

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
responses to works of*

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:

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

Commentary:

Throughout the 1930's and 40's 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 our own connections.

Pre-Assessment:

Discuss and/or ask students to list 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 make a written list?

Post-Assessment:

Review the performance activity with the rubric.

Scoring Guidelines:

See attached rubric.

Instructional Procedures:

View the following images:

Bread Line, Morris Huberland

American Faces, George Gilbert

Wife and Child of Sharecropper, Arthur Rothstein

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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.

Miner at a Dougherty's Mine, Jack Delano

Antiwar Demonstration, David Robbins

Shout Freedom, Rosalie Gwathmey

Questions for Discussion:

What do you see in this photo?

What is the mood of the photo?

Do you have an emotional response to the photo?

The photographs from the 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?

What do you think the photographer was trying to say?

What makes a photograph a documentary photograph?

Performance Activity:

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

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conceived? Is there good use of overlap, value and shape? See attached rubric.

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 ideas 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 and 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.

Mathematics: Using the World Almanac, have students graph the losses 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 that are the most

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effective in 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 have the students discuss which rights from the *Bill of Rights* might be illustrated and how it is represented.

Materials and Resources:

For teachers

Attached handouts:

Background of photographic images.

Rubric

Copies of Images

Collage Technique Book

World Almanac with information on population of European countries and America before and after the war including deaths of soldiers fighting. (Not included in museum resources)

Cass, Claire; Daiter, Stephen and Tucker, Anne Wilkes. **This Was the Photo League**. Chicago: Stephen Daiter Gallery. 2001.

Computer to Link:

More information on the New York Photo League:

<http://photography.about.com/library/weekly/aa100801e.htm>

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.htm?site=
http://newdeal.feri.org/pn/pn148.htm](http://photography.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://newdeal.feri.org/pn/pn148.htm)

Bill of Rights:<http://www.archives.gov/national-archives->

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experience/charters/bill_of_rights.html

DVDs:

The Artists at Work: Artists hired by the U.S. Government to work on projects in the 1930's.

WWII Experience: Frank Capra WWII American Propaganda Films of WWII

The Eye of War

American Photography

For students

Newspapers, magazines, access to internet for images

Paper, glue, scissors for collage

Acrylic matte or gloss medium for photo transfer (Mod Podge also would work) or clear packing tape, bowl with water to soak images

Computers for research of Photo Notes

Cameras; access to photo development or computer and printer (if digital camera) to create their own images.

Journal and pencil

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

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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 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.

With the evolution of the camera the U. S. has shifted from a literal community to a visual one. This modification is emphasized by 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. 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

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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.

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>

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BACKGROUND ON IMAGES

Morris Huberland

Bread Line, late 1930's

Vintage silver print: signed, titled and stamped on verso: 6¾ x 7¼ inches

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

Vintage silver print: signed verso: 9¼ x 7⅜ inches

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.

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Arthur Rothstein

Wife and Child of a Sharecropper, Washington County, Arkansas, 1935.

(Farm Security Administration FSA)

Vintage silver print: signed ("Arthur Rothstein") on mount verso: 6 5/8 x 9 1/2 inches

Arthur Rothstein belonged to a team of photographers that worked for the Farm Security Administration (FSA). FSA was a committee that was put together in attempts to aid members of rural communities suffering from severe poverty after the Great Depression as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal." Rothstein later recalled, "It was our job to document the problems of the Depression so that we could justify the New Deal legislation that was designed to alleviate them."

Jack Delano

Miner at Dougherty's Mine, near Falls Creek Pennsylvania, August 1940. (Farm Security Administration)

Vintage silver print: signed and annotated ("41332d") on verso: Delano collections: 6 7/8 x 9 3/8 inches

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."

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David Robbins

Antiwar Demonstration, c. 1941

Vintage silver print: initialed by daughter and annotated ("77") on verso: 8⁷/₈ x 7³/₈ inches (p. 84 This Was 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.

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PHOTO COLLAGE RUBRIC

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| 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. |
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| 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. |
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| 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. |
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| 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. |
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 | |
| 1 | Student did not complete collage. |