Grades: 9-12  
Subjects: 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?  

(Continued on p. 2)
**Curriculum Standards (cont.)**

**English Language Arts**

**9-10th grades**

9-10.RI.KID.1 Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw inferences; cite the strongest, most compelling textual evidence to support conclusions.

9-10.RI.CS.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

9-10.RI.IKI.7 Evaluate the topic or subject in two diverse formats or media.

9-10.RI.IKI.9 Analyze a variety of thematically-related texts of historical and literary significance for the way they address related topics, facts, and concepts.

**11-12th grades**

11-12.RI.KID.1 Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw inferences; support an interpretation of a text by citing and synthesizing relevant textual evidence from multiple sources.

11-12.RI.CS.6 Determine an author’s point of view and/or purpose in a text, analyzing how style and content contribute to its effectiveness.

11-12.RI.IKI.7 Evaluate the topic or subject in multiple diverse formats and media.

11-12.RI.IKI.9 Analyze and evaluate a variety of thematically-related texts of historical and literary significance for their topics, facts, purposes, and rhetorical features.

**Materials**

- PowerPoint
- Worksheet
- Essay Prompt

**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 19-25, 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: For U.S. history 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.

For English Language Arts 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:

U.S. History:
- 50pts: Participation in class discussion and questions 1-3 of worksheet
- 50pts: Short essay (worksheet question #4)

English Language Arts:
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

- 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.

- 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.