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History Literacy and Visual Informational Texts: Scrutinizing Photographs Beyond their Borders

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Historical thinking is a pattern of cognition, not simply comprehension of historical events (Martin & Monte-Sano, 2008; Wineburg & Martin, 2009). As historians examine a primary source, they consider its type, context, corroboration with other sources, and all variables surrounding its source, which includes the source's intent, credibility, and bias/perspective (Nokes, 2011; VanSledright, 2014; Wineburg, 1998, 2001). State and national educational initiatives require students deploy such habits of mind, or heuristics. For example, students are to analyze primary sources, reference textual evidence, identify perspective, distinguish implicit from explicit bias, juxtapose multiple and diverse sources, and extricate fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment (NGA, 2010; CCSO, 2012; NCSS, 2013; PARCC, 2012). Simply viewing a historical photograph or reading a letter is not historical thinking.

Historical thinking can be initiated at young ages, practiced over time, and refined with age, yet scholars contend students' success relies largely on teachers' selection of rich informational texts (Baildon & Baildon, 2012; Bickford, 2013; Wineburg, 2001). Teachers integrate various text-based and visual-based informational texts that engage, but do not exhaust, students' cognitive resources (Martin & Wineburg, 2008; Nokes, Dole, & Hacker, 2007). Students of all ages—children, adolescents, undergraduates, and practicing teachers—gravitate to photography, which are visually appealing and present a seemingly transparent, digestible message (Barton & Levstik, 2003; Callahan, 2013; Loewen, 2010; Wineburg, Martin, & Monte-Sano, 2011). Photographs *suggest* the events happened as they appear and connote a false sense of impartiality. Scholars have explored students' analyses of content within photographs' borders; the findings are robust yet incomplete because not all elements were considered (Callahan, 2013; Foster, Hoge, & Rosch, 1999; Tally & Goldenberg, 2005). Scholarship has not considered *all* the pathways that influence viewers' understanding. Even the analysis guide and sample questions suggested by the *Library of Congress* (Figure One) overlooks how a photograph's title inscribes meaning both within and beyond the photograph's borders.



Reader's Guide
Analyzing Photographs & Prints

Observe

Ask students to identify and note details.

Sample Questions:

Describe what you see. • What do you notice first? • What people and objects are shown? • How are they arranged? • What is the physical setting? • What, if any, words do you see? • What other details can you see?

Reflect

Encourage students to generate and test hypotheses about the source.

Why do you think this image was made? • What's happening in the image? • When do you think it was made? • Who do you think was the audience for this image? • What tools were used to create this? • What can you learn from examining this image? • If someone made this today, what would be different? • What would be the same?

Question

Invite students to ask questions that lead to more observations and reflections.

What do you wonder about...

who? • what? • when? • where? • why? • how?

Further Investigation

Help students to identify questions appropriate for further investigation, and to develop a research strategy for finding answers.

Sample Question: What more do you want to know, and how can you find out?

A few follow-up activity ideas:

Beginning

Write a caption for the image.

Intermediate

Select an image. Predict what will happen one minute after the scene shown in the image. One hour after? Explain the reasoning behind your predictions.

Advanced

Have students expand or alter textbook or other printed explanations of history based on images they study.

For more tips on using primary sources, go to

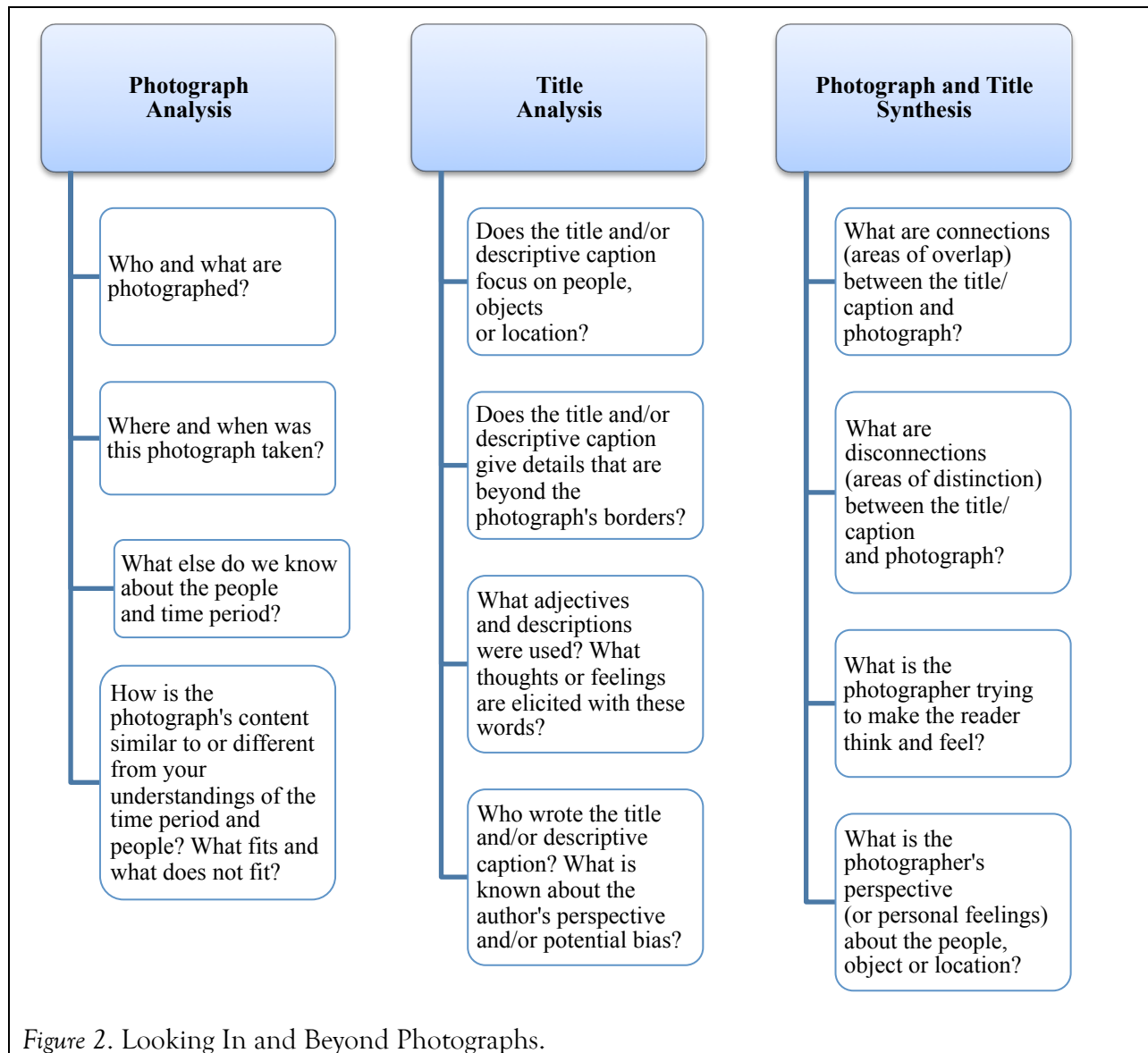
<http://www.loc.gov.teachers>

Figure 1. Teacher's Guide Analyzing Photographs & Prints. Retrieved from http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Photos_and_Prints.pdf

Historians and visual literacy scholars recognize the photographer's influence in selecting a single frame from a sequence of events or an image where the subjects' facial features make announcements that the subjects may not have intended (Buckingham, 2003; NAMLE, 2014; Nokes, 2011; Wineburg, 2001). A viewer's understanding of a photograph can be complicated by considering elements beyond the borders of the photograph, specifically its title and description. This is akin to how an author's influence extends beyond the narrative and into the title, front



cover, and back cover description. Viewed differently, a single photograph in a digital archive was purposefully picked from dozens (or thousands), carefully titled and/or captioned, and described in detail. The contextualization process is intentional, precise, and covered in the photographers' figurative fingerprints. For students to holistically evaluate photographs, they should consider influences beyond the camera. We propose a new model, *Looking In and Beyond Photographs*, which guides novices to consider these visual informational texts from multiple angles.



The first column centers on the photograph; it directs students towards the aforementioned historian's heuristics: source, context, corroboration, and credibility (Bickford, 2013; Nokes, 2011; Wineburg et al., 2011). The second column focuses on the title; it induces students to reflect upon how the title impacts their view of the photograph along with the writer's perspective and intentionality behind the words. The third column guides students to consider



the title and photograph in concert; it directs students' reflection on their interconnectivity and enables reconsideration of their initial analysis.

Looking In and Beyond Photographs can bolster students' historical scrutiny of photographs. It is situated at the nexus of content area literacy, visual literacy, and historical thinking. Visual literacy and historical thinking are rooted in the theoretical frameworks of sociocultural theory and cognitive constructivism (Nokes, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978, 1985; Wineburg, 2001). The interconnections between visual literacy and historical thinking manifest in both media literacy and Common Core, which provide space for students to explore the relationships between authors of diverse, multiple, and competing informational texts and their intended audiences (Buckingham, 2003; NAMLE, 2014). The subsequent sections are sated with texts and tasks that guide students' holistic scrutiny of photographs.

Informational Texts

Scholars, including those who developed the classroom guide for photograph analysis at the *Library of Congress* (2014), have detailed how to facilitate students' historical contextualization of photographs. Previous research targets the encoded messages—explicitly, implicitly, and unintended—within a photograph's borders (Callahan, 2013; Foster et al., 1999; Tally & Goldenberg, 2005). The elements that influence understanding manifest beyond these borders as well, as *Looking In and Beyond Photographs* addresses. The subsequent subsections are organized around the under-examined avenues of influence. The historical themes and eras are purposefully mixed to demonstrate the adaptability of this approach.

Emotive Title

An author intentionally titles a book to both reference content and elicit attention. The author's influence on the book's title for the reader is akin to a photographer's influence on the photograph's title for the viewer (although at times the photographs are titled by someone other than the photographer). The influence is clear yet often overlooked. Previous methods for photograph analysis, including from the *Library of Congress* (2014), do not address this avenue of influence (Callahan, 2013; Foster et al., 1999; Tally & Goldenberg, 2005). Viewers should not disregard the various and intentional attempts to influence how the photograph is interpreted. Students' attention can easily be directed towards such paths of influence. Figures Three and Four are used for instructive purposes.

Figure Three was taken to illustrate the human implications of poverty. To capture viewers' attention and sympathy, the photographer selected three cherubic, solemn, and dirty children and not the deplorable shanty in the alley or the intoxicated mother referenced in the title. The photograph is titled with demonstrative adjectives that provide additional information not known to the viewer, which compels the viewer to visualize—and potentially empathize with—the context. Only the children remain tangible as *deplorable*, *shanty*, *wretched*, *starving*, and *state of beastly intoxication*—all selected words from the title—contribute to an elusive understanding of the scene. This photograph would be viewed quite differently without the impassioned word choices and disturbing details within the title.



Figure 3. Estabrook. (1890) Picture of three children found by the Humane Society in a shanty in an alley bounded by Four-and-a-half, Sixth, K and L Streets, in a deplorable condition--wretched and starving, their father dead, and their mother in a state of beastly intoxication / Estabrook, Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/94505356>

The title's influence on the viewer's understanding is similarly discernible in Figure Four. While the photograph centers on the United States Capitol building, the brief title conveys much more sentiment. As in Figure Three, the viewer of Figure Four is compelled to do more than simply grasp the content within the borders of the photograph. Hyperbole about the "most beautiful building in America" compels a digression *beyond* the photograph's boundaries and towards pride and sentiment of country. This photograph would be viewed quite differently without the heartfelt remark.



Figure 4. (1904) United States Capitol from N.E., most beautiful building in America, Washington. Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003671064>

The influence of emotive language within the title is clear yet *only* when it is brought to viewers' attention. Adolescent viewers must be trained like apprentices to recognize the deliberate inducement subtly located in the title. Left to their own devices, adolescents may not even read the title much less recognize its deliberate use of language to influence viewers' understanding. This skill must be taught. For illustrative purposes, J. K. Rowling's influence on the potential reader would be apparent if she had titled her most famous book, *Young Wizard with Disarming Disposition and Iniquitous Home Life Engages in Horatio Alger-like Ascension*.

Prolonged Title

The yarn about Rowling's title was conspicuously lengthy. Titles are usually concise yet engaging. Lengthy titles are anomalous and elicit attention. Figures Four and Five are unwieldy in length and indicate Lewis Hine's, the photographer and author of the title, intent to influence how his work is viewed.



Figure 5. Hine, L. (1911) Olga Schubert, 855 Gruenwald St. The little 5 yr. old after a day's work that began about 5:00 A.M. helping her mother in the Biloxi Canning Factory, begun at an early hour, was tired out and refused to be photographed. The mother said, "Oh, She's ugly." Both she and other persons said picking shrimp was very hard on the fingers. See also photo 2021. Location: Biloxi, Mississippi. Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ncl2004002724/PP/>



Figure 6. Hine, L. (1914) Flossie Britt, 6 years old has been working several months steadily as spinner in the Lumberton Cotton Mills. Makes 30 cents a day. Lonnie Britt, 7 years old has been working steadily for 1 year as spinner. Makes 40 cents a day. Ages and data given me by their grandmother at home, and I saw them going and coming early and late. 2 smallest in group. When Mr. Swift made his last visit to Lumberton he was shown through these mills by Mr. Jennings, who asked Mr. Swift how many children he thought there were under age. Mr. Swift said about 20, Mr. Jennings told him there were at least 30 and called one of his men to prove he was right. He told Mr. Swift that all mills were employing children under age. N.B. SEE OTHER SIDE BEFORE USING LABEL (over) Important. [verso of card]: N.B. April 1915: A subsequent visit to this family brought out the information that Flossie was 8 years old and Lonnie 10 years old when I saw them. That the boss asked the mother to bring Lonnie to work, and that she worked about 1/2 year as steadily as she could. That another boss asked the mother to bring Flossie to work and that the girl soon became sick. The mother became disgusted and quit the mill for life on her father's farm where they are now located. There was no need for the children working. Since they moved to the farm the superintendent and 2 other persons visited the family and tried to intimidate them and get them to make mis-statements about the children's ages and work. See Hine report for additional details, all given to Mr. Hine in the presence of a prominent Lumberton attorney. Location: Lumberton, North Carolina. Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ncl2004004154/PP/>

Hine's Figure Five's title—in 68 words—describes how the young five year old girl first resisted being photographed due to fatigue, was insulted by her mother, and exposed to painful day-long labor. Sixty-eight words are more often seen in a run-on sentence than a title. Hine's title in Figure Six uses 273 words to depict both the ubiquity and physical implications of early 20th century child labor. Paragraphs, not titles, usually contain about three hundred words. Hine's photographs illustrated both how young children were exposed to brutal conditions and



implicated adults, present and absent. Hine's titles, however, conveyed far more content than the images could store. In doing so, Hine's title ensured each photograph transmitted far more than one thousand words.

Students should be asked to consider all that is known about who wrote the title and the caption, if there is one. Students could research Lewis Hine, the photographer and title writer for Figures Five and Six, to discover his interest in exposing the underside of society, capitalism, and industrialization. As a muckraker, Hine's unhidden agenda provides viewers with relevant context. This simple inquiry gives students important content that complicates interpretation. Figures Three and Four spawn a muddled inquiry as the former provides only a name—Estabrook—and the latter proffers less. The absence of an easy answer or quick information evokes questions about the organization that contracted the photographer or the company that printed the photograph. Such information is as crucial to photograph analysis as the source is in analysis of a diary or letter.

The previous examples indicate how titles provide information from outside the photographs' borders and in doing so shape the viewers' understandings. An analogous example would be if J. K. Rowling had used the book summary on the back cover for its title. Specific heuristics, or habits of mind, are needed to detect such attempts to influence. History education researchers have detailed instructional procedures that illuminate the perspective, bias, credibility, and context of specific sources and can be adapted for a variety of students' ages (Bickford, 2013; Nokes, 2011; Wineburg et al., 2011). State and national initiatives prescribe similar cognitive tasks, which begin in the elementary grades and spiral with increasing complexity throughout high school (NGA, 2010; CCSSO, 2012; NCSS, 2013). The subsequent section provides tangible methods and assessments that extend the previous suggestions.

Classroom Applications

Thoughtful and purposeful reading of photographs' titles enables further literacy skill development. Teachers may incorporate scaffolding, like guiding questions that elicit students' prior knowledge or vocabulary word banks to assist students' grasp of domain-specific language. With experience, students will more readily analyze the title during photograph analysis. The following classroom activities cohere with state and national initiatives (NGA, 2010, p. 61; PARCC, 2012, p. 40-66), elicit students' criticality (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), and foster history literacy skills for students of all ages (Bickford, 2013; Nokes, 2011; Wineburg, 2001).

Examining the Photograph Using Only the Title

This activity focuses students' attention strictly on the title. For illustrative purposes, we selected photographs by Lewis Hine and from the National Child Labor Committee Collection. Like Dorothea Lange, Ansel Adams, and other photographers who did not task others with titling their work, Mr. Hine had a specific objective when labeling his photos; the selected titles are ideal for this activity. The teacher can provide students with Figure Seven, *Examining the Photograph Using Only the Title*, which includes both focus questions and (abridged) informational texts. The atypical questions direct attention towards significant details that could potentially be overlooked.



Ask students to consider:

- What is the main idea of this paragraph? Underline phrases or words that support your main idea. Circle words that you feel are important words – such as names of people or places.
- Look at the words you circled and underlined. How are they connected?
- Consider the title length of books and paintings, how does this compare? What does the length of the title *do* (i.e. where-and how-does it guide you)?
- What adjectives or descriptive words did the author use? How did the author try to elicit emotion or reveal bias or perspective?
- What information guided your inference about the main idea?
- Re-read the last sentence. How does this sentence relate to the rest of the paragraph?

1. National Child Labor Committee. No. 435. Flashlight photo of children on night shift going to work at 6 P.M. on a cold, dark December night. They do not come out again until 6:00 A.M. When they went home the next morning they were all drenched by a heavy, cold rain and had few or no wraps. Two of the smaller girls with three other sisters work on night shift and support a big, lazy father who complains he is not well enough to work. He loafs around the country store. Location: Whitnel, North Carolina.
2. Going back to work. Youngest boy is Richard Millsap. The family record in bible says he is 11 years old - born Jan 22, 1903 (doubtful), and father says 12 years old. He appears to be under 9. Works every day at spinning, and has been working for some weeks. Boss saw investigator photographing him and whistled to him to get out. This photograph was gotten as he went in to work. Then boss took him off his regular job and put him helping others. Mother was furious at boss for not giving Richard and sister (a little older) more steady work. "He keeps changin em around and helpin others. I'll tell him that if he doesn't give em plenty of work there is plenty of mills that will." Father and mother both well and able to support family.] Location: Opelika, Alabama.
3. Mary and Minnie Gillim, fourteen and fifteen years old. They were commencing to attend the Mill School at Avondale, and had been to school but two weeks in their lives. Were in the low first grade in company with a child of six years. At that time (Nov. 30/10) their father was trying to take them out of school and put them back into the cotton mill. He has no obvious occupation. Location: Birmingham, Tennessee.

Figure 7. Examining the Photograph Using Only the Title.

Note. These questions are suggestions; teachers are encouraged to modify as needed.

Digital Creation Based on Title

Creation is the highest tier of critical thinking (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). It manifests when students creatively demonstrate newly generated understandings. Constructing an image based on the title is a logical extension of title analysis that facilitates students' criticality and creativity. Students can generate digital creations using various computer-based technology,



Internet resources, and helpful steps to transform abstract concepts—like those in the titles—into concrete images (Bickford, 2012).

We envision a three step process that begins after students engage in a discussion surrounding the questions from *Examining the Photograph Using Only the Title*. First, students should select a title and generate a digital creation following the previously-outlined steps; concept maps and substitution lists are effective scaffolding for students' creations (Bickford, 2012). The teacher can then print and post students' digital creations anonymously around the room. The digitally modified images posted around the room will likely elicit students' interest because of the boundless ways the titles can be visually represented. Finally, students should view their peers' digital creations and speculate at the specific title that inspired each digital creation. Students' individual analyses and speculations manifest as interpretative discussions, all of which originates from students' digital creations. One student's product serves both as an indication of her criticality and a catalyst for her peers' critical interpretations.

Photograph/Title Match

The first two steps are both interconnected and work well in concert. They also guide students' involvement in the third. We view Figure Eight, *Photograph and Title Match*, as a puzzle comprised of titles, photographs, and questions. Students first viewed the titles in *Examining the Photograph Using Only the Title* (Figure Seven) and then used the bibliographic information during digital creation. They are now tasked with finding complementary pieces. Students then answer the accompanying questions, which elicits metacognition about how identified corresponding informational texts.



<p>1. Hine, L. (1908) National Child Labor Committee. No. 435. Flashlight photo of children on night shift going to work at 6 P.M. on a cold, dark December night. They do not come out again until 6:00 A.M. When they went home the next morning they were all drenched by a heavy, cold rain and had few or no wraps. Two of the smaller girls with three other sisters work on night shift and support a big, lazy father who complains he is not well enough to work. He loafs around the country store. Location: Whitnel, North Carolina. Retrieved from http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ncl2004001355/pp/</p>	
<p>2. Hine, L. (1914) Going back to work. Youngest boy is Richard Millsap. The family record in bible says he is 11 years old - born Jan 22, 1903 (doubtful), and father says 12 years old. He appears to be under 9. Works every day at spinning, and has been working for some weeks. Boss saw investigator photographing him and whistled to him to get out. This photograph was gotten as he went in to work. Then boss took him off his regular job and put him helping others. Mother was furious at boss for not giving Richard and sister (a little older) more steady work. "He keeps changin em around and helpin others. I'll tell him that if he doesn't give em plenty of work there is plenty of mills that will." Father and mother both well and able to support family.] Location: Opelika, Alabama. Retrieved from http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ncl2004004124/pp/</p>	
<p>3. Hine, L. (1910) Mary and Minnie Gillim, fourteen and fifteen years old. They were commencing to attend the Mill School at Avondale, and had been to school but two weeks in their lives. Were in the low first grade in company with a child of six years. At that time (Nov. 30/10) their father was trying to take them out of school and put them back into the cotton mill. He has no obvious occupation. Location: Birmingham, Tennessee. Retrieved from http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ncl2004001228/pp/</p>	

1. Look at the title and image together. Were your assumptions about them separately correct? What information is clearer now? What items in the image relate to the words in the title?

2. Does the image support or contradict the title? How?

3. What is a common theme within these photos? If you could name this collection, what would it be?

Figure 8. Photograph and Title Match.



This process compels students' criticality about how the title influences and complicates students' understandings of the diverse elements of a single photograph. As they reexamine the same informational texts with fresh eyes, students are better able to appreciate both elements. This process, up through the current step, fosters students' partitioned analysis of each element much like an apprentice examining the product from several angles.

Comprehensive Analyses

Just as an apprentice develops skills through practice and the completion of increasingly difficult tasks, the next logical step for students to experience is a comprehensive analysis of photographs. We developed Figure Nine, *Comprehensive Analysis*, for this purpose. Students will already have experienced questions from Figure One, which originate from the *Library of Congress* (2014), to guide their analysis of the content within a photograph's borders. Students will also have experience with questions from *Examining the Photograph Using Only the Title* (Figure Seven) when analyzing content outside of the photograph's borders.



Mydens, C. (1935) Poor children playing on sidewalk, Georgetown, Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1997000138/pp>



Gardner, A. (1865) President Lincoln and his son Thaddeus. The last photograph the president sat for / A. Gardner, photographer, Washington. Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002722770>



Palmer, A. (between 1941 and 1942) The four freedoms. It's serious business, this milk drinking. Maybe this youngster is thinking of the millions of youngsters in other lands who can never take their milk for granted. Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/oem2002010053/PP/>

Figure 9. Comprehensive Analyses.



Students will likely be more effective and efficient in their photograph and title analysis. For each photograph, teachers should elicit students' prior knowledge about the year or era of the photograph. Students' prior knowledge about the Great Depression, the Civil War's completion (and Lincoln's impending death), and the Second World War influence interpretations. For each photograph, teachers can ask students which *single* word appears most conspicuous. Words like *poor* (children), *last* (photograph the president sat for), and *never* (take their milk for granted) each elicits attention to details and understandings that are beyond the photographs' borders.

Adaptations

These strategies can be modified in various ways. Teachers could have students view photographs without titles, record their analyses, view photographs with titles, reevaluate the photographs, and compare their first impressions with their second. A teacher could also have half of a class view photographs without titles and record their analyses while the second half views and evaluates photographs with titles. Students could then break into small collaborative interpretation groups for students to share and compare. Either approach might more efficiently distinguish the title's impact on a viewer's interpretation of the photograph than the more extended yet systematic methods proffered in previous subsections.

Our proposed photograph analysis tool, *Looking In and Beyond Photographs* (Figure Two), facilitates students' interpretation beyond the photograph's borders with more systematic consideration of the diverse ways in which a title influences viewers' impressions. It induces students to think in ways previously proffered graphic organizers (Callahan, 2013; Foster et al., 1999; Tally & Goldenberg, 2005) and analysis guides (Figure One) did not. Intended for photographs titled by the photographer, it can be adapted for photographs that are captioned in other publications. Analysis of the description provided by a non-photographer provides both a new dimension and, considering the numerous print publications and online repositories, numerous possibilities.

Theory Into (Initial) Practice

To start, select a historical topic that was likely captured by photographers. Safe choices begin in the mid-19th century. Explore digital resources that provide both the photograph and its source. The Library of Congress provides both and is free for classroom use. Examine the photographs of your selected historical topic. Consider both the content within the photograph and the photograph's title and description as you browse. Gather numerous photographs from various photographers that represent diverse views—both literal and figurative—of the selected historical topic. Consider implementing (and possibly adapting) the strategies suggested within *Classroom Applications*. These steps enable you to more effectively facilitate students' analysis of all the elements within a photograph.



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