

## Photographs as History: Photo Analysis Lesson Plan

**Description:** Students learn to analyze photographs from the First World War. Students choose a photo from the official First World War photograph collection and create a presentation in which they analyze the photo from the perspective of the photographer. In the conclusion of the lesson, students are asked to consider the role photographs can play in the study of history.

### Recommended Grade Range

All provinces and territories except Quebec: Grades 7 to 9

Quebec: Secondary 1 to 3

**Prerequisites:** This lesson should follow previous discussions and lessons on the First World War.

### Objectives:

- Students will analyze a photograph, making observations about its content;
- Students use these observations to draw conclusions;
- Students will use their historical imagination and their knowledge of the First World War to give a presentation in which they analyze a photo of their choice from the perspective of the photographer.

**Estimated Time:** 4 or 5 class periods

### Materials Required:

- Overhead transparencies of two official photos (if the equipment is available, you can project the image from the web site), or photocopies to hand out, downloaded from the resources section;
- Projector (if not using photocopies);
- Internet/computer lab access for 1-2 class periods *OR* printouts of photos for students;
- Copies of the War Photographer Worksheet;
- For background information on photo analysis, see Library and Archives Canada's Learning Centre section on decoding photographs.

### Lesson:

Note: Before starting the photo analysis, you may wish to review previously learned First World War material with students.

Explain to students that they will be looking at photos from the First World War and



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analyzing them. This is one way historians research the past, as photos can provide information that enriches our historical understanding.

Show the class one of the photos you have selected, and tell students that it was taken by an official Canadian war photographer. Model an analysis of the photograph for the class by clearly describing the people, objects, and setting of the photograph, and then inferring from this the mood of the photo, what additional information the caption provides, and why the photo might have been taken.

Now, show students a second photo. This time, guide students through an analysis of the photograph based on what has just been modeled. Use questions to prompt students to contribute their observations. Prompts may include:

- What is the caption?
- Are there people in the photograph?
- What do they look like?
- Who might they be?
- What are they doing?
- Where are they? What is in the background?
- Is the photo posed or spontaneous?
- Why might the photographer have taken the photo?
- What message do you think the photographer was trying to get across with this photograph?
- What if a new caption is written? Does the caption change how the photo is viewed?

Book one class period in the computer lab (you may need two), and ask students to select a First World War photo that interests them from the Official Photographs section of the Canadian War Museum's *Canada and the First World War* Web site. Alternatively, distribute printouts of a different photo from the archive to each student. Students will use their photo to do their own photo analysis.

Once students have selected or been assigned their photographs, distribute the War Photographer Worksheet. Ask students to complete the worksheet using their photos.

Students should present their findings to the class speaking as the photographer who took their photo. They should explain why they took the photo, how the content of the photo reflects their intended message, and describe the setting in which they took the photograph.

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### Wrap-up:

Ask the students to consider the usefulness of photographs in the study of history? What do they add? What are the weaknesses of photographs? What role does the photograph play in documenting events?

### Assessment:

Based on both the presentation and the completed worksheet:

- Students should be able to describe the visual elements of the photograph, and draw conclusions about the message the photograph conveys.
- Students should also be able to use their historical imaginations to 'get inside the head' of the photographer.

### Extension Activities:

- Students use disposable cameras to create photo essays that describe their lives.
- Students act as newspaper reporters, creating news story based on the events depicted in one or more First World War photos. Remind students to be descriptive - newspapers were one of the only sources of news during the First World War.