

Focusing on the First Ladies

## Lesson Plan #2: Reading Historical Photographs

**Subject:** American History

**Grade level:** 8-12

**Rationale or Purpose:** In this lesson students practice thinking like historians to evaluate primary source photographs. The questions students use to guide analysis of the photographs can be used with any other photos or visual material.

### Materials:

- Student Handout: Viewing Photographs from a Historical Perspective
- Copies of the four photographs of First Ladies needed for this lesson. These photographs may be projected onto a screen or downloaded to reproduce as transparencies (NOTE: See Web Site Resources for Lesson Plans page).

<http://www.cah.utexas.edu/photojournalism/detail.php?nickname=bush&picid=3>

Diana Walker, 1989

During pre-Inaugural festivities at the Lincoln Memorial, President-elect Bush's tonsils get an examination from his granddaughter, Ellie LeBlond.

<http://www.cah.utexas.edu/photojournalism/detail.php?nickname=carter&picid=6>

Diana Walker, 1977

President Jimmy Carter and the Shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, put their best face forward with their wives, Rosalynn Carter and Farah Diba, in Washington, D.C.

<http://www.cah.utexas.edu/photojournalism/detail.php?nickname=carter&picid=13>

Wally McNamee, 1979

Less than a year after the signing of the Camp David Accords, President Jimmy Carter, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and their wives, Rosalynn and Jehan, pose near the pyramids outside of Cairo.

[http://www.cah.utexas.edu/photojournalism/detail.php?nickname=cah\\_reading&picid=3](http://www.cah.utexas.edu/photojournalism/detail.php?nickname=cah_reading&picid=3)

David Hume Kennerly, 2000

At the governor's mansion in Austin on election night, George W. and Laura Bush are glued to the TV and surrounded by supporters, including Florida Governor Jeb Bush, former President George H. W. Bush and Dick and Lynne Cheney. Due to highly-contested election results, it would be five weeks before Bush delivered his victory speech.

**Objectives:**

- U.S. History 24.A -- analyze information by comparing and contrasting, making inferences, etc.
- U.S. History 24.C -- explain and apply different methods that historians use to interpret the past using primary sources
- U.S. History 24.D -- use the process of historical inquiry to interpret evidence
- U.S. History 24.F -- identify bias in visual material

**Activity:** Students work in pairs for this activity

**Step 1:** Introduce the four photographs used in this lesson.

**Step 2:** Discuss the three vocabulary words, provenance, content, and bias.

**Step 3:** Students work together to answer the questions on the student handout. Answers can be written or oral.

**Closure:** Students write individually to answer the following questions:

1. How do you know your answers to the questions on the student handout are right?
2. What problems did you encounter trying to answer the questions.
3. What conclusion can you draw about information in photographs from this experience?

**Modification:** Make transparencies out of one or more of the photographs and go through the steps of evaluating them orally in a whole class activity.

**Student Product:** written answers to closure questions

**Assessment or evaluation:** written answers to closure questions

**Extension:** Choose other photographs from the website to analyze using a historical perspective.

**Video Resource:**

[http://dev.lib.utexas.edu/~kg/dev-photoj/cah\\_reading.html](http://dev.lib.utexas.edu/~kg/dev-photoj/cah_reading.html)

“Reading Photographs” – Don Carleton, Ph.D.

## Reading Historical Photographs

### Student Handout

Photographs and other types of images can be important tools in understanding historical events and time periods.

#### I. Examine the photographs:

1. Begin by taking in the whole picture. Notice what your emotional and physical reactions are to the picture.
2. Then examine the picture in a methodical way. Draw imaginary lines on the photograph that divide the picture into four quadrants.
3. Look carefully at each quadrant for details that are not seen on first glance. Sometimes a magnifying glass is helpful to see details that are only apparent on close inspection.
4. After you have carefully examined the photograph, think critically about what you are seeing. Remember that photographs can be used to distort or misrepresent reality, as well as to report accurately.

#### II. Now answer the following questions:

1. Can you identify a date that the picture was taken? If so, when? How do you know?
2. Can you tell where the picture came from? Who owned from the time it was photographed until you saw it? How do you know? (Establishing the history of an image is called "determining the provenance.")
3. What is the context in which the photograph was taken? Does the photograph record a spontaneous moment or was it a posed event?
4. Can you determine whom the photographer was and if he or she was an amateur or professional?
5. Is there a bias represented by the photograph? If so, what is it? How can you tell?
6. Why did the photographer shoot the image from this particular vantage point? How did circumstances limit the photographer's choices? Does this make a difference in how you understand what is going on in the photo?
7. What happened immediately before and after the picture was taken?

8. How do the clothing, modes of transportation, kinds of technology, and living conditions of people in the images help you understand the historical time period in which the picture was taken?

9. Can you deduce anything from the facial images? Is something emotional happening in the photograph?

10. Can you tell anything about the kinds of relationships the people in the image are involved in by the way they have arranged or grouped themselves in the photograph?

**Document Analysis Worksheet:**

For more information on how to examine images from a historical perspective go to:  
[http://www.archives.gov/digital\\_classroom/lessons/analysis\\_worksheets/photo.html](http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/lessons/analysis_worksheets/photo.html)