

RECORDING A CHANGING NATION

Lesson Plan Overview

About this Resource:

From 1976-1981, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) sponsored a program of photographic surveys in 55 communities in 30 states across the United States. These surveys created a new visual record of a changing nation.

This resource uses those images (or any photographic survey) as source documents to spark sustained inquiry. Begin with an Analysis activity to provide foundational visual literacy and analysis skills. Then choose to “stack” any of the Lesson Extensions, which uncover images’ complexities, their historical context, or the work of documenting a community. Each activity challenges students to access prior knowledge and apply it in a novel context.

Grade Level: 6th-12th grade

Materials: Each activity will require access to print or electronic reproductions of select images.

Guiding Questions:

HISTORY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do communities change over time? How do they stay the same? • What might these community-based changes or consistencies tell us about their larger context (state, region, country)?
SOCIAL STUDIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are communities across the US depicted differently or similarly? By whom? • What might these similarities and differences tell us about the challenges and opportunities of democracy?
CIVICS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is a community? What does it mean to belong to a community? To what extent do communities change over time? • Why does visual representation matter? How does this connect with representation in government?

Objectives:

- Strengthen students’ visual literacy and analysis skills;
- Encourage evidence-based reasoning;
- Challenge students to apply historians' habits of mind to present-day issues within their own communities;
- Invite students to “do” history by documenting present-day issues through photographs and oral histories.

Approach:

These activities are intended to be mixed and matched to meet your classroom goals. Begin with one Visual Analysis activity, then stack on extensions.

Visual Analysis Activities:

1. Quick Visual Analysis: Observation and Interpretation (20 minutes)
2. Extended Visual Analysis: Photographer’s Choices (40 minutes)

Lesson Extensions:

3. Rhetorical Analysis
4. Historical Analysis
5. Continuity and Change Over Time
6. Shifting the Lens

Once you have chosen your activity or activities, select 6-10 photographs from the survey of your choice. Look particularly for images that you think would resonate with your students and demonstrate the breadth of the survey. Below are links to Smithsonian Learning Lab collections that gather a cross-section of survey images for you.

1. [Los Angeles, CA](#)
2. [Long Beach, CA](#)
3. Venice, CA (digital reproductions unavailable)
4. [Atlanta, GA](#)
5. [Lawrence, KS](#)
6. [Louisville, KY](#)
7. [Whitesburg, KY](#)
8. [Galveston, TX](#)
9. [Baltimore, MD](#)
10. [Mars Hill, NC](#)
11. [Buffalo, NY](#)
12. [Seattle, WA](#)
13. Cheyenne, WY (digital reproductions unavailable)

National Learning Standards

Visual Arts

K–12.3	Choosing and Evaluating a Range of Subject Matter.
K–12.4	Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures.
K–12.6	Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines.

CCSS Content Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1	Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6	Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7	Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3	Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2	Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5	Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.
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.

C3 Framework

D1.5.9-12	Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple points of view represented in the sources, the types of sources available, and the potential uses of the sources.
D2.Civ.10.6-8	Explain the relevance of personal interests and perspectives, civic virtues, and democratic principles when people address issues and problems in government and civil society.
D2.Eco.1.6-8	Explain how economic decisions affect the well-being of individuals, businesses, and society.
D2.Geo.2.9-12	Use maps, satellite images, photographs, and other representations to explain relationships between the locations of places and regions and their political, cultural, and economic dynamics.
D2.His.2.9-12	Analyze change and continuity in historical eras.
D2.His.3.9-12	Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.
D2.His.5.9-12	Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.
D2.His.6.9-12	Analyze the ways in which the perspectives of those writing history shaped the history that they produced.
D2.His.10.6-8	Detect possible limitations in the historical record based on evidence collected from different kinds of historical sources.
D3.2.6-8	Evaluate the credibility of a source by determining its relevance and intended use.
D3.3.6-8	Identify evidence that draws information from multiple sources to support claims, noting evidentiary limitations.
D4.3.9-12	Present adaptations of arguments and explanations that feature evocative ideas and perspectives on issues and topics to reach a range of audiences and venues outside the classroom using print and oral technologies (e.g., posters, essays, letters, debates, speeches, reports, and maps) and digital technologies (e.g., Internet, social media, and digital documentary).