



Photographs as History - Photograph Analysis Lesson Plan

Description: Students analyze official Canadian First World War photographs and make connections to issues, values and events reflected in the photographs. Students demonstrate their knowledge of photo analysis and the First World War by writing a short magazine article based on an event or phenomenon depicted in a photo of their choice.

Recommended Grade Range

All provinces and territories except Quebec: Grades 10 to 12
Quebec: Secondary 4 and 5

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

Objectives:

Students will:

- analyze a photograph, making observations and inferences;
- connect the photographs with the historical context in which they were produced;
- develop magazine articles to demonstrate their knowledge of the First World War.

Estimated Time: 3-4 class periods

Materials Required:

- Overhead transparencies of two official photos or copies 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;
- Copies of the Photograph Analysis 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.

Warm-up

Write the following question on the board:

- *Is a photo worth a thousand words? Why?*

Ask students to break into groups of three or four to brainstorm responses. When groups have had time to discuss and respond to this question, reconvene the class for a

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discussion of the student groups' responses. Possible answers include:

- Photos can show us how people lived during the war;
- Photos can tell us new information about what people thought was important during the war;
- Photos can reflect the values and cultures of the time;
- Photos help us understand what life was like in the past;
- Photos can give us information about how objects were made or used, and how they looked in the past.

Main Activity

Explain to students that they will be analyzing photos from the First World War and show the class one of the photos you have selected, with its title. First, ask students to make general observations about the contents of the photo.

- Are there people in the photograph?
- Who are they?
- What are they doing?
- What expressions are on their faces?
- What are they wearing?
- Is the photo posed or spontaneous?
- What objects are in the photograph?
- What is the relationship between the people and the objects?
- Where do you think the photograph was taken?
- What is the overall mood of the photo?
- Where is your eye drawn?

Next, ask students to interpret the photo (and its title) in its historical context.

- How does this photograph fit into the broader events of the First World War?
- What attitudes does this photo suggest about war in general?
- How do you think photos such as this affected people back in Canada?
- How might this photo contribute to Lord Beaverbrook's goal of recording the Canadian war effort?

Repeat this process with the second photo. Once again, prompt students with questions about the content of the photo, as well as their interpretations of it within its historical context.

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Now that they have practiced photo analysis, students will write a magazine article on an issue or event depicted in a photograph of their choice. Book one class period in the computer lab (you may need two) to allow students to select a First World War photo that interests them. Once photos have been selected, distribute the Photograph Analysis Worksheet as a tool to guide students in their photograph analysis.

Through interpretive analysis of their photographs, students should be able to identify an issue or event emergent from the photo. Possible topics raised by the photos include:

- War-time propaganda;
- Soldiers' living conditions;
- Canada and the British Empire during the war;
- Medical care at the front;
- Canadian soldiers in a specific battle;
- Women's contributions to the war effort.

Through library and internet research (at least one class period and homework time as necessary) and analysis of their chosen photo, students develop a short magazine article (2-3 pages) discussing an issue or event related to their photo.

Teachers may also wish to have students present their articles to the class.

Assessment:

- The student should be able to write a detailed description of the contents of the photo.
- The student should be able to draw conclusions from the contents of the photo; for example, the message the photo sends, the mood it conveys, etc., and how these are created by the content of the photo, the way it is arranged, the lighting, etc.
- The student should be able to connect the content and messages in the photo to events or issues from the First World War, and provide a clear summary of this connection using appropriate supporting research.

Extension Activities:

- Photocopy students' articles and photos, and bind/staple them together to create a class magazine.
- Students analyze images from recent conflicts (from newspapers, the internet, magazines), and compare them to First World War images. Have depictions of war changed? Have values changed? What similarities are there between photographs from the two eras? What differences?