Teaching with Primary Sources—MTSU

FSA PHOTOGRAPHY: CREATING A LOCAL ARCHIVE

Grades: 9–12
Subjects: U.S. History, English Language Arts
Time Required: Three 50-60 minute class periods, plus time for photography
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OVERVIEW
In this lesson students will study the work of the Farm Security Administration photographers who documented the rural South during the Great Depression. They will consider the purpose and methods of the FSA photographers, how these are reflected in the photographs, and the value of the photographs as a historical resource. They will then take on the role of FSA photographers to create an archive of photographs of their local area.

GOAL:
Students will gain a greater understanding of the effects of the Depression on the South. They will learn how Roy Stryker and his photographers planned their research trips, found their subjects, and edited the resulting photographs to create a collection of images portraying a particular view of the effects of the Depression.

OBJECTIVES:
The learner will:
• Analyze a set of primary sources for insights into the lives of rural Southerners during the Depression.
• Understand the purpose and methods used by the photographers of the FSA’s Historical Section
• Create an archive of local photographs modeled on the FSA project as a resource for future use.

INVESTIGATIVE QUESTIONS:
What do the FSA photographs reveal about rural life in the South during the Depression?
What can new photographs reveal to future researchers about life in Tennessee now?

(Continued on p. 2)
English Language Arts

- 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.
- 9-10.RI.KID.1 Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw inferences; cite the strongest, most compelling textual evidence to support conclusions.
- 11-12.RI.IKI.7 Evaluate the topic or subject in multiple diverse formats and media.
- 9-10.RI.IKI.7 Evaluate the topic or subject in two diverse formats or 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.
- 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.
- 11-12.SL.CC.1 Initiate and participate effectively with varied partners in a range of collaborative discussions on appropriate 11th-12th grade topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing one’s own clearly and persuasively.
- 9-10.SL.CC.1 Initiate and participate effectively with varied partners in a range of collaborative discussions on appropriate 9th-10th grade topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing one’s own clearly and persuasively.
- 11-12.SL.PKI.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective so that listeners can follow the line of reasoning; address alternative or opposing perspectives; and organize and develop substance and style appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- 9-10.SL.PKI.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically, so that listeners can follow the line of reasoning; ensure the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.
- 11-12.SL.PKI.5 Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.
- 9-10.SL.PKI.5 Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

County seat of Hale County, Alabama [1935 or 1936]
**Materials**
- Photograph Analysis Worksheet
- Shooting Script Worksheet
- Field Notes handout
- Editing Worksheet
- Digital cameras and photo editing software

**Procedure**

**Day 1:**

**Step 1:** Assign students The Farm Security Administration, FSA-OWI: About the Collection, and Hard Times in Sharp Focus: Online Collection Shows America, 1935-1945 as background reading. Depending on the class’s previous study of the Depression and the New Deal, you may wish to assign parts of the American Memory Timeline: Great Depression and World War II, 1929-1945 as well.

**Step 2:** Lead a discussion of the background reading. Share the investigative questions with the class. Explain that in order to help the class create a photographic record of their hometown, students will be studying how the FSA created a photographic record of small towns during the Depression.

**Step 3:** Explain that the students will first be using a worksheet to analyze images FSA photographers took in South in the 1930s. Depending on how familiar your students are with primary source analysis, it may be helpful to analyze this photograph as a class before students split into small groups.

**Step 4:** Divide the class into small groups. Assign each group one of the Photographs for Analysis, by providing either a link to view it online or a printed copy. Give each student a Photograph Analysis Worksheet. Give the groups time to both fill out their individual worksheets and discuss the photographs among themselves.

**Step 5:** Have each group present their photographs to the whole class using their answers to questions 1-3. It may be helpful to display the pertinent photograph on a projector for the class as each group presents.

**Step 6:** Discuss as a class what these photographs can tell us about life in small towns during the Depression. What signs of the Depression can students spot in the photographs? Ask students to share their answers to question 4. How have small towns changed since the Depression? Are they all still small towns? How have they grown? Are some things still the same even in larger towns? Ask students to consider how they would use photographs to show what has changed and what hasn’t.

**Day 2:**

**Step 7:** Explain to students that they will now begin their own “FSA Photography” project to create an archive of photographs on their town.

**Step 8:** Explain that FSA photographers used a “shooting script” as a set of guidelines to ensure they met the FSA’s goals for each trip. Share “The Small Town: Suggestions for a Documentary Photographic Study of the Small Town in America” with the class. Point out that while many of the potential subjects listed can still be found in the present day, others may no longer be present in your town.

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Step 9: Divide students into groups of two or three students each. Assign each group (or allow them to choose) a category from the list in Step 8 to be their responsibility. Give each group a Shooting Script Worksheet to plan their photography. Remind students that the purpose of their group’s shooting script is to help them make the most of their time while getting the photographs they need.

Step 10: Lead a discussion to determine the students’ goals for their photographic study. What aspects of their town would be important for future researchers to see? What aspects of life in their town do they want to emphasize to a viewer now? Considering these goals and the example of the FSA’s shooting script, help the class create a list of categories they want to cover in their archive.

Step 11: Give each group several copies of the Field Notes handout and remind students to make careful notes as they take photographs, so they will be able to compose accurate captions when the time comes. Share a few pages of Dorothea Lange’s captions for photos in LOTS 344-345 as an example. Instruct students not to delete any of the photographs they take, but keep them all for later classwork.

Step 12: Give students any necessary guidelines to insure the digital images produced will be compatible with your classroom technology. Remind students that they will be interacting with the public. Some people may not wish to be photographed or to allow photographs to be taken inside their businesses. Any request not to be photographed should be honored. Students should not trespass on private property. You may wish to provide students with a written explanation of their project to present to anyone with questions. Allow students sufficient time (in your judgment) to take the photographs as homework.

Day 3:

Step 13: Once photography is completed, explain to students that the FSA photographers took many photographs and not all of them were considered suitable for the FSA’s purposes. Some of the negatives—an explanation of the mechanics of film photography may be necessary for some students—were “killed” by Roy Stryker, the head of the Historical Section, by punching a hole through the negative. Show students the photographs in the “Killed” Negatives Demonstration (see image list on p. 6). Ask students why they think all but one of these photographs was “killed.” If necessary, remind students that the Historical Section’s job was to portray the suffering caused by the Depression and the necessity of improvements brought about by the FSA’s assistance programs.

Step 14: Explain that while all of the class’s digital images will be included in their archive, each group will now be going through its own “negatives” to choose a specific number to caption and include in a class display. (The number allowed may be determined by the teacher on the basis of the size of the class and the number of photographs taken.)

(Continued on p. 5)
PROCEDURE (CONT.):

Step 15: Give each group an Editing Worksheet. Explain that they will need to carefully choose which photographs to display and that they must justify their choices. What story do they wish to tell about this aspect of their town? Remind them refer back to the class discussion (step 10) and their answers on the earlier worksheets. Allow students time to choose their photographs, create captions, and complete the worksheet.

Step 16: Create a print or digital gallery of the captioned images for the class to view and discuss. What is the overall effect of this collection of images? What impressions does it create about life in your town? Do students feel those impressions are accurate? If they could, what would they do to portray their town differently? Why? Remind students that the FSA photographers and Roy Stryker considered these same questions during their own work. Does that change how students perceive the FSA images they’ve seen?

RESOURCES:

Background Reading
- American Memory Timeline: Great Depression and World War II, 1929-1945
- The Farm Security Administration
- FSA-OWI: About the Collection
- Hard Times in Sharp Focus: Online Collection Shows America, 1935-1945

Primary Sources:
Documents
- The Small Town: Suggestions for a Documentary Photographic Study of the Small Town in America [pg. 8-15 of the pdf] (from Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Written Records: Selected Documents)
- Dorothea Lange's captions for photos in LOTs 344-345 from Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Written Records: Selected Documents

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EVALUATION
Use the following rubric to evaluate student participation in group work and discussion.
10pts – Photograph Analysis Worksheet and participation in group presentation
25pts – Participation in class discussions
40pts – Group work with Shooting Script worksheet, field notes, and photography
25pts – Group work on the selection of pictures and captioning (Editing worksheet)

EXTENSIONS
- Use the images produced by the class to enhance a Google Earth map of your local area.
- Upload the images to a Flickr account, and invite the community to contribute through comments and/or additional images.

RESOURCES (CONT.):
- Grocery store, Greensboro, Alabama [1935 or 1936]
- County seat of Hale County, Alabama
- Woman examining dresses in front of shop, Laurel, Mississippi [1939 Jan.]
- Bank corner, Saturday morning, Laurel, Mississippi [1939 Jan.]
- Sidewalk scene in Selma, Alabama [1935 Dec.]
- “Killed” Negatives Demonstration
  - Twelve-year old girl of family of nine, cooking meal in rude, open lean-to near hut, Tennessee. [1936 Mar.]
- [Untitled], [between 1935 and 1942]
- [Untitled], [between 1935 and 1942]
- [Untitled], [between 1935 and 1942]
- Saturday afternoon, Yanceyville, Caswell County, North Carolina [1939 Sept.?]
PHOTOGRAPH ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Name:_________________________________________________

1. Observe the source carefully. What do you notice? Describe your source in a brief paragraph.

2. What can you learn from this photograph about life in a small Southern town during the Depression?

3. Considering your reading about the FSA photographers, why do you think the photographer chose to take this picture?

4. What does this photograph remind you of in the present? How is life in a small Southern town different now? How is it the same? What pictures would you take?
SHOOTING SCRIPT WORKSHEET

Names:__________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
Section of Class Shooting Script:____________________________________________________

We will go to the following place(s) to look for subjects for our photographs:
• ____________________________________________________________________________
• ____________________________________________________________________________
• ____________________________________________________________________________
• ____________________________________________________________________________
• ____________________________________________________________________________

We would like to take the following photographs:
1. ____________________________________________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________________________________________
4. ____________________________________________________________________________
5. ____________________________________________________________________________
6. ____________________________________________________________________________
7. ____________________________________________________________________________
8. ____________________________________________________________________________
9. ____________________________________________________________________________
10. __________________________________________________________________________
11. __________________________________________________________________________
12. __________________________________________________________________________
13. __________________________________________________________________________
14. __________________________________________________________________________
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16. __________________________________________________________________________
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18. __________________________________________________________________________
19. __________________________________________________________________________
20. __________________________________________________________________________
21. __________________________________________________________________________
22. __________________________________________________________________________
23. __________________________________________________________________________
24. __________________________________________________________________________
25. __________________________________________________________________________

We think these photographs would be a valuable addition to the archive because:
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
FIELD NOTES

Names: ________________________________________________________________

Subject #____
Who/What? __________________________________________________________
Where? ______________________________________________________________

Subject #____
Who/What? __________________________________________________________
Where? ______________________________________________________________

Subject #____
Who/What? __________________________________________________________
Where? ______________________________________________________________

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Subject #____
Who/What? __________________________________________________________
Where? ______________________________________________________________
EDITING WORKSHEET

Names:_______________________________________________________________________

Image #__
Caption______________________________________________
Included because-____________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

Image #__
Caption______________________________________________
Included because-____________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

Image #__
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