

# Using Digital Primary Sources to Teach Data Literacy

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**You can learn a lot from a single historical photograph. But what could you learn from a thousand photographs? Ten thousand?**

While many teachers may have worked with single photographs or items to practice close looking, analytical, and primary source literacy skills with students, these items can also be examined in larger groups by examining the data describing the items.

**Data**, or information describing people, objects, or events, is sometimes called **metadata** when used to describe books, photographs, and other types of materials. Examining multiple primary sources through the data that describes them can allow students to make more general inferences about historical moments.

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**What is data?**

**Data**, in this context often called **metadata**, describes every primary source you examine—whether it's a title, the creator of the source, where the source was created, or any information describing the source you can imagine.

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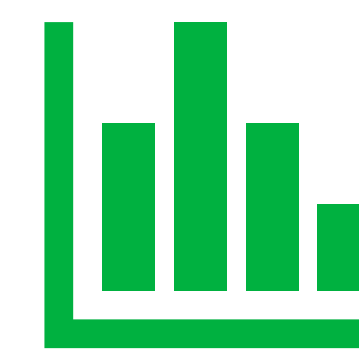
**Why should students be data literate?**

Students who are **data literate** can interpret, use, evaluate, and communicate knowledge derived from data. Data is often understood as figures and statistics that are part of any scientific experiment or study, and correctly interpreting data in its original scholarly form or in a news story is critical to ensuring students are information literate individuals. Using primary sources as data can be a great way to teach data literacy skills using concrete examples.

Teaching **data literacy** allows students to practice “distant reading.” Data literacy complements “close reading” by allowing students to make broader inferences based across many sources rather than just a single source.

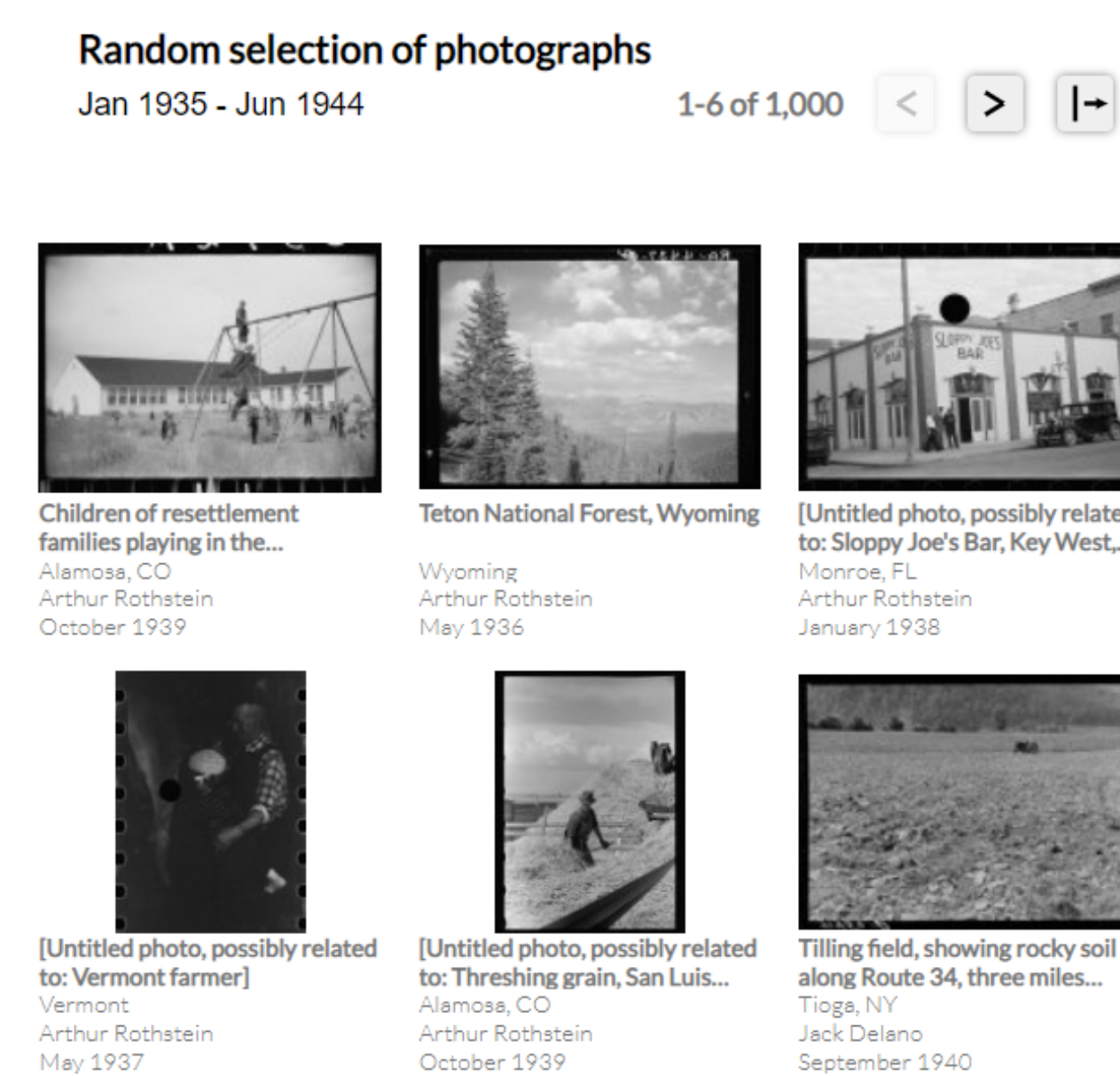
## Acknowledgements

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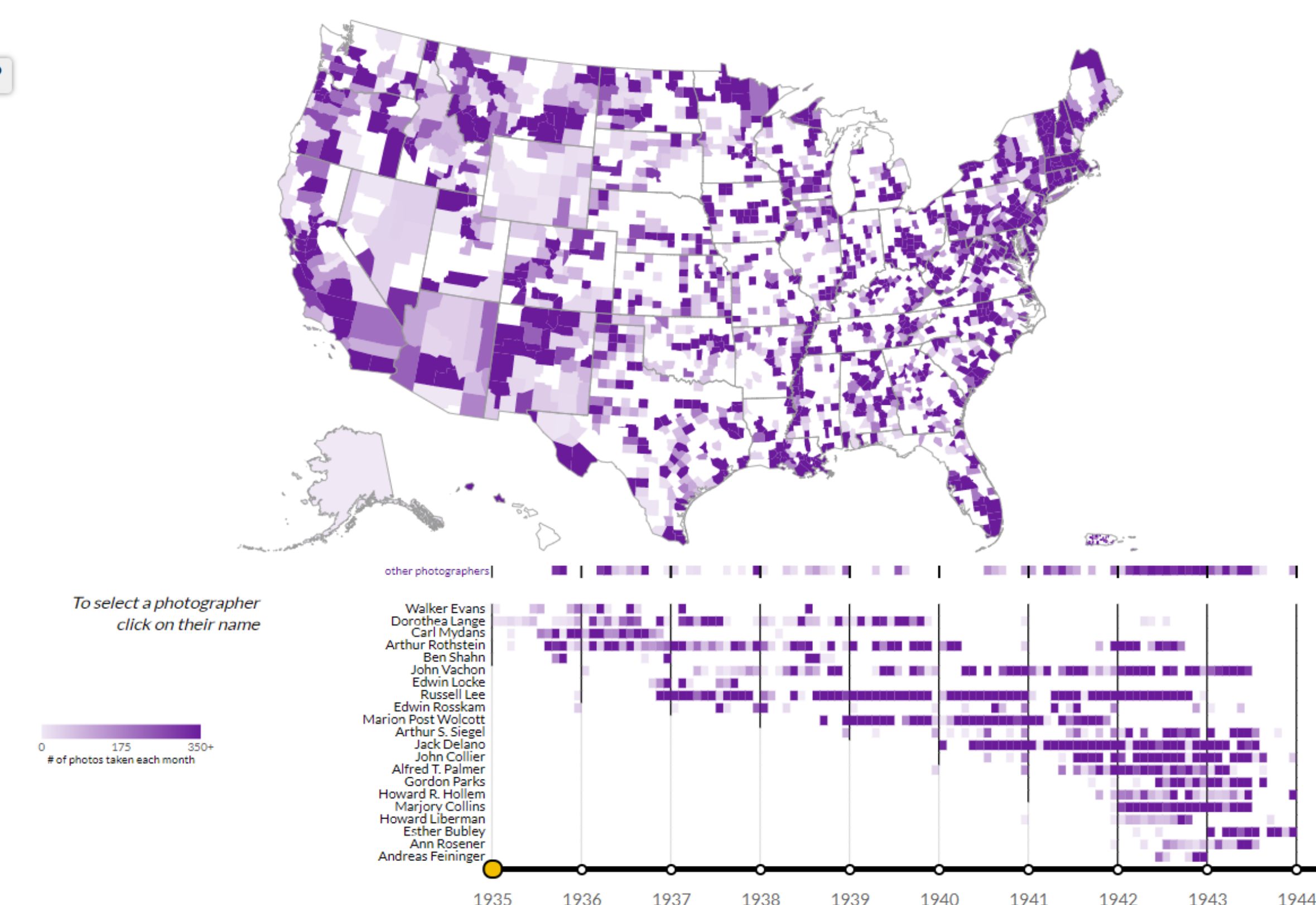


**Meet Photogrammar! An easy way for students to work with primary sources as data.**

photogrammar



Search Photographers Themes Map: Counties Map: Cities & Towns About American Panorama



The Photogrammar project, maintained by the University of Richmond, draws from nearly 120,000 photographs taken between 1935 and 1944 by individuals employed by the Farm Security Administration-Office of War Information (FSA-OWI) that are housed at the Library of Congress.

Photogrammar can be used to search and explore these photographs by location, topic, and creator, making it a rich source of information and data about Great Depression Era America.

**Questions to guide students through using and exploring Photogrammar, or any platform where you can explore large masses of primary sources:**

1

**What is available on the site? Does your personal background and knowledge impact how you understand and use the site? What information is prioritized? Why is the content selected to be available important? What can we learn from the content?**

2

**Who took the original photographs? Who is depicted in the photographs? Who made the photos available online? Who created Photogrammar? Who is the target audience of Photogrammar?**

3

**Why were the original photographs taken? Why was Photogrammar created? Why do you think the site looks the way it does? Why do you think we're looking at the site?**

4

**When were the original photographs taken? When were the photographs made available online? When was Photogrammar created? Why do those dates matter?**

5

**Where did the information about the original photographs come from? Where did the information on the site come from? Do you think the people who added information or made the site are biased in any way?**

6

**How does the site present the sources? Does the way the sources are presented prioritize certain views or ways of understanding the sources? Is there anything left out or not mentioned?**