

Essential Lens: Analyzing Photographs Across the Curriculum
Disaster and Government Response: The Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, and the New Deal

Activity 2 Lesson Plan

This modified lesson plan was created by middle school teacher Donald Rose who is featured in the Essential Lens video, *Lives*.

Objectives:

- Students will analyze photos for effectiveness in conveying a message.
- Students will understand the plight of migrant families during “The Great Depression”.

CCSS:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

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.

Supplies:

Paper, pencils, set of 11x17 Dorothea Lange Migrant Mother series of photos, table sets of same photos at 8x11 in manila envelope with Lange quote on the outside, overhead (document camera) projector.

Prior to lesson:

Hang larger prints around room with space between them to allow groups of students to view and take notes without obstruction.

Introduction:

Ask students to sit at tables in groups of three or four. There should be paper and pencils on each table.

Post the following photographs on the document camera:

Sharecropper

Displaced Families

Migrant Workers

Dust Bowl

Great Depression

Ask students to define these terms to the best of their ability on a sheet of paper. Allow about two minutes to do this. Next, have a quick discussion with the whole group to construct meaning about these terms, support and fill in background as needed.

Explain to kids that prior to the Internet and social media sites, newspapers hired photographers to document events, places, people, etc. Also explain the FSA and its mission to document the challenges farmers faced during the Great Depression, with a goal to improve conditions. Dorothea Lange, who is the photographer who took the Migrant Mother photos, is just one of several FSA photographers. She took these on behalf of the FSA to document the plight of rural communities during this era.

Teaching to the Objective:

This is a carousel activity. Give small groups about two minutes to view each of the five photos and then rotate clockwise until they have seen all five.

Tell students to get up as groups and observe each photo. (Pass out recording sheet). Each photo should be labeled with a number. Have students fill in the space that corresponds with the picture number. Have them write down their observations. Remind them to take a long look, and make sure they both get close to the photo and stand back and look at every corner of the photo. After two minutes have them switch to the next photo. This will continue until your group has seen every photo.

When all groups have finished, have them go back to tables. Now instruct students to read the quote on the outside of the envelope (see Activity). Ask students to think about how this quote informs them of the experience of the photographer. Use this prompt by putting it on the overhead: *At your table discuss the photos and your individual observations. After you have discussed all photos, choose the photo that you think would tell the best story of the plight of rural communities during the Depression. Why do you think your chosen photo would be the best choice? Can you come to a group consensus about which photo would be the most persuasive?*

Students can now pull the photos from the envelope and use them to discuss their opinion. They should point out certain components of the photo. The discussion and their opinions should have support within the photos. There is no wrong answer as long as the student can substantiate their opinion with a photo. Tell groups to pick one photo that answers the above prompt and then share around the room. Groups should share their photo and share why they think it is the most persuasive.

Closing:

Talk about Migrant Mother. Put that photo up on the board or project it, and have students discuss why they think this was the photo the FSA chose to use to be the iconic one and why.

Reminder: Students will most likely want to know what happened to “Migrant Mother”. Review the *Disaster and Government Response* collection for more details.