

TEACHING WITH PRIMARY SOURCES ACROSS TENNESSEE EXPLORING FSA PHOTOGRAPHY & PHOTOJOURNALISM: GEE'S BEND, ALABAMA

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Grades: 8-12

Subjects: U.S. History, English

Time Required: Two 50-60 minute class period

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will look at a series of photographs taken of Gee's Bend, Alabama. Students will write a series of newspaper articles based on the images and the evolution of change at Gee's Bend caused by Resettlement Administration involvement in the community.

GOAL

Students will

- Learn how to write text supported by images
- Analyze a series of photographs to explore purpose and intended audience
- Understand how photography helped the Resettlement Administration gain public support of their programs by utilizing photographs of improvement within communities

OBJECTIVES

The learner will

- View a series of photographs of Gee's Bend before Resettlement Administration involvement and write a newspaper article about the community
- View a series of photographs of Gee's Bend after Resettlement Administration involvement and write a newspaper article depicting progress in the community

INVESTIGATIVE QUESTION

How do photographs aid in getting public support for government programs?



CURRICULUM STANDARDS

8th Grade English

SPI 0801.3.1 Identify the purpose for writing (i.e., to inform, to describe, to explain to persuade, to entertain).

SPI 0801.3.9 Select illustrations, explanations, anecdotes, descriptions and/or facts to support key ideas.

SPI 0801.3.10 Select an appropriate title that reflects the topic of a written selection.

U.S. History Grades 9th-12th

8.4 Identify the changes in social and cultural life caused by the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl (i.e., Hoovervilles, Bonus Army, migrations, worldwide economic depression, Democrat Victory in 1932, widespread poverty, unemployment, religious revivalism).

8.6 Identify New Deal Programs/Initiatives (i.e., Social Security, WPA, TVA, Indian Reorganization Act, FDIC, CCC, Wagner/Fair Labor Standards' Act)

English I-IV Standard 7- Media

SPI 3001-3004.7.1 Draw an inference from a non-print medium.

SPI 3001-3004.7.3 Choose a visual image that best reinforces a viewpoint

SPI 3001-3004.7.6 Infer the mood represented in a non-print medium

MATERIALS

- [Primary Source Analysis Tool](#)
- [Teacher's Guide, Analyzing Photographs & Prints](#)
- Worksheet 1
- Discussion Questions
- Gee's Bend, Alabama: A Look into the Community before Resettlement Administration Involvement PowerPoint (optional)
- Gee's Bend, Alabama: A Comparison of the Community Before and After Resettlement Administration Involvement (optional)
- [What can companion images tell us?](#) (this link is available from the extended links included in the [Teacher Guide to the Primary Source Set: Dust Bowl Migrations](#) on page 5)



RESOURCES

Library of Congress Sources

- Fleischhauer Carl and Beverly Brannan, eds. *Documenting America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. [Library of Congress. http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fachap05.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fachap05.html)
 - “Conducting school in the church. Gee’s Bend, Alabama.” (see detail on p. 3) <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000006947/PP>
 - “Conducting school in a church at Gees Bend, Alabama.” <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000006982/PP>
 - “Cabins on the old Pettway Plantation. Gees Bend, Alabama.” <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000006854/PP>
 - ““Old man Mosely,’ now blind, just sits by the house, Gees Bend, Alabama.”(see detail on p. 5) <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1998012484/PP>
 - “Student in science class. Gee’s Bend, Alabama.” (see detail on p. 7) <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000031954/PP>
 - “A class in anatomy and hygiene in Gee’s Bend school, Alabama.” . <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000031955/PP>
 - “Part of old house and new home of Little Pettway’s family. Gee’s Bend, Alabama.” (see detail on p. 1) <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000031901/PP>
 - “Two homes for teachers. Gee’s Bend, Alabama.” <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000031930/PP>
 - “Aunt Sally, old midwife, the only doctor or nurse ever heard of in Gees Bend before project was started. Gees Bend, Alabama.” (see detail on p. 2) <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1998012489/PP>
 - “Nurse Shamburg and Dr. Dixon (R.E.) examining Susanna Pettway, whose father, Clement Pettway, has been ill for several years with tuberculosis. Gee’s Bend, Alabama.” <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000031913/PP>
- (Continued on p. 3)

RESOURCES (continued from p. 2)

- Interview with Isom Moseley, Gee's Bend, Alabama, 1941. Transcript. From Library of Congress, *Voices from the Days of Slavery*. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.afc/afc9999001.t5091a> (optional extension)
- Interview with Alice Gaston, Gee's Bend, Alabama, 1941. Transcript. From Library of Congress, *Voices from the Days of Slavery*. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.afc/afc9999001.t5091b> (optional extension)



PROCEDURE

Step 1:

Before beginning this lesson, have students do some research about the Resettlement Administration and the Farm Security Administration in their school library or on the internet and discuss the programs with the class. It is crucial for students to understand the programs in order to understand the role of photography in those programs. You may also want to review [History Matters: What can companion images tell us?](#) for a better understanding of how photographers think about their images and how they are presented to the public.

Step 2:

If you choose not to use the PowerPoint presentations, then before class begins, print out copies of:

Group 1:

[Cabins on the old Pettway Plantation. Gees Bend, Alabama](#)

["Old man Mosely," now blind, just sits by the house, Gees Bend, Alabama](#)

[Aunt Sally, old midwife, the only doctor or nurse ever heard of in Gees Bend before project was started. Gees Bend, Alabama](#)

[Conducting school in the church. Gees Bend, Alabama](#)

[Conducting school in a church at Gees Bend, Alabama](#)

Group 2:

[Part of old house and new home of Little Pettway's family. Gee's Bend, Alabama](#)

[Two homes for teachers. Gee's Bend, Alabama](#)

[Nurse Shamburg and Dr. Dixon \(R.E.\) examining Susanna Pettway, whose father, Clement Pettway, has been ill for several years with tuberculosis. Gee's Bend, Alabama](#)

[Student in science class. Gee's Bend, Alabama](#)

[A class in anatomy and hygiene in Gee's Bend school, Alabama](#)

Make sure to include the titles of the photographs, as they offer valuable information to students on the content of the images. Also, print out 2 copies of the [Primary Source Analysis Tool](#) for each student and one copy of Worksheet 1 for each student.

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PROCEDURE (continued from p. 3)

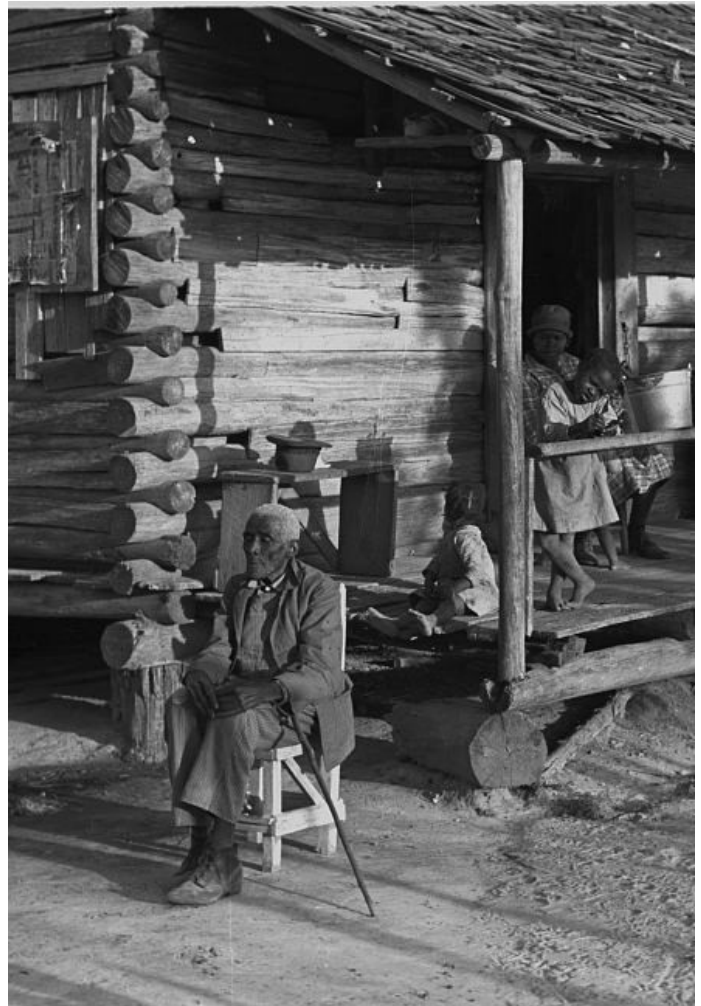
- Step 3:** Explain to students that they will be writing two newspaper articles based on a series of photographs of Gee's Bend, Alabama taken by Arthur Rothstein in 1937 and Marion Post Wolcott in 1939. The assignment is inspired by an article, "The Big World At Last Reaches Gee's Bend," written by John Temple Graves II for the *New York Times* in 1937 (This article is not required for this lesson plan, but if you are interested in reading it, then it is available for purchase on the [New York Times Archives Web site](#) for \$3.95 or it can also be accessed through databases, such as ProQuest). The article includes eleven of Rothstein's images and is a good example of Resettlement Administration propaganda. The article is very biased as the photographs showcased the "backwardness" of Gee's Bend, while the article highlighted the R.A.'s work to modernize the community in a positive light.
- Step 4:** **CONNECT** Show students the photographs, [Cabins on the old Pettway Plantation, Gees Bend, Alabama](#) and ["Old man Mosely," now blind, just sits by the house, Gees Bend, Alabama](#), so they have a sense of what Gee's Bend looks like.
- Step 5:** **INVESTIGATE** Have students read the chapter, [Tenant Farmers](#), in the book *Documenting America* by Carl Fleischhauer and Beverly Brannan. (A complete online version of [Documenting America](#) can be found on the [American Memory Web site](#)). Students can read the chapter online if they have access to a computer lab, or print copies of the chapter and have students read it in groups. Encourage students to take notes. This will provide them with background information on Gee's Bend, the images they are about to see, and the goal of the photographers.
- Step 6:** **CONNECT** Show students the images from group 1 or use the PowerPoint, "Gee's Bend, Alabama: A Look into the Community before Resettlement Administration Involvement." Allow students at least two minutes to view each photograph and write notes about them using the [Primary Source Analysis Tool](#) (Slide #6 contains four images, representing homes, health care, and school. Leave this slide up in case students need more time to write about a specific photograph). Use the [Teacher's Guide, Analyzing Photographs & Prints](#) to prompt discussion as the students examine each photograph.
- Step 7:** **WONDER** Allow students time to share their observations and questions with the class. What do they think it was like to live in Gee's Bend? What was school like? Describe the living conditions. What was Rothstein trying to communicate with his photographs?
- Step 8:** **EXPRESS** Tell the students to pretend that they are journalist in 1937. Their assignment is to write a newspaper article about life in Gee's Bend, using the information from the text, [Tenant Farmers](#), and the images. Make sure they include an appropriate title and information about homes, health care, and school (If there is not enough time in class, then assign this as homework).
- Step 9:** **REFLECT** Have students discuss the challenges of writing a newspaper article to go along with pictures. Then, ask for a couple of students to volunteer to read their newspaper article to the class or divide the class into groups of 3 or 4 to discuss their articles with each other. How did your perspective change when writing as a journalist?

PROCEDURE (continued from p. 4)

- Step 10: CONNECT** Show the students the images from group 2 or use the PowerPoint, “Gee’s Bend, Alabama: A Comparison of the Community Before and After Resettlement Administration Involvement.” Allow students at least two minutes to view each photograph and write notes about them using the [Primary Source Analysis Tool](#). Use the [Teacher's Guide, Analyzing Photographs & Prints](#) to assist students in looking at specific aspects of the images.
- Step 11: WONDER** Allow students time to share their observations and questions with the class. See the attached list of possible discussion questions to prompt a class discussion.
- Step 12: EXPRESS** Have the students write a newspaper article following the instructions on Worksheet 1 (If there is not enough time in class, then assign this as homework).
- Step 13: REFLECT** Have each student tell the class the name of his/her newspaper article. What can you learn from the titles of the articles? Ask a couple of students to volunteer to read their articles to class or divide the class into groups of 3 or 4 to discuss their articles with each other. Are newspaper articles and photographs like the ones of Gee’s Bend propaganda? What do you think the public would have learned from reading the articles and seeing the photographs?

EXTENSION

Gee’s Bend is an interesting example of the transition from slavery to sharecropping after the Civil War. The chapter, [Tenant Farmers](#), discusses the history of the Pettway Plantation briefly. Print out copies of the interview transcriptions of [Isom Moseley](#) and [Alice Gaston](#) (These interviews are part of the Library of Congress collection, [Voices from the Days of Slavery](#).) Allow the students to listen to the interviews of [Isom Moseley](#) and [Alice Gaston](#) and read along using the transcripts, or have students simply read the transcripts. Also, point out that [Isom Moseley](#) is the subject of one of the photographs used in the lesson plan. Have a class discussion on the content of the interviews. What was life like as a slave for Mosely and Gatson? How did the Civil War impact the plantation? Notice, that both Mosely and Gatson were asked, “What’s the government been doing for you?” Speculate why both were asked this question, and discuss their responses to it. For homework, have students write an essay from Mosely’s or Gatson’s point of view about life before and after R.A. involvement. Students should incorporate information from the chapter, [Tenant Farmers](#), the photographs, and from class discussions into their essays. Students should also include the pros and cons of R.A. involvement in the community.



EVALUATION

Use the following rubric to evaluate the newspaper articles:

90-100	Answers all of the questions on the worksheet, incorporates specific information from the text, <u>Tenant Farmers</u> , and the images, uses correct grammar, meets the required length of 1-2 pages.
80-89	Answers most of the questions on the worksheet, incorporates some information from the text, <u>Tenant Farmers</u> , and the images, uses mostly correct grammar, meets the required length of 1-2 pages.
70-79	Answers some of the questions on the worksheet, incorporates only a couple examples of information from the text, <u>Tenant Farmers</u> , and the images, uses incorrect grammar, does not meet the required length of 1-2 pages.
69 and below	Does not answer the majority of the questions on the worksheet, incorporates 0-1 examples of information from the text, <u>Tenant Farmers</u> , and the images, uses incorrect grammar, does not meet the required length of 1-2 pages.

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- Fleischhauer Carl and Beverly Brannan, eds. *Documenting America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. Library of Congress. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fachap05.html> (September 29, 2010).
- Rothstein, Arthur, photographer. "Conducting school in the church. Gees Bend, Alabama." Photograph. April 1937. From Library of Congress: *Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000006947/PP> (accessed September 15, 2010).
- Rothstein, Arthur, photographer. "Conducting school in a church at Gees Bend, Alabama." Photograph. April 1937. From Library of Congress: *Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000006982/PP> (accessed September 15, 2010).
- Rothstein, Arthur, photographer. "Cabins on the old Pettway Plantation. Gees Bend, Alabama." Photograph. February 1937. From Library of Congress: *Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000006854/PP> (accessed September 15, 2010).
- Wolcott, Marion Post, photographer. "'Old man Mosely,' now blind, just sits by the house, Gees Bend, Alabama." Photograph. May 1939. From Library of Congress: *Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1998012484/PP> (accessed September 15, 2010).
- Wolcott, Marion Post, photographer. "Student in science class. Gee's Bend, Alabama." Photograph. May 1939. From Library of Congress: *Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000031954/PP> (accessed September 15, 2010).
- Wolcott, Marion Post, photographer. "A class in anatomy and hygiene in Gee's Bend school, Alabama." Photograph. May 1939. From Library of Congress: *Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000031955/PP> (accessed September 15, 2010).

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- Wolcott, Marion Post, photographer. "Part of old house and new home of Little Pettway's family. Gee's Bend, Alabama." Photograph. May 1939. From Library of Congress: *Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000031901/PP> (accessed September 15, 2010).
- Wolcott, Marion Post, photographer. "Two homes for teachers. Gee's Bend, Alabama." Photograph. May 1939. From Library of Congress: *Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000031930/PP> (accessed September 15, 2010).
- Wolcott, Marion Post, photographer. "Aunt Sally, old midwife, the only doctor or nurse ever heard of in Gees Bend before project was started. Gees Bend, Alabama." Photograph. May 1939. From Library of Congress: *Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1998012489/PP> (accessed September 15, 2010).
- Wolcott, Marion Post, photographer. "Nurse Shamburg and Dr. Dixon (R.E.) examining Susanna Pettway, whose father, Clement Pettway, has been ill for several years with tuberculosis. Gee's Bend, Alabama." Photograph. May 1939. From Library of Congress: *Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000031913/PP> (accessed September 15, 2010).
- *Interview with Isom Moseley, Gee's Bend, Alabama, 1941*. Transcript. From Library of Congress, *Voices from the Days of Slavery*. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.afc/afc9999001.t5091a> (accessed September 29, 2010). (optional extension)
- *Interview with Alice Gaston, Gee's Bend, Alabama, 1941*. Transcript. From Library of Congress, *Voices from the Days of Slavery*. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.afc/afc9999001.t5091b> (accessed September 29, 2010). (optional extension)





TEACHING WITH PRIMARY SOURCES ACROSS TENNESSEE EXPLORING FSA PHOTOGRAPHY & PHOTOJOURNALISM: GEE'S BEND, ALABAMA

WORKSHEET 1

Instructions:

Pretend that you are a journalist in 1939. You are working for a major newspaper in a northern city, such as New York. Write a newspaper article comparing and contrasting life in Gee's Bend since the Resettlement Administration involvement. Remember, many people in the city may not be familiar with rural places and the government's attempt to assist the people in these areas. Also keep in mind that photographs and newspaper articles, like the one you are about to write, were used as government propaganda. It is your job to inform the public about the Resettlement Administration's progress. Are the government's programs working? Have they helped people, and if so, in what ways? Use the information from the text, Tenant Farmers, from the American Memory Web site, and the images. Make sure to include information about homes, health care, and school. Your article should be 1-2 pages. Give your article an appropriate title too!



TEACHING WITH PRIMARY SOURCES ACROSS TENNESSEE EXPLORING FSA PHOTOGRAPHY & PHOTOJOURNALISM: GEE'S BEND, ALABAMA

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Leonard Doob, a psychology professor at Yale University, once stated, "The lens of a camera is no more objective than the lens of the human eye." What are some things a photographer might think about when taking an image? Remember, most photographers take an image for a specific purpose. In the case of the Gee's Bend photographs, what did the photographer leave out in each set? What do they choose to keep in? How do these change the meaning of the image?
2. How did photography help or hinder public support for Resettlement Administration programs?
3. Does placing photographs in the media (newspapers, magazines, pamphlets) change the meaning behind the photograph? Why or why not?
4. Why do some magazines refuse to publish government-sponsored photographs?
5. Why was the medium of photography chosen to inform the public of the R.A.'s goals and progress? What are some advantages and disadvantages of using photography to represent the R.A.?