



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2006 Volume I: Photographing America: A Cultural History, 1840-1970

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## **A Moment in Time: Teaching Point of View Using Photography**

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The photograph called *La Salle at Amsterdam, New York, 1946* by Todd Webb shows a group of children holding hands circling a pipe spraying water into the air in the middle of the street so they can cool off on a hot day.

I chose this image to begin the teaching of my unit on point of view and writing detail. I am hopeful that the old saying --"a picture is worth a thousand words" will be true for my third grade students because many of them have difficulty finding topics to write about. Once they do find topics they often have difficulty expanding those ideas with the result that their writings tend to be short, direct, and of little interest.

Point of view in literature is that basic decision that everyone who writes must make about who is going to tell the story. Most students are taught point of view as including 1st person, 2nd, third person, and omniscient. When we are taught writing we begin with the first person narrative using the pronoun "I". This is in keeping with the long held recognition that students write better about personal experiences. Even with this students have difficulty stretching out their experiences into exciting stories that their readers might enjoy. They usually fail to tell what something feels like rather than showing it in words. In endeavoring to have students expand their sentences it is amazing how much language we use that goes to the subject of film or photography. We speak to our children of stopping the action and taking whatever is happening in a slow motion or frame by frame moment like a film. Often we use the term "snapshot" to talk about a particular feeling, moment, or critical object in a story. If the child is talking about a favorite gift they received -- perhaps a Teddy Bear-- the teacher would tell the student that rather than just saying "I got a Teddy Bear for my birthday", they should stop the action and then describe this bear. Instead of saying "I was scared" they might say "My heart was beating fast and I could feel my hands shaking."

While writing this unit I have reread some of the writings of Donald H. Graves whose books *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* and *A Fresh Look* at writing are standard references for teaching writing in schools. Graves is a proponent of the writer's workshop approach. He acknowledges that students have a tough time finding topics to write about in their everyday lives. He advocates showing students how to "read their world." I am proposing a monthly use of photography as a way to energize my students' writing.

Most of the photos I have chosen have been reviewed with my students to see their responses. A few of the photos that seemed like initial possibilities were eliminated because they might be deemed controversial for young children. Ultimately the deciding factors were: could the photo interest children and could we build

enough of an initial connection that would make it practical to discuss the picture? In some cases students' response was limited or they seemed to require more background than I really wanted to provide. Doing so I felt would make looking at the picture more a regurgitation of what they would perceive to be the "proper" interpretation.

## **Todd Webb and John Gutmann**

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In using the *LaSalle at Amsterdam, New York, 1946* photo I hope to engage students who will be fresh from summer vacation. I have no doubt that this photo will be successful. In the photograph a group of children are holding hands and dancing around a spray of water that is cooling them off from the summer heat. In looking closely at the photo we realized that the source of the water was not a fire hydrant but a series of pipes that were rigged up to ascend into the air like a flag pole from which the water sprayed out. My students had various remarks about the pipe and spray. Some thought the pipe resembled a Fourth of July rocket that was about to take off. The spray of water shot high up into the air above the heads of the children. It almost seemed like actual rain falling from the sky. The shape formed by the cascading water was like an umbrella spreading out like a canopy over the children. Above the water and in the background stood the tenement apartments and my students could imagine how they were still in the heat. The water made the street look darker and cooler where it had fallen. Some of the children have on bathing suits while a few of the girls are in dresses.

We spoke about circles and why we often get ourselves into a circle. Students remarked that playing in a circle gave them a chance to see everybody. I asked them what was friendlier -- being in a circle or being in a straight line. They found that it was easier to talk in a circle while in a straight line your vision was sometimes blocked and you couldn't speak to your friends. So the photo suggested the children were getting along. The people in the circle seemed to glow while the area around the circle was darker and the people most of them adults seemed to look longingly at the circle. The lightness emanating from the cascading water made the source of the water like the sun. In fact some of the children questioned if the picture were taken in full daylight or closer to sunset because they could not see the sky and the brightest light came from the water pipe.

I then told them a bit about the photo. Todd Webb was a photographer who took pictures during World War II and after took photos of life after the war. <sup>1</sup> When he took this picture the war was over. They were able to understand that this picture showed children having fun and people being together. There is another Todd Webb photo of the same event -- three African American girls off to the left of the picture still being hit by the spray of water. The number of children around the ascending pipe is less and they are holding on and circling it almost like a May Pole. The picture seems to be split into two subject areas and one can see that the girls seem to be in mid air as their feet look like they do not touch the ground. In the back a group of boys is seen who have also left the water. Again the shading of light to dark is apparent with the water having a white shining affect and almost blotting out any notion of the sun facing toward the camera with the circle of children behind them. As the girls grab the pole it is reminiscent of the Statue of Liberty holding up its light of freedom and progress. It is not necessarily important that students have the historical background and many times it may not expand their understanding of the picture but that is something that can be decided by the teacher.

After talking about the pictures my students agreed that they liked the circle photo the best. They thought it had a clear focus and they could connect with the action. I would have them write about being one of the children in the circle and what it feels like to have the cool water hitting you on a hot day. Slowing down the action of that circle would make students see how you could take something so very simple and make it into an interesting and enjoyable narrative.

A good follow-up is *The Artist Lives Dangerously* by John Gutmann. I had included this photo among those I might use when I began randomly searching for photographs to include in the unit. Personally, I had initially thought it was a good possibility. In the photo a young boy is making a chalk drawing of a Native American on the shoulder of the street while further out in the middle of the road a car is going by. My students on seeing the photo commented about the boy taking chances by doing his drawing near the traffic. They thought that the boy had probably found a good place to draw and wasn't thinking when he began. We spoke about drawing on the sidewalks (graffiti) and other unusual places. Students suggested that they often wonder more about how the artist was able to get to the place they drew rather than the drawing itself. What I hadn't thought of too much was the boy's drawing. I knew that westerns were a popular subject of films in the thirties and forties and saw nothing special there. However, a colleague suggested that the symbolism of the boy's drawing grew as one thought about the treatment of the Native Americans. What Gutmann caught in his photograph was not only the car possibly running over the boy, but also the Native American in the drawing and reality who was subject to being run over by society. My students missed this and so I wasn't sure that unless I went into a lot of background this photo would fit in. While I had eliminated the photo I do think that if coupled with the Webb photo it offers another view of childhood for students to consider. As part of a discussion about Native Americans it can also be quite powerful.

In reading about John Gutmann I was interested to learn that like many other early photographers he was originally trained as an artist. Gutmann was born in Poland in 1905 and had studied with the Expressionist artist Otto Muller. From his studies Gutmann became interested in the exotic. When he had to leave Berlin because he was forbidden as a Jew to teach or exhibit his artwork, he came to America. He went to San Francisco and took up photojournalism as a way to earn a living. He never regarded photography as a pure art form. Gutmann settled in San Francisco where he liked to photograph what he saw as the strange and exotic culture of America. He was intrigued by popular culture and especially the proliferation of cars. <sup>2</sup>

## Evans, Van Gogh, Warhol, and Magritte

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Continuing to use familiar images that students can deal with, and a topic they can readily identify with I would move onto *Four pairs of shoes in the sand* ( *Mitch Diamond* ). The black and white photo shows four pair of sneakers on what appears to be beach sand. Inside each is a rolled up pair of socks. The sand is messed up in the background as though people have walked on it and you can tell by the shadows that the sun is out. This photo was again something the students could easily identify and expand on as we tried to take the four pairs of shoes and figure out where they were and what the circumstances might be around the picture. Students could readily imagine what was going on and write about what connection they could make to the photo. How did they know they were at the beach?

A Walker Evans photograph *Floyd Burroughs' Work Shoes* is a good contrast. In looking up the photo I came across a selection from *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* by Fredric Jameson (Duke UP, 1991) which had

no relationship to my topic other than it discussed a variety of works that also depicted shoes of various types and argued for their economic symbolism. The works included Van Gogh's *Painting of Peasant Shoes* ; Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes*; and Rene Magritte's *Le modele rouge*. Each photo or painting presents a pair of shoes; Warhol's picture of silvery high heels, Van Gogh's shoes which are closest to those pictured by Evans, and Magritte's surrealist painting of shoes missing the toe portion but showing a foot extending from the back portion of the shoe as one entity. I think that these photos and paintings offer students a chance to see how an object can have so much meaning and provoke so much thought. I am glad for the suggestion and the luck of finding the other images. I imagine there are other examples of pictures surrounding an object or theme that can be utilized as extensions of this unit.

What would happen if we put the sneakers on the sidewalk -- or on a rug? Why did the photographer have the socks in the sneakers? Students felt that the socks indicated that the people had gone barefooted so they could go into the water. A couple of the shoes had shoe laces still tied. The students realized that this meant whoever the people were they wanted to get their shoes off quickly so they did not untie them. It was unclear about the relative sizes of the shoes but they could see the possibility that this might be a family of adults and children. Then a few of them launched into stories about how their parents like to relax at the beach. Getting rid of your shoes means you are free to move around.

We talked about walking on sand at the beach and what it felt like. Students began to talk about the hot sand and how it got between their toes when they walked on the beach. Even though there was not a lot of detail in the picture -- just four pairs of sneakers, socks and sand -- yet we got the message. I suggest take a piece of chart paper and have students brainstorm what the picture conjures up. We made quite a list beginning with words like sand, water, swimming, etc. So sometimes less is more. If a writer uses a few good descriptive words it can help the reader picture a detailed setting.

## Joel Meyerowitz: Ballston Beach

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I would like to contrast this picture with Joel Meyerowitz's photo *Ballston Beach, Turro 1976-77* . This is an obvious beach scene with people doing various activities on the beach, the water in the background. The *Four Pairs of Shoes in the Sand (Mitch Diamond)* merely suggested -- you had to provide the images from your own experience -- while the Meyerowitz photo gives you more to look at. But it isn't just conjuring up the beach. Here the centerpiece is the lifeguard. People seem to be falling in and out of the picture but the center holds the lifeguards and his perch high above the beach. In the background the ocean is calm. The one male life guard sitting in the chair has a relaxed attitude. Students could tell by the way his arms were hanging over the chair that everything was peaceful. The distinct horizontal lines on the horizon and the shore of the beach help to emphasize the calm. The lifeguard's resting arms are in line with the horizon line. The only things breaking the horizontal lines are the vertical lines of the lifeguard's chair and the flag pole.

A female guard sits on the sand in back of the chair. We know who they are because they wear orange. The children readily knew that the orange color they were wearing would be easy to see. They also knew that the orange cross on the flag waving above the lifeguard's chair was meant to show where help was available my students sensed that the picture told of the dangers of the beach as well as its beauty and opportunity for fun. While people play and have fun the guards are always there to protect us. We hardly know that they are there. There seems to be a line between the people on the beach and the water and a very distinct horizon

line between the water and the sand and water and sky. Students noticed that the guard's chair blocked out part of the water.

While the *Four Pairs of Shoes in the Sand* (Mitch Diamond) photo showed how minimalism could work this photo was different. Meyerowitz took what might be a typical scene but chose a point of view that does not tell us the typical story. He might have stepped in front of that lifeguard's chair and taken the shot of people on the beach. As one of my students suggested by not doing this he makes us think more. He is telling us about a part of the beach we don't think about -- the danger.

I suggest that students could imagine they are one of the lifeguards and talk about the responsibility they have for guarding the people on the beach. They might talk about the equipment that we see in the photo and how they might use it. Still they might offer a

story about being rescued. Perhaps they rescued someone or were rescued themselves.

Next, I would use is called *House and Tornado* (Chuck Carlton) building on the other photos we are merely trying to work on expanding an idea and seeing what details we could find. In this photo the house is calmly sitting in the left front of the picture while to the right a tornado looms! Both the house and tornado are in black and white. The photos show how certain images can evoke a myriad of ideas. Most of the students were impressed with the tornado. We talked about the fact that the title of the picture was *House and Tornado* and not *Coming Danger* or *A Tornado about to Strike*. Is there a particular reason for it being title simply *House and Tornado*? Both images can be looked at separately. What if we just saw the house? Curiously two distinct reactions came from my students. Some thought the house was a place they would like to live in. Some thought the house had people inside while others thought the house looked empty because all the shades were down. Some of the students thought the house was strange. It seemed isolated and alone. A few thought they would like it better if it were another color. The black shutters seemed to make the house somehow creepy. They speculated that there might be someone in the house who needed to be warned. The tornado was awe-inspiring.

Looking at the way the photo is set up also provides some interesting ideas. Cutting the picture in two provides us with the house in the forefront and left a mixture of strong rectangles and triangles which emphasize strength and immobility. The tornado on the right side of the picture swirls up and dominates the top half of the photo. Those curves which show the might of the cyclonic winds also has a wildness as it extends to the top that suggests a genie being let out of a bottle. We expanded our conversation into the telling of personal experiences about storms and recollections of films they had seen about tornados. I was even able to go the weather channel web site and show them video of actual tornadoes.

How do the streets look before a storm? Perhaps our uneasiness with the house was just the fact that people were absent or hiding. One writing assignment might consist of students coming up with a list of things to do before a storm. They might also write a few rules that should be followed during a storm or tornado. Since most students are fascinated with tornadoes and hurricanes this might be linked to a science unit on these phenomena.

What would happen after the storm? I would like to contrast this with a picture of people inspecting the aftermath of a storm. I have found a few pictures that show a few of the emotions of people after a storm. There is dealing with loss and the damage of the event while also a sense of celebrating life and the fact they have survived. Again, students might be asked to write a journal entry describing how they might feel after surviving a destructive storm. I have also thought of playing some music like *La Mer* or the storm sequence

from the *William Tell Overture* .

## Robert Doisneau

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After working with these simpler straightforward images we would then turn to some more complicated photos. I would begin with three photos by Robert Doisneau (1912-1994). Doisneau lived in Paris and eschewed the artistry of photography in favor of capturing the special moment in everyday life. He wandered the streets of Paris taking pictures. <sup>3</sup>The first I would like to consider is *The Fallen Horse (1942)* which as the title suggest is of a horse lying on the ground in a street of Paris while a group of bystanders looks on. The horse is wearing blinders on its head and seems to be on its side. There are small puddles on the street and one of the bystanders has an open umbrella. This photo had great appeal for my students because of the presence of an animal that seemed to be in distress. Their first reaction was a collective cry of Ohhhh! The children immediately thought the horse was having a baby. When I told them that the title was *Fallen Horse (1942)* we shifted discussion to the fact that the horse was not on the ground because of some natural event. Could they imagine a horse falling? How could it happen?

One of the things that make this photo so appealing is the use of light and dark. The horse stands out and is easily recognized as the main focus with its whiteness. A technique that photographers often use is that of contrasting light and dark. Again a suggestion was made to me that children might make a picture in which they highlight one element by using specific coloration of perhaps do a black and white drawing. Drawing is an excellent way that teachers use to connect children's ideas and their words. Beginning with a picture often helps to focus the child's thoughts and ideas.

Further discussion concerned the setting. They could tell that the setting was a city -- a building was in the background. Then they speculated that the horse had run away from a farm. I asked them if it was strange to see a horse in the city. They said no because sometimes the police ride horses and in some cities there are carriages pulled by horses that take people around. A couple of the children had ridden in a carriage in New York with their parents.

We then turned to the photographer and his point of view as he shot the picture. Where was he when he took this photo? Why didn't he run across the street and get a close-up of the horse? They agreed after I isolated the horse that pulling back and showing the whole scene including the reaction of the people made it more interesting. We talked about how in their stories they had to not only describe a scene put give reactions and feelings when they wrote. It would be good at this point to have students take the point of view of one of the spectators in the photo and write from their perspective a journal entry they might make about seeing the horse.

The second photograph is called *Musician in the Rain (1957)*. In the photo a man with a bass violin stands holding his umbrella over the instrument while another man continues to paint a picture. My student's first reaction was one of amusement. Something about the man with the bass violin is so absurd. They finally explained with a little prodding that the unusualness of the circumstances made them laugh. The man was holding his umbrella over the instrument instead of himself. To many it seemed that the bass violin was almost like another person. It was covered with its own coat (protective cover) same as the man. From his



behavior toward the bass violin students felt that the man must treasure the instrument because he would rather get wet than let his instrument be harmed. Further they speculated that the man was probably waiting for a taxi to take him home or to a concert where he was going to play.

The painter in the photo was a bit more difficult to discern. His back is to us and we can tell he is painting a picture. It looks like it contains a road or street. Why didn't he just stop painting? He must want to finish that picture very badly. The man with the instrument is amusing but the painter doesn't send an immediate emotional feeling. We started to converse about things we like to do. I suggested that students think of activities they do outside. Sometimes you're playing ball or riding your bike and the weather changes but you keep playing. Sometimes it starts to get dark and you can barely see the ball but you keep playing -- Why? Students were quick to say that when they are doing something that they enjoy it is hard to leave it. I suggested that what the photograph was perhaps showing them about the painter and the musician is that they really enjoyed what they were doing and that art and music were very important to them.

I told them that the title of the picture is *Musician in the Rain (1957)* . Why did the photographer include the painter? I like to cut out one of the images in the picture and ask students how the feeling of the picture changes. In this case I covered the painter. Why was he in the photo and yet the title focused on the musician? Students thought the musician seemed to be closer to them and they could see his face. He was the one they could tell the most about. Yet when the painter was cut out they felt something was missing. It seemed more balanced when the two people were there.

The third Doisneau picture is called *Large Bolides (1956)*. Bolides is a meteor that explodes before it crashes to earth. In it a boy in a toy car is looking at a smashed up car with its front wheel on the sidewalk. Students thought that maybe the driver of the car had been hurt or maybe fled; leaving the car there so the police would not catch him. I asked them why the photographer had taken a picture of the boy in a toy car next to a real car that had been smashed up. Someone thought it was a warning about driving a car and how it was dangerous. They also suggested that the boy could have been hit because the car came on the sidewalk where it didn't belong. However, the boy with his toy car couldn't go in the street because he didn't have a real car but a toy. Maybe they speculated that he would be a better driver when he grew up because of seeing this smashed car. I asked them what they thought about when adults make mistakes. They thought that everybody can make a mistake although adults should know better. They should be examples for children. When I asked if they thought the picture were serious they said no there was something funny about the boy being a better driver than the adult.

I then put up the three photos by Doisneau and the children agreed that the photos were looking at everyday things that happen. They felt that the *Fallen Horse (1942)* photo was beautiful and sad. There was something about the black and white shadows that made them like that photo the best. The other two: *Musician in the Rain (1957)* and *Large Bolides (1956)* were less serious.

## **Joel Meyerowitz: Fallen Man and Fallen Horse**

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I then took the Meyerowitz's photo *Fallen Man, Paris 1967*. Likewise he also has a photograph called *Fallen Horse, Spain 1967* which can be compared to that of Doisneau. Meyerowitz started in black and white photography and was one of the first photographers to switch into color photography. Black and white

photography was considered to be the only true way to achieve a serious art photograph. Meyerowitz and others changed that. Interestingly he was the first photographer to be allowed access to the World Trade Center after the attack on 9/11. <sup>4</sup>

Not only did he explore in color film but he began to change his photographic center and went to a kind of off center technique that showed the main activity in his photos -- the primary event or action in a corner. <sup>5</sup> Thus the action became sometimes unnoticed or a non-event. In *Fallen Man Paris, 1967* the man is not the center of the photo and so his falling becomes almost unimportant. As we can see the man is on his back legs in the air but life goes on. A woman continues down a flight of stairs to the subway, men are on their busy way -- in fact, a workman seems to step over the man as he continues on his destination. The traffic of the city takes center stage and the man's fall is marginalized to a non-event in the face of the bustling city around him.

The photo is in color though students didn't pick it up as an initial comment when comparing the two photos. The sunlight and grouping of white automobiles in the intersection seemed to lessen the strength of color in the photo. Students found the Meyerowitz photo to be less sympathetic than that of Doisneau's *Fallen Horse* (1942). When we compared them they felt that the people in the Doisneau photo seemed more sympathetic to the horse and rushed to help. In the Meyerowitz photo the man seemed to get little more than a glance and the workman with the hammer was stepping around the man. A few students suggested that the workman might have hit the fallen man with his hammer.

No one was sure that the man would be helped. We speculated that while the man on the bike and the woman going down to the subway looked at the man it didn't seem likely that they would stop and go help the man. Why was the photo called *Fallen Man* ? While students felt the most important action in the photo should be the fallen man, he was out of place in the scene and should have gotten our attention but it didn't work out that way. Most students said that in looking at the photo they first saw the traffic and the man got their attention later when they looked closely at what was going on.

What did this photo say about living in a city? Some recognized that there were so many things happening that the man could go unnoticed. Doisneau's *Fallen Horse, Spain 1967* seemed to be less busy and we as viewers of the scene feel that horse will get help. The horse is not competing for our attention. Looking at their faces we feel that the people are more concerned.

I did not speak to my students about the fact that there was speculation that the photo was staged. Would it matter to them? Was a photo or story only good if it were true? What about narrative stories that were all or part fiction?

## **Diane Arbus, Man Ray, and David Heath**

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Next we turned to the Diane Arbus photo called *A Child Crying, New Jersey, 1967* . The photo elicited sympathetic sighs from my students. The photo shows nothing but the little girl crying and the children were able to come up with many explanations of why she was in distress. But why would you want to take a picture of a little girl crying? The children thought that it didn't matter why she was crying; that the photographer wanted to show us how sad the baby was. Also they were able to determine from the white glare of the photo that camera was very close to the girl because it looked like her face was hit with light from the flash. She



looked to them like she was looking into a funhouse mirror that exaggerated her face and made it seem larger than life. They could see the tracks of her tears and almost hear her crying.

Then they were shown the photo by Man Ray called *Tears (1945)*. Man Ray was born Emanuel Rabinovitch in Philadelphia but was raised in New Jersey. He learned the basics of photography from Alfred Stieglitz. Later he went to Europe and became part of the European experimental movement known as *dada*. *DADA* was an attempt to create works of art that confused the viewer's sense of reality. They would photograph everyday objects and present them as finished works of art.

In the photo *Tears (1945)*,<sup>6</sup> Man Ray chose to show the tears of a woman. We see can see her eyes and the tears. On further looking at the photo my students felt that the woman did not show any real emotion -- rather the tears looked like they were placed there. In the Arbus photo they could see the tears streaming down the girls eyes and hanging off of her face. This woman had very beautiful eyelashes and as one student offered the mascara should be running down her face. While the students had guessed at the phony emotions of the Man Ray photo I did not learn until later the fact that the woman in the photo is actually a mannequin and the tears were glass beads stuck on for effect. Autobiographically speaking the photo was done at a time when Man Ray had broken off relations with his lover Lee Miller. There is the suggestion of the phony tears. My students discussed how crying can often get you sympathy and how they have used tears to manipulate certain situations. This photo suggested that we can be fooled by a photo and in real life.

We then turned our attention to the photograph called *Vengeful Sister* by David Heath. Heath was born in 1931 and grew up in foster homes and orphanages in the Philadelphia area. He later became a kind of "street photographer."<sup>7</sup> The photo shows a boy obviously crying and in pain lying on the ground looking at his hand. Turning away from him but almost highsteppng with laughter is a little girl. My students initially thought the little girl was calling for help. The projected photo was not clear to them and the little girl's face is turned in profile. As a result I felt it necessary to tell them that the title of the photo was *Vengeful Sister*. We then spoke about the meaning of the word vengeful and the idea of trying to get revenge on someone who has hurt you. Then it became obvious that the girl was dancing and screaming with glee about having hit her brother. They could then see the boy's surprised look as he looks at his hand and lies writhing in pain.

In looking at the setting of this photo it is interesting that there is nothing in the scene but the boy and girl. Children might speculate what would happen if a toy were on the ground. My students thought that it would indicate that they argued over that object. Without a possible answer to why she had taken vengeance on her brother the picture the picture was more interesting. It was a puzzle you couldn't really solve and most found unnecessary to do.

In looking at the setting there is nothing but concrete sidewalk and steps. Hard rectangular surfaces are all you see. As you look at the little girl she is almost like a plane lifting off--her hands by her side and her head in the air. Her triumph over her brother is apparent in a release of energy that you can see and feel. The back of her head leads down in a slanted line to the head of her brother who in contrast to her stretched figure is curling up in a protective fetal position.

My students were sympathetic to the girl and understood that her brother had probably deserved what he got. Many of them speculated at her motives and recounted their own experiences at being both victim and bully. For this set of pictures we spoke about the fact that most of them would be punished if they were the little girl. My assignment to them would be to write a letter to their parents describing why they did what they did and if they feel the punishment were justified.

## Mount Herman Fire and the San Francisco Earthquake

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As the unit winds down I would turn to a couple of pictures that show unique points of view. In the photo *Mount Herman Fire* (1965) a football game is going on and in the background a house is burning. The photo is an AP photo taken on November 24, 1965. Mt. Herman was playing their rivals from Deerfield Academy. The Science building caught on fire and in fact was destroyed. Mt. Herman not only lost the building but the game ending a two year winning streak. <sup>8</sup>The initial reaction of my students was surprise and a bit of confusion. It almost seemed funny. The photo shows the people in bleachers looking at the fire but at the same time watching the game. Again point of view plays an important part in the photo. How would the picture be different if the photographer had gone onto the street and taken a picture of the burning building? It probably would be a good photo but it would not be as interesting. Here we have a dangerous situation juxtaposed with a football game. It would seem that people would leave and the game would stop but it continues. Sometimes we think when something catastrophic happens everyone is paying attention but here a fire rages but people pay marginal attention.

We would then turn our attention to another photo called *As the city burns; a group watches the towering clouds of smoke from a safe spot on Russian Hill* (1906). This is a photo of the fire that occurred after the Great San Francisco Earthquake. Here the photographer didn't take the expected close-up picture of the fire but choose to photograph people on a hill on the outskirts of the city watching what is going on. I would read them a description of the destruction of that fire from *If You Lived at the Time of the Great San Francisco Earthquake* by Ellen Levine and Pat Grant Porter. Yet look at the photo. The young women are laughing and the men casually and calmly look back at the city. They are not rushing out to help nor do they seem panicked. The photographer is also standing back to let us see that we are merely spectators. Do we always react to a situation with sustained and profound sadness? The assignment might be to imagine that you are one of these observers of the fire. Tell what you saw and how you felt. Why are you smiling? I might also tell my students that in fact the fire was not brought under control until it swept over the Russian Hill where the spectators in the picture are sitting.

## Eisenstaedt and Lartigue

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Finally I chose to end with a photo that offers the viewer no real context. It is Alfred Eisenstaedt's *The Guignol Puppet Show, Paris 1963*. In the photo a group of children react to what is going on in an outdoor puppet show. Eisenstaedt snapped the photo at precisely the moment when the dragon has been slain. The children react with different facial expressions. The point of view is from the stage looking out toward the audience so we have no way of definitively knowing what the source of their reaction is unless we know the photo's title. Eisenstaedt was born in 1898 and fell in love with photography when he received his first camera at the age of fourteen. He was called the father of photojournalism and has taken some of the world's best-known photos. <sup>9</sup>

In discussing this photo with my students we had to rely on looking at the reactions of the children. First we discussed whether we had to know what the children were looking at in order to enjoy the photo. They were inquisitive but thought the photo had some wonderful faces in it. As the photo was projected on the screen we added post-it notes to the screen describing what feelings each child was emoting. Then I had each child

speculate about the children might be seeing and hearing. Most of them thought the children were seeing a fight or argument and a couple thought they were watching someone do dangerous stunts. They speculated that it could be a person inside a cage with a lion or tiger at the zoo. After collecting and reading their ideas I then informed them what circumstances the photo was taken. They agreed that the photo was interesting whether you knew the title or not. I might choose to extend this photo by having students pick a child in the photo and try to write a description of the child and what they were thinking.

I have given an account of how my students and I dealt with the pictures because it is important to note that discussing the photos is often difficult. Sometimes the photos do not project clearly and that can cause problems. Where possible, I have tried to make connections to other media and to topics my students are familiar with. There are still other photos I would like to try but time and space has limited the choices.

It seems impossible to me to consider a unit like this without actually engaging students in sharing and discussing photos from their family albums and/or taking some photos themselves. While I have not formally included the photographs of Jacques-Henri Lartigue within the unit it was suggested to me that he would be an excellent example to share with students. Lartigue (1894-1986) was from a privileged background. As a child of eight his father gave him his first cameras. Lartigue began to take pictures of his own life. He seems to have had a natural talent for photography and he was never worried about being part of any movement in photography. He was not influenced nor did he influence the world of photography because none of his work was exhibited until 1962.

Along with his photographs Lartigue kept diaries from his earliest days. He also drew many of the photographs that captured the same effect that he sought in taking the picture.<sup>10</sup> In sharing some of these photos with students they could easily see someone their own age recording what they found interesting in life.

I would like to see my students take some pictures and arrange them in some meaningful way. They could take photos of things that are important to them, family members, their homes, etc. Of course, along with the photos I would want them to write about the images and what they mean to them.

## Lesson Plan #1: Reading a Photograph

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Objective: Students will look at a photograph and fill in a graphic organizer based on the five "**W**" questions **who, what, where, when, why**, as a way of recognizing the visual elements within the photograph and how well they help to create a successful composition.

Materials: photograph, overhead projector and screen, graphic organizer (see **Appendix #3**), pencils

Introducing the Lesson: You might begin this lesson by asking students why people take photos? Students would hopefully answer that usually a photo is made to remember an event, place or person. Students might talk about events or things they might photograph. You could then tell them that photos tell us stories or have stories behind them much the same as those stories we read and write. Today we are going to try to learn how to read photographs. The same way we question, wonder, and connect to help us understand a story we can do the same with photographs. To help us we will use the 5 "W" questions: who, what, where, when, and why.

Procedure:

1. Present a photograph to the class such as *Shoes on the Sand* (see bibliography).
2. You may want to fill in the organizer after preliminary discussions about the photo. You can decide whether to give each student a copy of the organizer at the start of the lesson. Sometimes the organizer becomes a distraction.
3. If you follow the discussion as outlined in the unit your students will agree that the photo of the sneaks suggests more than it directly shows us about being at the beach.
4. Additional "why" questions you might include are:

*Why did the photographer emphasize certain elements and not others?*

What's in focus?

Is one person or object in focus or many?

What happened before or after the picture was taken?

What might the photo look like if the photographer had taken it from another

angle- above, behind, left, right, or below?

Conclusion: Students would have successfully completed the organizer and begin to understand how the 5"W" questions help them become more conscience of detail and point of view.

## **Lesson Plan #2: The "voice" of a photograph**

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Objective: Students will be given an old photograph and be asked to write in the "voice" of the person within the photograph. As with many writing activities students would need to have this modeled and then gradually expand the writing to where they could do it on their own.

Materials: There are many possibilities but I will use as an example the photograph by Todd Webb entitled *LaSalle at Amsterdam, New York, 1946*, paper, pencil,

Projector, screen

Introducing the lesson: This writing assignment would occur after a discussion of the photo as was done earlier in this unit. Then we would talk about "voice". In writing voice is the underlying component of the whole process. Without it the writing will fall flat and uninteresting. It is the same in a photo. Voice is the imprint of the artist on the photograph. It is what lets us know that we are reading their story or looking at one of their pictures.

Procedure:

1. Look again at the photograph: *LaSalle at Amsterdam, New York, 1946* by Todd Webb.

What is the voice in this photo? Hopefully students would be led to see that the voice comes from the joy and happiness of the children as they dance delightedly under the cascading water.

2. Each child should imagine that they are one of the children in the circle. If necessary have students stand and hold hands in a circle and rotate about. Whose hand are you holding and what is it like as you circle around.

3. We might talk about what it is like in the summer on one of those hot days. How do you feel? What is it like when cool water touches your skin?

4. For special ed. And second language learners it might be advisable to list vocabulary words students might have trouble spelling.

5. Have students imagine that they are one of the children in that photo. They can write a description of what it feels like to be under that water and being part of that circle.

Closure of the lesson: Students can share their writings and post them on a display around a copy of Todd Webb's photo.

## **Lesson Plan #3: Comparing a Photo and a Painting**

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Objective: Students will compare a picture or pictures of the San Francisco Earthquake with the painting *Evacuation of San Francisco by Sea* by Alexander Coulter (1849-1936). The painting is a panoramic view of the rescue which Coulter did on a 5' X10' shade he had salvaged from the quake. Interestingly, Coulter had been a newspaper artist but lost his job when the quake occurred. He did the painting from sketches he made as he helped rescue people from the city by sea. Coulter also altered the placement of some key structures which would have been hidden by smoke if he had made accuracy his primary focus.

Students will complete a Venn diagram comparing the two media used.

Materials: A photograph of the damaged city. I have chosen to use *Looking toward the fire on Sacramento Street* taken by Arnold Genthe (1896-1942). Genthe was a classical scholar from Germany who taught himself photography. Dorothea Lange worked with him early in her career.

Projector, screen, pencils, Venn diagram graphic organizer.

Introducing the lesson: this lesson could be done as a follow-up to discussing the photo *As the city burns, a group watches the towering clouds of smoke from a safe spot on Russian Hill*. You might show the Coulter work and then the Genthe photo. See if students recognize that one is a painting and the other a photo. Talk about the difference.

Tell them the story of how Coulter made sketches of what he saw and how he altered the placement of buildings in the final painting.

Procedure:

1. Give students a Venn diagram graphic organizer. Have students label one side for the painting and the other for the photograph.
2. Students should recognize that the painting is a reproduction of what happened and the photo shows part of what was happening.
3. Can we trust the photo?
4. How accurate is the Painting? If it is not accurate does that make it less valuable as a remembrance of the quake and fire? Why? Why not?
5. Students will fill in the Venn graphic with the teacher modeling

Closure of the lesson: Students will have completed the diagram and with continued practice should eventually be able to work in small groups or in pairs to compare and contrast other photos.

## Endnotes

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1 Biography of Todd Webb

[http://www.toddwebbphotographs.com/about\\_todd.html](http://www.toddwebbphotographs.com/about_todd.html)

2 Exile in a Strange Country: The photography of John Gutmann. USA Today

(magazine): May 1, 2001; Ross, Iain 2001

<http://www.highbeam.com>

3 Biography of Robert Doisneau

<http://www.robetdoisneau.com>

4 Joel Meyerowitz article: Masters of Photography

<http://www.mastersofphotography.com>

5 Joel Meyerowitz biography

<http://www.joelmeyerowitz.com>

6 American Masters, Man Ray, PBS

[http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/ray\\_m.html-30k](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/ray_m.html-30k)

7 David Heath, photographer

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<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0003669-11k>

8 Associated Press Photo Archives

<http://www.photoarchivesap.org>

9 Alfred Eisenstaedt, Biography

<http://www.artscenecal.com/ArticlesFile/Archive/Articles1997/Articles0397/AEisenstaedt.html-8k->

10 Biography: Jacques-Henri Lartigue

<http://www.lartigue.org/index.html>

## Appendix A

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This unit deals with topics that are reflected in the standards of the New Haven Public Schools' Writing Curriculum.

Content Standard

2.0 Writing

### **Performance Standard 2.1**

*Students will demonstrate strategic writing skills that ensure successful communication*

### **Performance Standard 2.2**

*Students will demonstrate strategic writing behavior, before, during writing, and after specific writing tasks.*

### **Performance Standard 2.3**

*Students will demonstrate performance standards 2.1 and 2.2 through a wide variety of writing tasks.*

## Appendix B

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I have referenced a site that offers a list of vocabulary which will be useful in discussing photographs. ( **Basic Strategies in Reading Photographs**, <http://www.nuovo.com/southern-images/analyses.html> ) I reproduce it here although the web sight provides accompanying thumbnail pictures to illustrate each term.

**General Vocabulary:** Words that can be used in describing photographs

**abstract:** an image that emphasizes formal elements (line, shape, etc.) rather than specific, recognizable objects.

**content:** the subject, topic or information captured in a photograph.

**direct approach:** confronting a scene in a straight-forward manner, without using unusual angles or distortion.

**documentary photography:** photographs whose main purpose is to record a place, person(s) or event

**expressive:** concerned with communicating emotion.

**geometric shape:** simple rectilinear or curvilinear shapes found in geometry, such as circles, squares, triangles, etc.

**intention:** reason(s) why the artist made a work of art.

**landscape:** an image that portrays the natural environment.

**objective:** a point of view free from personal bias, which attempts to consider all available information with equal regard and fairness.

**organic shape:** shapes based on natural objects such as trees, mountains, leaves, etc.

**representational:** an image which shows recognizable objects.

**subject:** the main object or person(s) in a photograph.

**theme:** a unifying or dominant idea in one work or in a collection of works.

**Visual Elements:** these terms describe elements you will see in many photographs along with questions that will help you to narrow down how that element is present in the photo you are looking at.

**focus:** what areas appear clearest or sharpest in the photograph? What do not?

**light:** what areas of the photograph are most highlighted? Are there any shadows? Does the photograph allow you to guess the time of day? Is the light natural or artificial? Harsh or soft? Reflected or direct?

**line:** are there objects in the photograph that act as lines? Are they straight, curvy, thin, thick? Do the lines create direction in the photograph? Do they outline? Do the lines show movement or energy?

**repetition:** are there any objects, shapes, or lines which repeat and create a pattern?

**shape:** do you see geometric or organic shapes? What are they?

**space:** is there depth to the photograph or does it seem shallow? What creates this appearance? Are there important negative spaces in addition to positive spaces? Is there depth created by spatial illusions?

**texture:** if you could touch the surface of the photograph how would it feel? How do the objects in the picture look like they would feel?

**value:** is there a range of tones from dark to light? Where is the darkest value? Where is the lightest?

**Composition of the Photograph:** these words will help you to think about how the visual elements combine within a photograph to create a composition.

**angle:** the vantage point from which the photograph was taken; generally used when discussing a photograph taken from an unusual or exaggerated used when discussing a photograph taken from an unusual or exaggerated vantage point.

**background:** the part of a scene or picture that is or seems to be toward the back.

**balance:** the distribution of visual elements in a photograph. Symmetrical balance distributes visual elements evenly in an image. Asymmetrical balance is found when visual elements are not evenly distributed in an image.

**central focus:** the object(s) which appears most prominently and/or most clearly focused in a photograph.

**composition:** the arrangement or structure of the formal elements that make up an image.

**contour:** the outline of an object or shape.

**contrast:** strong visual differences between light and dark, varying textures, sizes, etc.

**framing:** what the photographer has placed within the boundaries of the photograph.

**setting:** actual physical surroundings or scenery whether real or artificial.

**vantage point:** the place from which a photographer takes a photograph.

## Appendix C

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Graphic organizer for use when discussing a photograph based on *Reading Photographs*: by Melissa Thibault and David Walbert (<http://www.learnnc.org/articles/v/photo0602-1>)

Name :

Date:

Name of Photograph:

Photographer:

Who or What do you see?

What don't you see?

When was the photograph taken? What is happening?

Where was the photograph taken?

Why did the photographer take the photo at this moment?

Why did the photographer take the picture from this vantage point?

## Bibliography

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Adams, Ansel. 1989. *Example: the making of 40 Photographs*. New York: Little, Brown, and Company. This book takes forty of Adams' photographs and adds an accompanying narration by the photographer about the circumstances that led him to take each specific photograph.

Culham, Ruth. 2003. *6+1 Traits of Writing*. New York: Scholastic.

This book presents what is considered by many to be the essential traits of good writing: Ideas, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, Conventions, and Presentation. These are used as a way of evaluating and instructing students.

Editors of Life Magazine. 2003. *100 Photographs That Changed the World*. New York

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A well known book about teaching writing in the elementary grades. It presents ideas on teaching spelling, writing conventions and a range of genre from poetry to fiction and nonfiction.

Hillerich, Robert L. 1985. *Teaching Children to Write, K-8*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Offers the elementary teacher advice and ideas on encouraging students to write and organizing the writing classroom.

Levine, Ellen. 1992. *If You Lived in the Time of the Great San Francisco Earthquake*. New York: Scholastic. One of a series of books that literally takes young readers to important events or times. This book takes place to San Francisco, California, shortly before, during, and after the quake. Describes what it was like for the people living through this event.

Meyerowitz, Joel and Colin Westerbeck. 2001. *Bystander: A History of Street Photography*. New York: Bulfinch Press. This is a substantial book that embraces the history of a photographic genre which was created from the energy of everyday street life. Both well known and unknown artist are included.

Orvell, Miles. 2003. *Oxford History of Art: American Photography*. New York: Oxford Press. This book examines the 150 year history of American photography both well known and less-known images. The book makes this subject available to even the casual reader with an interest in the subject.

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