Grades: 5, 9-12
Subjects: Social Studies, English/Language Arts, U.S. History
Time Required: One to two 50-60 minute class periods
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OVERVIEW
In this lesson students will consider what they know about a famous photograph from the Great Depression. They will analyze and discuss this primary source before investigating several different viewpoints on how the photograph came to be taken. Students will then write an essay discussing how this contextual information has affected how they understand the image.

GOAL
Understand how investigating a variety of related primary and secondary sources can change our perception of a primary source.

OBJECTIVES
The learner will
- Analyze and discuss the Migrant Mother photograph
- Investigate the circumstances under which this photograph was taken and the viewpoints of the people involved.
- Compose a short essay on his or her new understanding of the photograph

INVESTIGATIVE QUESTION
Does learning more about the background of a photograph change how you think about that photograph? In what ways?

CURRICULUM STANDARDS
5th Grade
Social Studies
5.51 Compare and contrast a first hand and second hand account of the impact of the Dust Bowl of the 1930s.

High School
US History
US.47 Write a narrative piece that includes multiple media components to describe the toll of the Great Depression on the American people, including massive unemployment, migration, and Hoovervilles.

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**CURRICULUM STANDARDS (CONT.)**

**Common Core**

**5th grade**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.6 Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.8 Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.9 Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

**9-10th grades**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.7 Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6 Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.8 Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author’s claims.

**11-12th grades**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.6 Evaluate authors’ differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors’ claims, reasoning, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.8 Evaluate an author’s premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

**MATERIALS**

- PowerPoint
- Worksheet (5th grade)
- Essay Prompt (9-12th grades)

**RESOURCES:**

- Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother" Photographs in the Farm Security Administration Collection: An Overview
- Exploring Contexts: Migrant Mother
- Geoffrey Dunn, “Photographic License,” San Jose Metro, January 19-23, 1995
- Documenting America: Migrant Workers

Dorothea Lange, Resettlement Administration photographer, in California [1936 Feb.]
PROCEDURE


Step 2: Begin the PowerPoint presentation. Display the Migrant Mother photograph (Slide #2) and ask students to share anything they know about this image. How many of the students have seen it before? Where and in what form? What is it called? Who are the woman and children in the photograph? When was their picture taken and why? Who was the photographer? Why is this photograph famous? Help the class create a list of everything they know, or think they know, about the image.

Step 3: Display the photograph’s bibliographic page (Slide #3). How is this information the same or different from what students knew about the image? (Note the title, for instance.)

Step 4: Explain to the class that they will now be reading and listening to a group of primary and secondary sources with information on the taking of this photograph. Share the investigative questions with the class and suggest they think about how the following sources might affect their answers. (High school students should be told to take notes for later use in their essays.)

Step 5: Watch the Library’s introductory video as a class (Slide #4). Ask students what new information about the photograph they learned from this video. Which of their earlier questions does the video answer? What questions does the video raise? What have they learned about the photographer, Dorothea Lange? Who did she work for and why was she there?

Step 6: Read Dorothea Lange’s account of the day she took the photograph (Slide #5). Why didn’t Lange ask the woman’s name? Display the rest of the Migrant Mother series to the class. (Slides #6-10) (They are presented in the order they were taken.) What does the series seem to tell you about how the photograph came to be taken? Why do you think Lange captioned some of the photographs in different ways?

Step 7: Explain to the students that the identity of the woman in Lange’s photographs—Florence Thompson—was not discovered until 1978. Read Florence Thompson’s biography and listen to the interview excerpt (Slide #11). How does it affect our perception of the photograph to know something about Thompson’s history and to hear her voice? How does her short statement about the taking of the photographs—excerpted on the slide—compare to Lange’s?

Step 8: Read the accounts of Thompson’s children and grandson (Slides #12-13). (Leroy and Troy Owens, and Katherine McIntosh are all Florence Thompson’s children. Robert Sprague is her grandson.) How do these accounts compare to their mother’s and grandmother’s and to Lange’s? Why do you think the people involved remember this event differently? What do their accounts reveal about how the photograph made them feel?

Step 9: A. For 5th grade students: Give each student a copy of the worksheet. Explain that this worksheet will help them prepare to write a short essay on what they have learned today. Lead a class discussion on questions 1-3 as students take notes on their worksheets. Assign question 4 as homework.

B. For high school students: Explain to students that their homework will be further reading on this subject as preparation for writing a short essay, and hand out the essay prompt.
EVALUATION

Use the following rubric to evaluate student participation in group work and discussion:

5th graders:
- 50pts: Participation in class discussion and questions 1-3 of worksheet
- 50pts: Short essay (worksheet question #4)
  - 40-50 Essay has 9 to 10 sentences, uses details from class discussion and correct grammar.
  - 30-39 Essay has 7 to 8 sentences, uses some details from class discussion and mostly correct grammar.
  - 20-29 Essay has 6 to 7 sentences, uses few details from class discussion and incorrect grammar.
  - 19 and below Essay has fewer than 5-6 sentences, uses very few details from class discussion and mostly incorrect grammar.

High school students:
- 90-100 Essay has 5 to 6 paragraphs, uses details from class discussion and assigned reading, makes a convincing case for the student’s position and uses correct grammar.
- 80-89 Essay has 4 to 5 paragraphs, uses some details from class discussion and assigned reading, makes a reasonable case for the student’s position, and uses mostly correct grammar.
- 70-79 Essay has 3 to 4 paragraphs, uses few details from class discussion or assigned reading, makes a minimal case for the student’s position and uses incorrect grammar.

EXTENSIONS

5th grade:
Print copies of the Migrant Mother photograph for students to take home. Have students interview their parents and grandparents about the photograph. When and where have they seen it before? What do they know about it? What does it mean to them? Have students share what they’ve discovered with the class.

High School:
Assign students (or let them choose) another iconic photograph to research for a presentation to the class. Some possible photographs are “Tank Man, or the Unknown Rebel,” “Afghan Girl,” or “V-J Day in Times Square.” In their presentations, students should be sure to address the photographer’s background and point of view, the subject’s point of view (if possible), and the consequences of the photograph’s publication for the photographer, the subject, and the public.

Migrant agricultural worker’s family. Seven children without food. Mother aged thirty-two. Father is a native Californian. Nipomo, California [1936 Feb. or Mar.]
**Migrant Mother Worksheet**

Name:_____________________________________________________________

1. Is it important that we know Florence Thompson’s name? Why or why not?

2. What differences did you notice between Lange’s story and what the family members remember about that day? Are those differences important? Why?

3. What do you think Lange meant when she said, “there was a sort of equality about it”? Do you think that is true?

4. Write a short essay to answer the following questions: What do you know about this photograph now that you didn’t know before this lesson? Does what you’ve learned change how you respond to the photograph?
MIGRANT MOTHER ESSAY PROMPT

Read the two sources below. Then write a short essay addressing the prompt.

Documenting America: Migrant Workers

Geoffrey Dunn, “Photographic License,” San Jose Metro, January 19-25, 1995

Dorothea Lange said about photographing Florence Thompson: “There was a sort of equality about it.” Geoffrey Dunn begins his article with a quote from Susan Sontag: “To photograph people is to violate them.” Based on what you’ve read about Dorothea Lange’s work and what Geoffrey Dunn discovered about Florence Thompson and her family, which quote do you feel best applies to what happened in this case? When making your argument, be sure to refer to the sources and how you evaluated them.