

**The Study of the Spanish Speaking People of Texas**  
**A Photo Essay by Russell Lee**  
**Lesson 1**  
**Who Is Russell Lee?**

**Enduring Understandings:**

- Images have power and influence in people’s lives.
- Some people use art to express their thoughts and feelings about the social condition

**Essential Questions:**

- How do historians use images to understand the past?
- In what ways has art been used to make statements about social conditions?

**TEKS:**

11.10 (B) analyze the effects of changing demographic patterns resulting from immigration to the United States

11.2 (C) analyze social issues such as the treatment of minorities, child labor, growth of cities, and problems of immigrants

11. 14 (D) identify actions of government and the private sector to expand economic opportunities to all citizens

11.17 (A) analyze the effects of 20<sup>th</sup> century landmark U.S. Supreme Court decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, *regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, and *Reynolds v. Sims*

11.21 (B) explain efforts of the Americanization movement to assimilate immigrants into American culture

11.24 (C) explain and apply different methods that historians use to interpret the past, including the use of primary and secondary sources, points of view, frames of reference, and historical context

11.24 F) identify bias in written, oral, and visual material

11.24 (G) support a point of view on a social studies issue or event

**Materials:**

1. Access to website: *Study of the Spanish-Speaking People of Texas* at <http://www.cah.utexas.edu/ssspot/> which consists of photographs by Russell Lee and includes a biography of him (<http://www.cah.utexas.edu/ssspot/bio.php>) as well as information about why he was chosen as the photographer for this project (<http://www.cah.utexas.edu/ssspot/why.php>)
2. Comprehension Questions about Russell Lee
  1. Handout: Russell Lee Biography
  2. Comprehension Questions about Russell Lee

**Objectives:**

The students will:

1. Read a short biography of Russell Lee
2. Demonstrate comprehension of Russell Lee biography

**Anticipatory Set (Attention Getter):**

The teacher will:

Direct the students' attention to the picture of Russell Lee at the top of the handout and say, "This is Russell Lee, a photojournalist. We will be studying about his contributions to the world of documentary photography."

**Procedure(s):**

The teacher will:

A. Introduce the lesson by explaining:

Russell Lee was famous for his documentary style of photography. In this lesson you will learn about his life and his contributions to photojournalism.

**Procedure(s):**

1. The teacher will:

A. Provide copies of the Russell Lee Biography.

The students will individually or in pairs:

A. Read the biography of Russell Lee

**Closure:**

The teacher will:

Ask the students to summarize the important facts of Lee's life.

**Evaluation:**

The students will:

Using the Lee biography, create a timeline of the events of Lee's life. Using information from their history books, the students will add to the timeline of Lee's life the significant events that were happening in American history during Lee's life. Examples are World War I, The Roaring 20s, the Stock Market Crash, the Great Depression, World War II, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, etc.

## Russell Lee Biography



### **Russell Werner Lee (July 21, 1903 - August 28, 1986)**

Russell Werner Lee was born in Ottawa, Illinois on July 21, 1903. He attended Culver Military Academy in Indiana and graduated from Lehigh University in 1925 with a degree in engineering.

Lee began his career as a chemical engineer but grew dissatisfied after four years in manufacturing. Encouraged by his first wife, artist Doris Emrick, Lee began to paint. The Lees left the Midwest for San Francisco, where Doris wanted to study. They arrived just before the 1929 crash of the stock market and the onset of the Depression and immediately became engaged in the thriving art community there. From San Francisco, the Lees next moved to the New York art colony of Woodstock, where they lived in the summers from 1931 to 1936, spending their winters in New York City. In 1935 Lee began to experiment with a camera as an aid to his painting and soon gave up painting in favor of photography. He and Doris went to Europe, where she studied art and he traveled, observing life in Eastern Europe, Germany, and the Soviet Union.

In 1935 Lee began to photograph miners and record conditions in Pennsylvania coalmines. His growing interest in social issues and his affinity for photography as a means of recording social conditions brought him in contact with other visual artists, among them Pare Lorentz and Ben Shahn, whose work he admired. He heard that Shahn was involved with the documentation program of the Historic Division of the Resettlement Administration, later renamed the Farm Security Administration, and decided to seek a job there. His first assignment for Roy Stryker was to photograph the Jersey Homesteads housing project in 1936. When Carl Mydans left the agency, Stryker offered Lee a full-time job.

Russell Lee's photographic work continues to be associated with the documentary tradition and the work of the Farm Security Administration under the direction of Roy Stryker. As part of the team that also included Dorothea Lange, Arthur

Rothstein and Walker Evans, Lee's primary task was to document rural communities with the goal of making urban Americans aware of the plight of tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and migrant workers stricken by drought and the Great Depression. Stryker assigned Lee to cover the Midwest and the West Coast, where he typically stayed on the road much longer than expected. Lee made some of his better-known early photographs in rural Iowa in 1936. He traveled throughout Texas and New Mexico between 1939 and 1940. Lee and his first wife grew apart during this time and divorced in 1938. During the 1940's, Lee's distinctive work appeared in hundreds of newspapers and popular journals including *Life*, *Look*, *Fortune*, *U.S. Camera*, and *Survey Graphic*.

Shortly after the U.S. entered World War II, the Historical Division transferred to the jurisdiction of the Office of War Information. Lee left the FSA group and joined the Air Transport Command as a captain in January of 1943, assigned to take aerial surveillance photographs as well as documenting local conditions on the ground. When the war ended, Russell Lee resigned his commission and in 1947 he and his second wife Jean Smith moved to Austin, Texas. From 1965 to 1973 he taught photography at the University of Texas. Although Lee often traveled as a free-lance photographer on assignment for magazines, corporations, the federal government, and the University, Austin remained his home and Texas a major focus of his work until his death in 1986.