Reality and Representation:
An Exploration into Intention, Perception, and History

Dorothea Lange, Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California, neg. 1936, print c. 1950, gelatin silver print, 11 in. x 14 in., museum purchase, Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA

THE POWER OF INTENTION • THE POWER OF THE VISUAL

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What does Timothy O'Sullivan's photograph tell us about the Civil War?

In 1861, photographer Mathew Brady (1823–1896) took out a loan on his New York gallery in order to finance his dream of photographing the Civil War. Because of the unofficial status of photographers and the limitations of capturing motion, photographers mostly documented posed and still scenes, rather than action—or battles. After leaving Brady’s photographing team to form his own, Alexander Gardner (1821–1882) and his team, including Timothy O'Sullivan (1840–1882), found inventive ways to overcome obstacles of weather and cumbersome equipment to bring images of the reality of war to the American public. At Gettysburg they took sixty photos, often shooting the same bodies of fallen soldiers from different angles and moving bodies to create more tragic pictures.

- What stories do Civil War photographs tell?
- How do the intentions of Civil War photographers compare to subsequent and recent war photographers?

How many images are needed in order to tell the whole story?

In 1866, Gardner bound one hundred of the Civil War photographs taken by his team into two albums entitled Gardner's Photographic Sketchbook of the American Civil War. How do these albums tell the story of the war compared to an individual photograph or to a painted record, such as City Point, Virginia, Headquarters of General Grant by Edward Lamson Henry (1841–1919)?

Serving as a captain's clerk aboard a Union Quartermaster's supply transport, Henry made sketches to document the non-combat side of a soldier's life. From 1865 to 1873 he worked on combining these sketches to create the composite scene of the painting that emphasizes the bustling transportation network as a new basis for national identity.

- How do Henry's and Gardner's intentions and works compare?

Do photographs or illustrations tell a more convincing story?

Because the technology to reproduce photographs was not yet practical for mass distribution during the Civil War, newspapers relied on artists to provide images for their stories. Photographs and drawings were engraved on wood plates to enable them to be printed in publications such as Harper's Weekly. Winslow Homer (1836–1910) was one of Harper's most noted illustrators, creating many images from the front lines of the Civil War.

- What do you imagine were/are some differences between understanding the Civil War through Gardner's photographic albums and articles illustrated by Homer in Harper's?
- Who saw the images? How were they viewed? What stories do they tell?

**How can photographs inspire social change?**

Dorothea Lange (1895–1965) is best known for the photographs she made while working for the Farm Security Administration during the Great Depression. Lange's empathic depictions were powerful symbols of human suffering that stirred the government and the public to action. After her renowned *Migrant Mother* photograph (a version of which is pictured at left) was published in the *San Francisco News*, immediate government relief was sent to the Nipomo migrant camp.1

- What did Lange’s images represent then?
- What might they represent now?

Carleton Watkins's (1829–1866) photographs of Yosemite from the 1860s similarly impacted government policies and action.

Watkins designed a camera around a glass-plate negative large enough to capture Yosemite's monumental features and carried these four-pound plates along with a darkroom tent and processing chemicals through untamed terrain to create these images. These exquisite photographs (see additional image on page 6) sent with letters to senators in 1864 were influential in persuading the US Congress to pass legislation to protect the Yosemite Valley.

- How did Lange and Watkins create such moving photographs?
- How might you create images to inspire and incite social action today?

**What do photographs of Yosemite over time reveal about our relationship to the land?**

In this century, photographs of Yosemite by Ansel Adams (1902–1984) (see additional images on page 6) and Roger Minick (b. 1944), provide alternative views of the well-traveled national park. Patiently waiting for the perfect light and using special lenses and filters, Adams is known for dramatic black and white compositions of his beloved California landscape. Like Watkins, Adams also used his photographs to petition the government and public for environmental preservation of US lands. Minick on the other hand, wastes no time in capturing the fortuitous moment when a tourist wearing a Yosemite National Park scarf is stands before the falls pictured on it.

- What are the differing intentions of Ansel Adams and Roger Minick?
- How would you photograph Yosemite or your favorite landscape—and why?

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CONTEXT OF THE BIGGER PICTURE

The story told in one photograph can change significantly if one sees or hears the larger context of the picture, such as what came before and after, or hearing voices of witnesses to the event. Select a photograph – perhaps this Stanley Forman (b. 1945) , Dorothea Lange’s Migrant Mother, or Diane Arbus’s (1923–1971) Child with a Toy Hand Grenade – and write a narrative based on what you imagine is happening from the one image. Then look at the photographer’s outtakes and read any articles or books that provide a broader account of the event depicted in the photograph (we can help provide these or lead you to sources). Write the story again to see how the additional images and/or information changed your perception of the story.

- What story of busing desegregation in Boston in the 1970s does this picture tell?
- How might we learn more about the actual incident to put this picture in its larger context?

PROJECT IDEAS

- How do Homer’s Illustrations, the photographs from Gardner’s albums, and Henry’s painting (p. 2) function as primary sources?
- What stories do they tell about the Civil War—individually and together?

PRIMARY SOURCES

- What information can we learn from primary sources?
- What are examples of primary sources from history?
- What primary sources do we encounter every day?

Discuss how newspapers, magazines, family photographs, ticket stubs, receipts, and even email messages function as primary sources. What will future generations be able to learn from them? Choose a source from which people can learn about you and write what you think they could learn. Then take a photograph that could function as a primary source telling the same story. Exchange your photograph and other primary source about you with a friend and write your observations of each. Share your ideas about what you can learn from each source individually—and the two together.

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LANGUAGE ARTS

Format and Intention
- How does the arrangement of Eadweard Muybridge’s motion studies photographs express his intentions?
- How does the meaning of a story change if it is presented as an autobiography, a fairy tale, a poem, a graphic novel, or a photo essay?
- How do you decide which format will best express your ideas and intentions?

Write about yourself in at least two different formats and consider which details are emphasized in each. Discuss how the different formats reveal your identity. Option: Students can also photograph or draw themselves. Discuss how the image expresses your identity differently than the written forms. Try combining the written and visual form and sharing these with others.

Context and Perception
- What story does Jim Casebere’s photograph imply?
- Can the narrative implied by a photograph be a lie?
- How does context affect the power of an image?

As Lewis Hine said in 1909, “While photographs may not lie, liars may photograph.”
If the subject of the photograph is a deliberate falsehood – such as in Jim Casebere’s (b. 1953) photograph using a model of an architectural space filled with gelatin to resemble a flood – the photograph is still an honest reproduction of what was before the lens.

Choose a photograph that tells an interesting story. Write a title and an interpretation of the photograph as if it were to hang next to the picture in a museum. Then write a caption and a story for the same photograph as if it were to be printed in a newspaper. Discuss how the context affects the interpretation.

SOCIAL STUDIES AND HISTORY

Military Conflicts in the News
- How do the ways in which the Civil War was documented differ from the ways in which other military conflicts have been documented?
- How are current military conflicts portrayed in the media? in art?

Compare images and information from news and other primary sources about one or more military conflicts from history. What stories do they tell? How do they differ? Who made them and what were their intentions? Compare these materials to those of a current military conflict. Think about the types of sources available to you and which sources you trust. Write an essay about how the formats and sources of images and information has changed over time and how they affect our understanding of war. Option: Work together to create a visual timeline of war photography and documentation.

SCIENCE

Presenting Results

- How do scientists present their findings?
- How might different formats be received by the public?

In 1872, Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904) invented the technology to capture an image of a horse mid-gallop, proving that all four of a horse's hooves leave the ground at once. Muybridge felt his original photo was not detailed enough for public display so he had his assistant paint a picture from it and then displayed a photograph of the picture. He also had drawn copies of his photographs available for zoetropes, circular drums that are spun to display the small changes between images as fluid motion, and zoopraxiscopes, his own invention that projected these images with light. Which of these formats - the photographs, the photographed painting, and the illustrations in motion - do you think is more "real"?

Individually or in small groups, try several different formats for presenting results from a science experiment, such as a lecture, PowerPoint, brochure, poster, exhibition, video, or newspaper article. Consider how you would combine text and images in each of these formats. Have students share their work to the class and discuss the effectiveness of each format.

Environmental Preservation

What do Watkins’s and Adams’s photographs each say about Yosemite?

How does each perspective influence our perception of the place?

Choose a local environmental issue about which you feel strongly and write a persuasive essay. Then think about how you would communicate the importance of your issue using images. First, paint or draw images for a poster to convince your audience of the problem and possible solutions. Then use photographs for the same purpose. Determine the most effective combination of words and images to get your message across to the public. Consider publishing your work in the local newspaper or a community bulletin, or having a public exhibition.

- What type of image is most effective at convincing the public about an environmental issue?
- What text would you use to accompany your images to highlight the problem and offer some possible solutions?
RESOURCES

Browse or search the Addison Gallery’s collection online to find images of your favorite works anytime—or check out the community portfolios for sample themes and ideas.

http://accessaddison.andover.edu/

The Addison Gallery can provide PowerPoints or jpps of the images in this packet or others from the Addison’s collection.

A comprehensive collection of all articles, maps, and illustrations printed in Harper’s Weekly during the Civil War.

The Center for Civil War Photography: http://www.civilwarphotography.org/index.html
The CCWP’s website has online exhibitions of Civil War photography and a video demonstration of wet plate photography.

Reproductions of works from every phase in Lange’s career, narrated by quotes from both Lange and the subjects of her photographs.

A compilation of the two albums of photographs and text by Alexander Gardner and his team of photographers.

An exploration of the enduring impact of iconic American photographs through image and text, including Lange’s Migrant Mother.

Contemporary versions of classic images by Muybridge, Watkins, and Adams accompanied by essays that together show how Yosemite and our conceptions of the landscape have changed since the 19th century.

A fascinating biography of Eadweard Muybridge written for a younger audience.

An exploration of the context behind Stanley Forman’s powerful photograph depicting Boston’s desegregation busing crisis in the 1970s.

Petersburg National Battlefield - City Point (US National Park Service): http://www.nps.gov/pete/historyculture/city-point.htm
A description of City Point, the location of Edward Lamson Henry’s painting. From a small village surrounded by a plantation to the war’s largest field supply base, this piece of land was critical to the outcome of the siege of Petersburg during the Civil War.

Contemporary copies of the books that promoted changes in the living conditions of immigrants living in tenement housing in New York City in the 1880s, told through narrative, photographs, and illustrations.

Yosemite’s visual history told by essays and works of art from the last two centuries.

Above left: Carleton E. Watkins, California, El Capitan, n.d.; Above right: Carleton E. Watkins, Mirror View of El Capitan, Yosemite Valley, Mariposa County, Cal., 1867; both: albumen prints, museum purchase, Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA

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