on a crucial role in the effectiveness of propaganda to heighten social awareness.

In 2001, The Columbus Museum of Art acquired 170 works by 70 artists, 16 women among them, from the New York Photo League. Many of them are on regular display in the Museum's American Galleries. The images in this lesson can be viewed on the website www.artandsocialissues.com.

References

Child Labor. February 1, 2002. <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAchild.htm>
The Farm Security Administration. February 1, 2002.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fasinfo.html>

The Office of War Information. February 1, 2002

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/woiinfo.html>

February 1, 2002 <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAP>

February 1, 2002. <http://www.telefonica.es/fat/ephotoleague.html>

BACKGROUND ON IMAGES

Morris Huberland *Bread Line*, late 1930s. Gelatin silver print: 6¾ x 7¼ in. Photo League Collection, Museum Purchase with funds provided by Elizabeth M. Ross, the Derby Fund, John S. and Catherine Chapin Kobacker, and the Friends of the Photo League.

The great Depression ravaged America throughout the 1930's, beginning in September 1929 on "Black Tuesday," the single most devastating day for the New York Stock Exchange in history. In January of 1931 the President's Emergency Committee for Unemployment Relief claimed 4 to 5 million people were unemployed, climbing to almost 25% by 1933. People who had always been able to support themselves found they were unable to secure a job to put food on the table and often lost their homes. Bread lines became a common sight, for innumerable families had to depend on charity in order to survive. Huberland captures the hopelessness many were feeling in this photograph of a bread line.

George Gilbert, *American Faces*, New York, c.1940, Gelatin silver print: 9¼ x 7 3/8 in. Photo League Collection, Museum Purchase with funds provided by Elizabeth M. Ross, the Derby Fund, John S. and Catherine Chapin Kobacker, and the Friends of the Photo League.

George Gilbert's photo accentuates Franklin D. Roosevelt's tremendous popularity. The only president to serve more than two terms, FDR was President for four consecutive terms until 1945 when he suffered from a stroke and died. Defeating Hoover, who was running for a second term in 1932, FDR promised to instill a plan for economic recovery he called the "New Deal." Upon election and the implementation of the New Deal, he implemented numerous policies to help Americans until the depression could be overcome. Leading the Americans through their recovery from the Great Depression, FDR then had to help guide U.S. citizens through WWII.

Jack Delano, *Miner at Dougherty's Mine, near Falls Creek, Pennsylvania, August 1940.* (Farm Security Administration) Gelatin silver print. 9 3/8 x 6 7/8 inches. Photo League Collection, Museum Purchase with funds provided by Elizabeth M. Ross, the Derby Fund, John S. and Catherine Chapin Kobacker, and the Friends of the Photo League.

The Agricultural Department also hired Jack Delano as a photographer for the FSA and this photograph focuses on the working conditions of the coal miner. Between 1880 and 1930 the coal industry expanded as the production of steel required coal to fuel the furnaces. In the 1930's mining sites could be found throughout the East and mechanization began to be implemented within coal mines but the conditions were still dirty and the risk of injury or death due to explosions or a shaft collapsing was still high. Workers were typically immigrants and were required to live in company-built, efficiency towns called "patches."

David Robbins, *Antiwar Demonstration, c. 1941* Gelatin silver print: 8 7/8 x 7 3/8 in. Photo League Collection, Museum Purchase with funds provided by Elizabeth M. Ross, the Derby Fund, John S. and Catherine Chapin Kobacker, and the Friends of the Photo League.

The year was 1941 and the world was in a tumultuous state. World War II was raging and the United States was still attempting to remain neutral. David Robbins' photograph illustrates the general feeling of American citizens who were not willing to commit to a war while still struggling to overcome the effects of the Great Depression. However, on December 7th Pearl Harbor was bombed in a surprised attack by the Japanese. The Japanese Admiral Yamamoto afterwards said, "I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant" and his words proved true, for the U.S. joined the Allied cause and in 1945 both the German Nazi regime and the Japanese admitted defeat.

PHOTO COLLAGE RUBRIC

- 5** Student creatively collaged a picture that represents a social or cultural issue. The image communicates an issue and the piece has an interesting title. The images in the collage are appropriate and powerful. The collage is an exemplary model of good composition, displaying use of overlap, variety of tonal value, color and shape.
- 4** Student collaged a picture that represents a social or cultural issue. The image communicates an issue and the piece has an appropriate title. The images in the collage are appropriate. The collage is a good model of composition displaying use of overlap, variety of tonal value, color and shape most of the time.
- 3** Student collaged a picture that represents a social or cultural issue. The image communicates an issue but does not have an appropriate title. The images in the collage overall are appropriate but some are not. The collage composition, in some cases, uses overlap, variety of tonal value, color and shape.
- 2** Student collaged a picture but it does not represent a social or cultural issue nor does it have an appropriate title. The images in the collage overall are appropriate but some are not. The collage composition does not utilize the elements of art such as overlap, variety of tonal value, color and shape.
- 1** Student did not complete collage.