

REPORTING AMERICA AT WAR

CLASSROOM MATERIALS

The Power of Pictures

SUBJECT:

Journalism, Social Studies, English

ESTIMATED TIME REQUIRED:

One or two class periods.

OVERVIEW:

In humans the sense of sight is by far the most dominant of the five senses. Scientists who study the brain have determined that about one-quarter of the human cerebral cortex is involved in the sense of sight. Today's media environment reflects our strong reliance on sight as a way of taking in information. It is an environment filled with a vast array of visual images, some moving, some still. Although video and film occupy most of our attention when it comes to the visual media, the photograph or still image provides valuable lessons in understanding the techniques used to convey information visually.

This lesson introduces the concept of visual literacy and provides opportunities to develop skills that can lead to a better understanding of the media in general.

Students will:

- become familiar with the criteria used to analyze a still image;
- learn that photographs are a means of conveying information and can be manipulated for specific purposes;
- apply visual literacy skills in creating photographic images;
- tell a story using photographs;
- use visual literacy skills to analyze media other than photographs.

BACKGROUND FOR THE TEACHER:

The below three short articles provide basic information on visual literacy along with Description of the criteria used in analyzing photographs:

www.learnnc.org/Index.nsf/articles?OpenForm&topic=critical&subtopic=vislit]

The titles of the articles are Reading Images: An Introduction to Visual Literacy, Reading Photographs and Resources for Teaching with Photographs.

RESOURCES FOR THIS LESSON:

- Computers with Internet access
- Handout: [Glossary of terms](#)
- LCD projector (optional)
- Disposable cameras (optional)

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES FOR THIS LESSON:

Comprehensive source of visual literacy information and teaching resources; extensive photo resources www.med.sc.edu:1081/imagesofwar

Includes a "War & Military" category www.picturehistory.com

Contains a lesson on Images as Persuasion; also lists additional visual literacy lessons www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/21stCent/Impersuasion.html

Extensive list of photographers—historical and contemporary—and samples of their work www.temple.edu/photo/photographers/index.html

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Stories of war reporters and photographers www.newseum.org/warstories

Korean War photos www.trumanlibrary.org/Korea/Koreawar.htm

Visual Learning Grants www.polaroid.com/education

Shooting Under Fire: The World of the War Photographer by Peter Howe (Artisan Sales, 2002)

STRATEGY FOR THIS LESSON:

Prior to beginning the lesson, it is recommended that students view Stephen Ives' *Reporting America at War*.

Everyone has heard the cliché “a picture is worth a thousand words”. Ask the students to explain what that expression means. The discussion should ultimately bring the students to the point of understanding that a picture, whether a painting, drawing, or photograph, is a medium of communication. Introduce the concept of visual literacy from the Glossary of Terms, and explain to the students that visual literacy skills are important tools to have in our media-dominated culture.

PHOTO ANALYSIS

Choose a photograph from one of these sources found at the [Images of War web page](#):

<http://www.med.sc.edu:1081/imagesofwar.htm>.]

- United Press International (Suggested: #16 or #17)
- BBC News Photo Gallery (Suggested: April archive – Human Cost, #10)
- Washington Post (Suggested: Persian Gulf War, #15 or #26; Mar. 30, #5)

Show the photograph to the class, making sure that the students see only the photo and not the caption or any other identifying information. *Note: If the equipment is available, you can project the image from the Web site; otherwise, print copies of the photo to give to each student.*

Ask students the following questions:

1. What does this photo show? Who/what is in it? Where was it taken? When was it taken? What was the photographer's purpose in capturing this image?
2. Look at the composition of the photo. How are the elements arranged? Where is your eye drawn? (the focal point)
3. What do you notice about the light? What time of day is it? Where is the light coming from (what direction)?
4. Where was the photographer standing? What if he/she had moved lower? Higher? Farther right? Farther left? How would that have changed the picture?
5. What's included in this photograph? What's missing?
6. Is it color or black & white? How does that affect your perception?
7. How does this photograph affect you? What would be the effect if this photo appeared on the front page of the newspaper? How might people react to seeing it?

Have the students do an independent photo analysis, using the same set of questions. They may choose a photo from the Images of War web page or from a recent news publication. Students should present their analyses to the class, with time allotted for questions, comments and observations from the other students.

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PRACTICING VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Give students the assignment of surfing through photographs on the Web sites provided as resources in this lesson. Ask them to experiment taking photos in order to communicate a particular message or to create a particular effect. Remind them that photographing the same subject in different types of light (e.g., different times of the day) and from different angles or directions (perspective) are ways they can vary a photo, and thus, the message the photo conveys.

PHOTO STORIES AND ESSAYS

Ask students to create a photo essay or a story told only with photographs. They may work in pairs or small groups, following these steps:

- **Choose a topic.** This should be something familiar to the students; having access to the intended subject is also important.
- **Get permission.** Find out if permission will be needed, either from the intended subject or the location of the planned photography. Get written permission if necessary.
- **Write an outline.** Before starting to take photographs, students should write their story in outline form. Review these and help students clarify or modify their story as needed.

Allow 2-3 weeks for the students to take pictures and create the photo essay. Photos should be mounted on poster board or another sturdy material. Designate several class periods when students will display their photo essays and when the class may ask questions and comment on the essays.

As an optional activity arrange to exhibit the students' photo essays in the school or at a community location.

PICTURES OF WAR

Military censorship occurred in every war of the last century as well as in the recent conflict in Iraq. The censorship was imposed on both written reports as well as on photographs, film and video.

Have a class discussion of the following questions:

1. What is the purpose of imposing censorship on the press in time of war?
2. Why are photos and the other visual media subject to censorship?
3. Is the public well-served by having this censorship?
4. How could the course of a war be affected if there weren't military censorship? In other words, what if newspapers and television showed uncensored photos and footage of the carnage of war? How do you think the public would react?

PHOTO VERSUS VIDEO

From *Reporting America at War* choose one of the scenes showing battle footage, soldiers on the move, or the aftermath of a battle. Let the students view it once or twice. Ask them to describe their reactions to the segment. Then show the class a photo of a similar scene from the Images of War web page or from a recent news publication. Have them describe their reactions to the photo.

Discuss the following questions:

1. Which one of these gave you more information—the video or the photo?
2. What is the photo able to convey that video does not, and vice versa?
3. Does one of them make a stronger impression on you than the other? Explain.

As a follow-up to the discussion, ask students to read "Still Photographs Capture the War's Real Deal" www.med.sc.edu:1081/stillphotos.htm on how the experience of seeing photographs differs from seeing a video-taped report.

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RESEARCH REPORT

Starting with the Civil War, every war in which the United States has been involved produced a moving and compelling photographic record. Some notable war photographers are Matthew Brady (Civil War), Robert Capa (World War II), Tim Page (Vietnam War), and David Turnley (Persian Gulf War). Ask the students to choose a war photographer and write a report on how each one managed to get his/her photos, and how he/she worked with—or around—the military censors. Students should include samples of the photographer’s war photos in their reports. Have the students share their reports with the class, including an analysis and discussion of the photos. Ask the class to compare the works of the various photographers.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Have the students analyze other visual media, such as ads in magazines.

Have the students examine the use of photographs as a propaganda tool. (See lesson on “[Message Control](#)” [link].)

RELEVANT STANDARDS:

Media content strands established by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

Understands the ways in which image-makers carefully construct meaning

Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Understands the influence of media on society as a whole

Understands how the type of media affects coverage of events or issues

Understands the role of the media in addressing social and cultural issues.

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS FROM NCTE AND IRA

Use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

Use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

SOCIAL STUDIES NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS FROM NCSS

Power, Authority & Governance

Analyze and explain ideas and mechanisms to meet needs and wants of citizens, regulate territory, manage conflict, establish order and security, and balance competing conceptions of a just society

Civic Ideals and Practices

Evaluate the effectiveness of public opinion in influencing and shaping public policy development and decision-making

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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