



Immigration and Photography: The Case of Lewis Hine

Curriculum Unit 04.03.03
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Introduction

The goal of this unit is to introduce students to documentary photography and how it records the life and conditions of individuals and their communities; to help students develop an understanding of how photographs are constructed; and how documentary photography can express a point of view. Documentary photography describes an approach to photography which reveals the subjective nature of an individual or group of people and their place in the larger society. Documentary photographers use their camera to capture moments which can transcend the individual, and speak a universal language of memory and experience. Lewis Hine, one of the more notable and influential documentary photographers at the turn of the century, examined the integration of immigrants into the larger society.

The materials used will be Hine's photographs *Climbing into the Land of Promise* , Ellis Island, 1905 ; *Looking for Lost Baggage* , Ellis Island (1906) ; *Climbing Into America* (1908) ; *Children on Street* , Lower East Side, N.Y.C..

The images can be downloaded and reproduced for classroom use. Photos can be projected onto a screen directly from the computer; downloaded and photocopied onto acetates to be projected for class use; or color photocopied and distributed for each student's use.

This unit is intended for intermediate fluency ESL students. Research indicates that academic achievement and school completion are significantly enhanced when English language learners are able to use their native language to study academic subjects. Not only does support in the native language facilitate English development, but it also helps academic skills transfer across languages. Students will be encouraged to translate into English the initial verbal reactions to the photographs in the unit. Lessons will later focus on developing vocabulary, written and verbal expression.

Overview

It is important for students to understand the art and concept of photography. It is not just about pointing and pressing a button; it's a decision-making process. It is about capturing a moment, understanding the image being portrayed and the effects it conveys to the observer. Photography also helps kids look much more carefully at the world around them and helps them to better understand images, especially media, which they're bombarded with every day. This unit will introduce photography in three stages, first by introducing a brief history of photography, second, by focusing on the life and works of Lewis Hine and third, discussing the subject of immigration as a theme in photography and allowing students the opportunity to compare, contrast and photograph their communities.

In order for students to grasp the importance of images and the power they have to convey messages without words, good modeling is essential. The teacher is introducing something new and exciting, students will lack the necessary vocabulary to communicate what they see effectively therefore students will be especially intent on reproducing what you do. The key concepts are being consistent, being purposeful and demonstrating respect. Introducing students to the invention of the photography and how it first began to manifest itself into the world will provide students with some background knowledge helpful in providing a context for the lesson.

A Brief History of Photography

The daguerreotype, an early form of photography, was developed in France and introduced in the United States by Samuel Morse in 1839. Using light sensitized metal plates and a camera obscura, it was possible to capture the reflected image. This new form of art was able to capture expressions of reality that were unseen in American art. For example, the popularity of the daguerreotype is revealed in the numerous portraits that were taken by daguerreotypists, at least one per town and often traveling, wielding their trade.

The development of glass negatives in the 1850's allowed for sharper and more stable images and the printing of several positive images from the same negative. As the United States embarked on a new era of social and economic change fueled by technological advances, photographers were there to record as best they could.

In the early 1900's, photographs and photographers began to influence government social policy. Photographers began "documenting" what they saw with photographs. Many of the photographs were taken by Lewis W. Hine.

The Life and Works of Lewis Hine

Lewis Hine was born in Wisconsin in 1874. His father died when he was only 16, forcing him to begin work at an early age. He left home to study educational theory at the University of Chicago, perhaps with John Dewey, and was encouraged by his friend, Frank Manny, to join him in New York as an assistant teacher of nature study and geography. He began photographing the immigrants on Ellis Island in 1905 and continued portraying their lives on the Lower East Side of Manhattan (in New York City) through the early decades of the century. (Ellis Island in Upper New York Bay, southwest of Manhattan, served as the main point of arrival for immigrants to the United States from 1892 to 1943.)

Lewis Hine is an important American photographer because he was able to capture the definitive realities of American life that we now take for granted: In *Climbing into the Land of Promise*, Ellis Island, 1905, the harsh and exhausted look of immigrants arriving at Ellis Island; In *Children on Street, Lower East Side, N.Y.C.*, the horrific conditions families were forced to live and work in, overcrowded homes and streets where children were left to fend for themselves. In *Looking for Lost Baggage, Ellis Island*, the images of the woman and children surrounded by their belongings amidst a mass of other lost immigrants evokes feeling of displacement and anxiety that anyone who travels, let alone moves, to a foreign country empathizes with.

Hine's photographic career began in a period of social ferment and reform. In 1899 Florence Kelley had come to New York to administer the National Consumer League, with the Child Labor Committee, was to be the spearhead of the movement for protective legislation for woman and child workers. In 1908, he became a staff photographer for the National Child Labor Committee and also for the magazine *Charities and Commons*, later called *Survey*. This magazine gave Hine his earliest support and publication. His photos of child laborers throughout the country and of working-class families in the immigrant neighborhoods of New York were meant to reveal, but also to educate. The plight of the newly arrived immigrant in seek of the American dream of wealth and prosperity brought an overwhelming sense of compassion as symbols of endurance and a country that would deliver on its promises. Photographing extremely poor and marginalized immigrants encouraged middle class reformers and wealthy philanthropists to come together and devise social reform legislation. Later in life, Hine was commissioned by The Farm Security Administration (FSA) to photograph the devastating images of the Depression in a photography project that later served as a guide for much of the New Deal policy.

Hine traveled across the United States photographing children working in factories and in one 12 month period he covered over 12,000 miles. Compared to other documentary photographers of the time his photographs were less shocking than they were accurate. To take such photos he sneaked into factories disguised as a fire inspector. He continued to bombard publications with his child labor photos until "the whole country is so sick and tired of the whole business that when the time for action comes, child labor pictures will be records of the past."

In 1916, Congress passed legislation to protect children and restrictions were placed on the employment of children under 14 years of age in factories and shops. Owen Lovejoy, Chairman of the National Child Labor Committee, wrote, "The work Hine did for this reform was more responsible than all other efforts in bringing the need to public attention."

Hine began to work for the Red Cross during the First World War and visited Europe where he began to photograph the impact of the war on French and Belgian civilians. He then returned to the United States and

in 1930-1931 photographed the construction of the Empire State Building, with one of his most famous photos entitled, *Men at Work*. The Red Cross hired him again to photograph the consequences of the drought in Arkansas and Kentucky. Despite these assignments he had difficulty earning enough money from this photography. In 1940 he lost his home after failing to pay loans and died on November 3rd, 1940 in extreme poverty.

Theme: Immigration

The “foreignness” of the immigrant has often been exaggerated in drawings and cartoons carried by the popular press and in advertisements. Such negative images of ethnic and racial minorities have created and reinforced barriers to social progress and integration. At the same time, however, the plight of the immigrants (who were crowded into tiny apartments; restricted, for all practical purposes, to the ghettos of the cities and forced to work for substandard wages) became of great concern to a group of reformers and progressive social critics around the turn of the century. These critics and reformers fought for better working conditions, better housing, and better education for American immigrants.¹

The students I instruct emigrated with their families predominantly from Central and South America but also from other parts of the world and are no strangers to immigration. They are often disenfranchised and isolated from mainstream American culture and society. Migration and adaptation to a new country and social environment carry with it consequences that are not solely limited to language barriers. It is important to address these issues when taking into account our second language learners needs. How does the need to cope with our physical environment shape our social behavior, and our material culture? What changes take place or have taken place within our lives is a direct result of moving to a different location? There are a number of reasons for movement even within a country from native areas into the cities: political, religious and economic. Students will be encouraged to share their experiences and come to understand the universal messages put forth in Hine’s photographs.

The Hine photographs we will be describing were made in a phase of industrial expansion and the United States wanted cheap labor. Through Ellis Island passed as many as 5000 immigrants a day. From 1906 to 1926 (the period covered by the Hine series) approximately 14,000,000 men, women and children entered America through the bottleneck of Ellis Island. In 1907 alone the total was 1,290,000, while from 1820 to the present it is over 38,000,000. When immigration was restricted in 1926, the yearly total dropped to 300,000. As the 20th century began, millions of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe poured into Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and other U.S. cities. In New York, the nation’s largest city, more than half of the population was foreign-born. The pace and size of U.S. cities were different than anything experienced by most immigrants. Whether they came from villages or small cities, little in their past prepared them for the crowded streets, blaring traffic, towering skyscrapers, and roaring subways of large urban centers like New York. Many of these cities were marked by great diversity. Neighborhoods were defined by class, religion, ethnicity and race. For example in New York City, bias forced most of the city’s 50,000 African-Americans into Hell’s Kitchen, Harlem and pockets of Brooklyn. Southern Italians, who were considered “black” by some New Yorkers, were also targets of racial discrimination.

As new immigrants settled downtown, New Yorkers with older roots in the city moved uptown or to the city’s

outer boroughs, such as the Bronx. Subways, trolley lines, railroads, bridges, and ferries made possible this escape from the inner city. Despite all their differences, millions of New Yorkers read some of the same newspapers, saw the same movies, laughed at the same comic strips, mixed in public spaces like Coney Island, and wore mass-produced fashions that blurred class distinctions.

By introducing the theme of immigration in this unit, as it relates to the photos and this particular time of American history, it is important for students to relate their personal immigrant experiences to the lesson. How are the events and experiences similar or different to what immigrants today may confront upon their arrival to the United States? Are cities and neighborhoods still defined by class, religion, ethnicity and race?

Lesson Plans

Day One, time approx. 45 minutes

Subject:

History of Photography

1. Brainstorming Ask how many students have a family album of photographs. Ask: Why do we take and keep photographs? What information can you gather from photographs? How can historians use photographs? What information can historians gather from photographs? Discuss the issues of the photographer's point of view in taking pictures. Visible web of information on board or large paper. Highlight key terms and vocabulary.

2. Photograph Analysis Print out a copy of Hine's photographs *Climbing into the Land of Promise*, *Ellis Island, 1905* and reproduce it on a transparency. Use this photograph to demonstrate to the students techniques in photo analysis. Give students a few minutes to look at the photograph. Turn off the projector, and ask them to write down everything they saw in the photograph. After a few minutes, ask students to share their findings. They will probably have some conflicting views; some students will see things that others have not seen or, in some cases, claim to have seen things not present in the photograph. Cut an 8 1/2" x 11" piece of paper into four parts. Place these four parts over the picture so that you can reveal one section of the photograph at a time, keeping the rest of the picture covered. Ask students to look closely at the area that is revealed and describe what they see in the photograph. This will draw their attention to the details of the photograph. After students have had an opportunity to view each section, uncover the whole photograph and ask them how what they now see in the photograph has changed.

3. Introducing Photography Techniques There's obviously much more to photography than the few aspects described here, but introducing the basics will teach the kids a fundamental understanding of how to think before taking a picture. This introduction will also give you a platform to move further into the aesthetics with older kids. Students must first be introduced to the importance of looking, seeing the big picture and making conscious decisions. Now the teacher is ready to get into the core decision factors: angle, pan, distance, level, focus and framing. It's important to use common photographic vocabulary rather than apparent synonyms that have emotional connotations. Focus should be described as soft or sharp, for example, not "strong" or "hazy." Because those kinds of words more closely describe the emotional effect of the finished photo, not the conscious decision-making process that went into creating the effect. You should explain this concept to the kids and get them comfortable with using new vocabulary and terms of art so that everyone has a common

vocabulary. Emphasize that before taking pictures, one must make conscious decisions.

Many students are tactile learners, ESL students all the more, therefore, demonstrating concepts with the camera--stand on a chair to point the camera down at someone, then kneel or lie down to take an up angle shot, allows students to be active participants as they learn.

Day Two- 45 minutes

Subject:

Student Photographers and photographing their world

Step 1:

Have the kids make paper frames like those made when introducing the camera's basic features and use them to examine objects in the room from different angles.

Step2:

Review the previous concepts. Now introduce the idea of panning, a video term that refers to moving the camera from one side to the other to follow a scene. Here we use it to refer to the side from which one is taking the picture: forward, left or right.

Step3:

Introduce the idea of distance: close, middle or far.

Step4:

Introduce the idea of level: eye level, high or low. This idea refers to the height at which the viewer appears to be seeing the subject and is different from "angle," which involves tilting the camera. The camera may or may not be at an angle and may still be from a high, eye-level or low perspective. Make sure that kids understand this distinction.

Step5:

Introduce the idea of focus: sharp or soft. All of the techniques discussed here, including focus, actually fall along a continuum, of course, and consist of more than just two or three options just simplify the topic here. Because focus is even more of a continuum than the others, you may want to make it clear that you are really talking about more or less sharp, more or less soft, and how focus changes relative to other factors, such as distance and angle.

Step 6:

Focus on the idea of framing. Until now, the paper frames help kids slowly understand and think about seeing,

really discuss ideas like subject and composition in more depth. For example, how does distance affect what's framed in a picture? How does one capture action in a frame? What happens when you leave things out of a frame?

Step 7:

For Step 7 and beyond, review the previous concepts and provide some more time to work on various techniques in combination.

Step 8:

Provide students with disposable cameras to take home and use keeping in mind key concepts explored throughout the unit. Final Project: Students respond to photographs they have taken using the same questions and format used for Hines photographs.

Day Three- 45-50 minutes

Subject:

Images Of Immigrant Life

1. *Class Discussion Activity:* Project or distribute the photograph *Children on Street , Lower East Side, N.Y.C.*

Allow several minutes for students to look at it.

Ask students about what they see in the photographs. Ask them about the mood of the photograph, how the children are positioned, where they are located; looking for clues about the experience of immigration, social and economic influences. Makes notes about their observations on the chalkboard or on a chart. Ask them to support their observations and solicit prior knowledge.

2. *Distribute the photograph*

Project or distribute the photograph, *Looking for Lost Baggage, Ellis Island* allow several minutes for students to look at it. Repeat questions from previous photo.

Day Four-45 minutes

Subject:

Small Group Discussion and Writing Activity

1. Students will be put into groups and asked to examine one of the photographs and write their impressions of the image.

2. Working individually, students can choose either of these two approaches to do the writing part of this assignment:

- Describe the photograph. What kinds of details do you see? How are the people arranged?

Where do you think the photographer was positioned to get this image? What do you think the photographer was trying to show about immigrants? Write an essay from the point of view of the photographer.

- Examine the pictures carefully and write a story based on one of them. Think about what's happening in the photos, who the characters are, and what kind of "voice" will best capture the feelings evoked by the photograph.

Day Five-45 minutes

Subject:

Developing Visual Literacy 1. Depending on the size of your group you can divide them into groups of 3-4. Distribute different photograph to each sub group. Give each sub-group as many copies of their assigned photograph that you have available.

2. Based on the sub-groups observations and students free-writing, the sub-group should choose five words it would use to describe the character of the people in the photograph. The sub-group should arrive at the five words by a process of give and take leading to consensus.

3. Whole class discussion: Students from each sub-group share their assigned photograph and the five words they chose. Emphasis should be placed on new vocabulary words. *Assessment* The whole group should discuss the photographs and what they learned from the activity. The group should consider the following questions in their discussion:

- Given what you've done and what you know, what can you say about the
- photographers and their social goals?
- How might these photos have shaped public perceptions of immigrant life?
- Given the nature of photography, how do photographic images shape our perceptions today?

Incorporating New Haven Public School Standards

The strategies used for teaching these objectives are taken from a variety of resources and can be adapted according to the learners specific needs. Before introducing photography to students it is important to introduce students to concepts of poverty and immigration. Gradually introducing students to concepts outlined as themes, you will bring forth ideas and notions that are not so foreign, as a matter of fact they are quite familiar and universal in scope.

Vocabulary will be an important way to facilitate new ideas and students should be given the opportunity to translate each word, idea or concept into their native language. Depending on the level of the English language learner, the teacher will select appropriate vocabulary.

The standards of New Haven Public Schools English as a Second Language are the same as the standards in the mainstream content areas. This unit is intended to provide a bridge to the mainstream by acknowledging the central role of language in content learning, while responding to the specific needs of second language learners.

The New Haven Public Schools Standards for English as a Second Language emphasize critical thinking skills, specifically the ability to express ideas, predict, compare, contrast, explore, experiment, analyze and evaluate. Learners are encouraged to speak, listen, read and write in both English and another language.

The Bilingual Education and English as a Second Language Standards are based on three national goals developed by Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) : 1) effective communication, 2) achievement in the content areas, and 3) achievement in a variety of cultural contexts. The Standards also include a fourth local goal-4) the vision of achievement in more than one language. This fourth goal, New Haven's unique addition, is one in which native speakers of English and speakers of other world languages work together for mutual benefit.

Effective communication will be addressed for:

1) Social Interactions, Students will:

- Express interests, needs and opinions using more complex and/or fluent speech (complete sentences, question forms, negatives)
- Initiate conversations and share ideas using expanded vocabulary
- Listen to different points of view and express opinions fluently, using extended speech
- Comment and discuss ideas, debate, negotiate, compromise, and resolve conflict using appropriate language
- Respond to lengthy questions and explain answers in detail

2) For personal expression. Students will:

- Express likes, dislikes, and justify feelings using complete sentences and expanded vocabulary
- Describe experiences using descriptive details
- Read and listen to longer explanations in English and express reactions at length

Reading:

Students will:

- Become familiar with the specific reading strategies needed for the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT).
- Form an Initial Understanding
- Determine the main idea
- Summarize (select and use relevant information)
- Use context clues to determine meaning
- Develop an Interpretation and respond to photographs
- Connect photographs with experiences and knowledge
- Describe the photographer's use of details
- Draw conclusions and explain reasons with reference to the photographs
- Demonstrate a critical stance
- Use the photographs to make a prediction
- Tell how the photographer uses literary devices such as irony, point of view and foreshadowing
- Evaluate explicit and implicit information
- Prepare written responses to material viewed
- Explain values, customs, ethics and beliefs included in photograph

Writing:

Students will:

- Do pre-writing activities (brainstorming) and demonstrate pre-writing strategies-i.e. select and limit topics, draw upon personal knowledge, set a purpose and define the audience

- Develop, clarify, organize, and support ideas for writing using graphic organizers- i.e. webbing, clustering, outlining.
- Use complex grammar and syntax in writing-i.e: Compound verb tenses: present , past, and future perfect; Conditional tenses; Other verb forms: gerunds/infinitives; Modals: may might, could, would, should, must , will, have to, can, can't; Comparative adjectives; Plural forms; Prepositional phrase; Subjective, objective, and reflexive pronouns; Dependent clauses
- Do proofreading- i.e. assess a piece of writing in terms of accepted standards for paragraphing, sentence structure and the mechanics of written English Edit, revise and rewrite to improve content and form
- Become familiar with additional writing strategies needed for the Connecticut Academic Proficiency Test (CAPT)
- Demonstrate a critical stance
- Express personal ideas, inform and persuade through writing

Resources

Beattie, Donna Kay. *Assessment in Art Education* . Worcester, MA: Davis Publications, 1997. Resource for teachers introducing and incorporating art education into the curriculum.

Beaton, Cecil, and Buckland, Gay. *The Magic Image : The genius of Photography from 1839 to the Present Day* . London: Pavilion Books, 1989 A history of the art of photography with emphasis on photographs.

Brooks, Charlotte (ed.). *Cities* . New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968.A depiction and summary of the growth and concept of cities in American life.

Foner, Eric, and John A. Garraty, eds. *The Reader's Companion to American History* . Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991

Frank, Robert. *The Americans* . New York: Grove Press, 1959. Detailed account of immigration in the United States and the creation of "new" Americans.

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Ibieta, Gabriella and Orvell, Miles . *Inventing America: Readings in Identity and Culture* . St. Martin's, 1996 The social and economic impacts of immigration on the United States and its newly arrived immigrants.

Langford, Michael. *The Story of Photography* . Focal Press, 1980.

Nash, Gary B., et al. *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society*. New York : Harper & Row Publishers, 1990.

Newhall, Beaumont. *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present* . Secker and Warburg, 1986

Stewart, Marilyn G. *Thinking through Aesthetics* . Worcester, MA: Davis Publications, 1997.

Szarkowski, John. *Looking at Photographs* . Museum of Modern Art, 1973.

Tindall, George Brown, with David E. Shi. *America: A Narrative History* New York : W.W. Norton and Company, 1992.

Trachtenberg, Allan. "Camera Work: Notes Toward An Investigation" *Massachusetts Review* XIX 4, 1978. Issue contains photographic samplings of various camera artists including Helen Levitt, Walker, Evans, Lewis Hine, Robert Wilcox and Robert Frank.

Trachtenberg, Alan. *The Photographer's Eye* . Museum of Modern Art, 1966 *Reading American Photographs*. Noonday Press, 1989.

Resources On the Web

American Museum of Photography

<http://www.photographymuseum.com/index.html>

This site features a revolving series of exhibits from photographers on a wide variety of subjects.

Digital Cameras

<http://www.uwf.edu/coe/tutorials/technolo/digitalc/digitalc.htm>

The basics of digital photography with links to more resources.

Smithsonian Institution: Office of Imaging, Printing and Photographic Services

<http://photo2.si.edu/>

This clearinghouse for photographs related to the many museums and galleries in the Smithsonian Institution is a good starting point for kids' photography projects. The site has a searchable database of photographs as well as a topical index of photographs available.

Notes

1. Introduction from *Inventing America: Readings in Identity and Culture*, by Gabriella Ibieta and Miles Orvell St. Martin's, 1996 (pp.466-467)

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