A Day in the Life: September 11 in Photographs

Curriculum Unit 06.01.07
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Photography is a form of art--a fact that is often forgotten or overlooked. In a photograph we can observe the emotion, environment, clothing that is worn, and more. Photographs fix you in a moment. They capture people and places as they were at a given time.

My unit titled, A Day in the Life: September 11 in Photographs, will focus on images of the September 11th tragedy. The unit will integrate literacy, social studies, and art. The unit will be taught in a fourth or fifth grade classroom, but may be used in any classroom. Teachers may need to select different photographs that are appropriate for their students.

Many of us can vividly remember what we were doing on September 11th when tragedy struck the United States. We watched what happened to the Twin Towers over and over again. Because this event was so tragic, it marks an important time in history that will never be forgotten. Just as we can replay the events of that day in our heads, our students are also familiar with this tragedy. Some students may even know someone that lives in New York or was involved in the tragedy.

Teachers should be careful about the photographs that they choose for this topic. There are many wonderful photographs but some may be too vivid for children. The topic itself may be too much for young children, so I leave it up to the discretion of the teacher. As a teacher with experience in different grade levels, I realize that second grade students and fourth grade students are not on the same level. I believe that fourth grade students or upper elementary students can handle this topic and the viewing of these photographs.

This topic is a difficult, yet vital one to teach. There is no easy way to discuss September 11th. By using photographs it will make it more "real" for the students. Students will be able to relate and connect to the photographs. Students will examine the photographs, focusing on point of view, composition, and more.

We will be analyzing thirteen photographs, comparing different ones. For example, students will compare one photograph to another, very different photograph. Students will be writing about what they see and how they feel. Students will also be given the opportunity to create their own story from the picture.

As a teacher of different elementary grade levels, I believe it is very important that we teach students how to make observations and write about these observations. Whether they are making observations about a book they are reading or a math problem they are solving, it is important that children know how to be observant in all that they do. This unit will focus on making observations using photography. Students will be asked to not
Writing has become a "buzz word" to teachers of all grade levels. In New Haven, teachers at the elementary level have focused on CMT (Connecticut Mastery Test) questions. Students read a book or a passage and then practice answering different types of questions, questions that they may see when they take the CMT. Therefore, most of the writing activities in this unit will coincide with the CMT focus questions. Students will look at a photograph and then be asked to answer a question or set of questions about the photograph.

Observing photographs will be a nice change for students. Students normally look at drawings, paintings or illustrations. They are not given the opportunity to look at any types of photographs. Therefore, I hope to get students interested in both photography and history. I want students to realize that there are millions of different types of photographs in the world that relate to different time periods in history.

The Unit

There are so many options--many, many photographs of September 11, 2001 in books, magazines, and the internet. I have chosen ten photographs to discuss. Teachers may choose more or less. Teachers may focus on photographs of people and emotion or on themes like heroes.

The photographs that I chose for this unit will take the students on a journey through the event. Students will relive September 11th, through photographs. The unit focuses first on photographs of the attack; then, photographs of the aftermath; finally, the attempted rescues.

The unit will provide teachers with activities that integrate language arts, social studies, and visual arts. It touches upon many different curriculum standards. According to New Haven Public Schools language arts standards (2.0-3.0), students will progress along a developmental continuum as they become skilled writers and speakers. Students will also develop strategic listening and viewing skills by interpreting and constructing meaning (4.0-5.0). According to social studies standards (5.0), students will focus on the importance of events in the world in which they live. Lastly, it touches upon visual arts standards (3.0-4.0). Students will evaluate, critique, and integrate art concepts. Students will understand the historical and cultural relationships and influences to art work (http://nhps.net/curriculum).

Photographs One and Two (New York City Skyline Before and After)

To begin this unit, I chose two photographs that would really capture the attention of all students. Photographs one and two in my unit show the New York skyline (http://digitaljournalist.org). Photograph one is a picture of the New York skyline before the September 11 attack. The photograph is called, Statue of Liberty and World Trade Center. The photograph was taken at night, so one can see why New York is called "the city of lights." The lights signify excitement and life.

The photographer, Joseph Pobereskin, seemed to focus on the enormity of the World Trade Center. In this
photograph, the Statue of Liberty looks minuscule next to the World Trade Center. From the foundation of the pedestal to the torch, the height of the Statue of Liberty is about 306 feet 8 inches (http://endex.com). But in this photo, it looks almost like a tiny figurine. The torch of the Statue of Liberty is directly in the middle of the two towers.

The numerous buildings in this photograph act as vertical lines cutting though the sky. If you cover or block out the World trade Center buildings, you are left with a very flat, horizontal skyline. The World Trade Center adds height to the skyline and one can see why the buildings were called "the twin towers." The World Trade Center is 110 stories and 1,368 feet tall (http://en.wikipedia.org).

As you look at this photograph more and more, you get the sense that the World Trade Center was important, not only to New York, but to all of the United States. The towers represent security and comfort, surrounding the Statue of Liberty and lighting up the New York sky.

In photograph two, you immediately notice the absence of those two magnificent buildings. This photograph was taken on September 12, 2001. It is called, Statue of Liberty and New York Skyline, again taken by Joseph Pobereskin. The photographer really captured the mood in this photograph. The sky is gray and gloomy. There is still a cloud of smoke and ash, caused from the devastating attack. There are no lights present in any of the buildings, as if life stopped. The buildings and city look dark.

The Statue of Liberty, again the center of the photograph, looks lonely. She is surrounded by clouds of smoke. The Statue of Liberty sheds the only light that we see in the photograph. It is as if she were saying, "We may be done, but we're not out." The light shining up form the Statue of Liberty is the "punctum" in this photograph. Roland Barthes describes the "punctum" as something powerful, a detail that catches your eye. Barthes, in his book titled, Camera Lucida, says the punctum is something that "pierces" or "stings" you.

Photographs Three and Four (A Close Look at the Twin Towers)

Both photographs are from the book titled, New York September 11, by Magnum Photographers. They are found in a section of the book titled, Farewell to the Towers (134-135). These photographs were taken prior to September 11th. The photographers' "studium" is clear in both photographs. Roland Barthes describes "studium" as the intention of the photographer, the message the photographer is trying to convey. Richard Kalvar and Dennis Stock wanted us to see the beauty of these two buildings. Both photographs show the fine details, the complexity of the two buildings.

Photograph three is a close-up of the two towers. The photographer, Richard Kalvar, was standing down below and took the picture looking up at these giants. The beauty of this photograph is not only that it is black and white. The beauty is the details of the building. In distant photographs of the twin towers, you notice the vertical lines of the buildings. Here, you see the detail at the bottom, not simply vertical lines but a design like a pitchfork, three distinct prongs repeated along the bottom.

As you look at this photograph more and more, you wonder how something so gigantic could be built and how long and tedious this process must have been. In this photograph the towers look solid and strong. They also look infinite, as if the tower in the front stretches up forever and ever. From the angle the photograph is taken,
the towers look taller than 110 stories; they appear to stretch to the sky like a pathway or escalator.

The photographer of photograph four is Dennis Stock. It is another beautiful photograph taken from a unique viewpoint. The photographer was looking up at the towers. But the most striking feature of this photograph is the fact that the towers are the brightest part of the photograph because of the way the sunlight is reflecting. There are two buildings casting dark shadows on the towers. The shapes of these dark areas are very architectural, triangular and somewhat octagonal.

Photographs Five, Six, and Seven (The Attack)

The next set of photographs is interesting because they are taken from the same point of view. These photographs are again taken from Magnum Photographers, *New York September 11* (8-9). The photographer focused on the change in the landscape, which happened in a matter of minutes on that day. Steve McCurry photographed these scenes, capturing the magnitude of this attack.

Photograph five shows the second tower after it was hit. You can see the top of the tower beginning to crumble. The smoke is billowing, forming gray clouds hovering over Manhattan. These clouds represent the terrible sadness this event caused. From this day forth, our lives would be changed.

The next photograph, photograph six, shows how fast the destruction progressed. In a matter of seconds much more of the building began to crumble. You can see the debris that was sent in all directions. In minutes, the surrounding buildings would be covered or even destroyed.

Those once powerful towers among the unique landmarks of the United States of America, were gone. Americans no longer felt safe and protected, as we did for so many years. This photograph reminds me of a volcano erupting, the tower is erupting, exploding into pieces. The World Trade Center took seven years to build, and was demolished in a matter of hours.

The last photograph in this sequence shows the dust and debris that covered the buildings and the city. It looks like a blanket, covering the surrounding buildings. This photograph looks like a massive explosion has just occurred. Some of the buildings that were visible in the other two photos are no longer visible now. For the next eight months, the World Trade Center site cleanup and recovery continued twenty-four hours a day and involved thousands of workers.

Steve McCurry took all of these aerial photographs to capture as much of the cityscape as possible. McCurry wanted viewers to see the size and magnitude of this terrible event. By photographing a large portion of the city, it looks like the smoke is swallowing the buildings and taking over the city. In these photographs, the billowing smoke takes up more than half of the photograph. This smoke actually created somewhat of a fog over Manhattan that lasted for days.

The September 11 attack began when a hijacked American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the North Tower at 8:46 am. At 9:03 am, United Airlines Flight 175 crashed into the South Tower. The South Tower collapsed at 9:59 am, while the North Tower later collapsed at 10:28 am. Later that day 7 World Trade Center also collapsed. The four remaining buildings in the World Trade Center plaza were damaged and later demolished.
It took months to cleanup after this attack. More importantly, innocent lives were lost. There were 2,749 deaths related to the WTC attacks, as of February 2005 (http://en.wikipedia.org).

**Photograph Eight (The Smoky Aftermath)**

This photograph would be categorized as an aftermath photograph. This shows what the New York skyline looked like for the days that followed the attack. The thick layer of smoke seemed to hover of the city for days like a terrible, unlucky black storm cloud.

This photograph was taken by Thomas Hoepker from Brooklyn, New York (Magnum Photographers, 67). It is unusual because it is considered both documentary photography and artistry in photography. In the top portion of the photograph, you see the skyline, partially covered by smoke. The smoke is so thick you can hardly see the buildings. It looks as though there is a terrible storm that is only over Manhattan because you can see the clear blue sky in the upper right hand corner of the photo. Most of the buildings look very dark. My attention is drawn to the one white building in the middle of the skyline because it is so bright.

The Brooklyn Bridge is pictured on the left side of the photograph. In the middle part of the photograph is a blanket of green, hovering over the cemetery. This green blanket is like a mirror image of the blanket of smoke that is covering the city. The numerous tombstones in the cemetery are broken up by the tall, vertical structures. These tall monuments seem to have almost the same placement as the buildings above in the skyline.

It is as if the photographer cut the photograph into two horizontal parts--the top part of the photo representing devastation and the bottom part representing death or what was to come next. The top portion is very dark, yet the bottom portion of the photograph seems to be light.

**Photograph Nine (The Aftermath--Debris)**

This photograph represents the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. The photographer is Steve McCurry. This photograph shows the lobby of the World Financial Center (Magnum Photographers, 20-21). Normally, there would be thousands of people rushing around this building. This photo shows the silence and stillness caused by the attack on September 11.

The photographer chose an interesting viewpoint for this photograph. McCurry did not take the photo looking straight on at the staircase; instead he chose to take the photo at an angle. The staircases and escalators are positioned in the center of the photograph but on a diagonal, rather than simply being vertical. There are no people in the photograph. There is no sign of life, just debris and broken windows.

Another striking feature in this photograph is the sunlight shining in the windows. The sunlight shines in the upper right portion of the photograph but follows through the photograph horizontally. The light is an important feature in this photograph. It represents hope. It tells the observer that a higher being is watching.
The light from the window is the only light around. Because of the attack there is no power of any sort. So this ray of sunshine is shedding light on a very dark building. It sheds light on a hopeless and devastating event.

**Photograph Ten (Rescuer amongst the Devastation)**

This photograph represents the rescuers of September 11. There were thousands of rescuers that worked nonstop for months to clean up the devastation and to find life and death. Rescuers had the best and worst jobs. They represented hope to those of us watching in disbelief.

Eli Reed photographed this emergency worker surrounded by devastation (Magnum Photographers, 104-105). The photograph looks surreal. It is beautiful. The buildings in the background look foggy because of all the smoke and debris in the air. In the nearby buildings, there are windows and other parts that were blown away. Yet the buildings stand strong.

The emergency worker is surrounded by enormous piles of rubble. And yet he works with a small hammer. One would expect him to be holding something larger like a sledge hammer or an ax to get through the debris. But there he is working vigorously, pounding away with the hammer.

The worker is in a shadow so we cannot see his face. All we see is the hard hat on his head and hammer that he holds tightly in his right hand. He seems to be on a long beam or platform. This emergency worker represents the goodness and kindness in people. This man volunteered his time and effort. And although the situation that surrounds him seems hopeless and terrible, the worker represents the spirit that Americans had. It is the spirit to never give up and to always find the good in every situation.

The rubble from the twin towers in the bottom right of the photograph is a familiar sight. Americans came to know this rubble as "Ground Zero," a term that we would forever remember. That rubble is all that remains from the 110 story buildings that once stood there. There is still smoke coming from the rubble.

**Photograph Eleven (Firefighter Climbing a Ladder)**

Steve McCurry took an artistic photograph of a rescuer (Magnum Photographers, 17). This is a firefighter climbing a ladder. The photograph is taken in a unique way. McCurry chose to take the photograph from inside a nearby building. The photographer chose to be inside while looking outside. The photograph would not be the same if McCurry took the photograph from outside, perhaps standing beside the fire truck.

You can see that whatever building this was, it was also destroyed. We see remnants of the steel walls. The holes act as frames in this photograph. In the left frame we have the firefighter climbing a ladder and in the right frame we have piles of debris. It almost looks like the black hole, an endless abyss.

Again, we are looking at "Ground Zero." If you look closely, you see that this is heavy debris, pieces of steel...
and other heavy objects. This enormous pile represents the "weight" of the situation. This is not something that will be cleaned up in a matter of days; it would take months to go through this destruction. And it would take years for Americans to recovery from this tragedy.

This photograph makes you think about our loss as Americans. Not only did we lose landmark buildings, we lost innocent people in this tragedy. More importantly, we lost our feeling of safety and our feeling of power in this evil world that we live in.

**Photograph Twelve and Thirteen (Heroes of 9/11 and Iwo Jima)**

These two photographs represent heroes. Both photographs define America. In photograph twelve, we are looking at a famous photograph that was taken after September 11. Thomas E. Franklin took this photograph and published it on September 12, 2001. Franklin was about 150 yards from the debris of the World Trade Center towers when he took this photograph. It is a photograph of three Brooklyn firefighters hoisting a flag at Ground Zero (http://digitaljournalist.org). After taking this photograph, he said that he thought of Joseph Rosenthal's image of U.S. Marines raising the American flag on Iwo Jima in 1945 (photograph thirteen). Because Franklin's photograph looks like Rosenthal's famous war photograph, it predicts that Americans would be in a war resulting from this event. The comparison of the two photographs tells us that there is a new war on.

This photograph seems to show hope and a sense of pride. The firefighters hoist an American flag amongst all the debris and filth. It is as though they are saying, "We may be down but we're not out!" The photograph shows that we, as Americans, are not ready to throw in the towel and give up. It may be a long road but we can do it.

The "punctum" in this photograph is the American flag. Not only is it in the center of the photograph, but it seems to be that important detail that simply "grabs you." The red, white, and blue of the flag stand out amongst the gray pile of debris. The flag is a symbol of patriotism. It stands for freedom, justice, equal rights, equal opportunity, and much more. The attack did not destroy our patriotism, instead it strengthened our spirit. After this photograph, many people displayed flags outside of their homes and places of work. It became an epidemic. After September 11, the flag truly became a national symbol.

The firefighters are covered with grime and soot. All three of them are looking up. They are carefully preparing the flag that sits at half-mast. The entire background of the photograph is rubble. The pile of debris is so "heavy" and enormous that it makes the men look dwarf-like.

My final photograph, Rosenthal's photograph thirteen, is a historic photograph. I wanted to show my students how history "repeats itself." These two photographs are very similar. They represent American pride. They also relay an important message; the message tells us that by working together we can achieve anything, we can be victorious.

Photograph thirteen was taken by Joseph Rosenthal in 1945 (http://www.iwojima.com). It is a photograph that defined American glory. It is a photograph of U.S. Marines raising a flag atop Mount Suribachi on the Pacific Island of Iwo Jima on February 23, 1945. This flag-raising occurred during one of America's bloodiest World War II battles with Japan.
It is a very famous photograph. This photograph is taken from a side view. We cannot see the soldier's faces in this photograph. What was important in this photograph was the raising of the American flag. It stood for victory and pride. The photograph captures the heroic.

The men are united in form and effort. The right leg of each man seems to be identical with the same bend. We do not see their faces, the faces were not important in this photograph. We simply see their bodies and their hands. The last soldier is reaching up to the empty, gray sky. The flag is positioned at a diagonal, mirroring the stance of the men below.

Lesson Plans

The Twin Towers

Objectives: Students will observe and analyze photographs. Students will verbally share these observations with their classmates. Students will listen to their classmates' observations.

This activity especially relates to language arts and visual arts, students will be focusing on their verbal and listening skills. It is important for the teacher to help keep the discussion focused. The teacher should also ask questions to motivate the students. The materials you may need are as follows:

Photographs one through four

Laptop and projector (if possible)

Laser pointer (if possible)

Journals

Pencil/pen

Discuss photograph one, Statue of Liberty and the World Trade Center. During the discussion, focus on the New York skyline. Discuss such things as composition, colors, texture, vertical and horizontal lines. Then, as a comparison photograph look at photograph two, Statue of Liberty and New York Skyline. Discuss the similarities and differences in these two photographs. Teachers may wish to make observations about photograph two and then put both photographs up side by side to make comparisons.

Next, discuss photographs three and four. These two photos give students a closer look at the Twin Towers. This is a perfect time to allow students to lead the discussion.

At the end of the activity, students should reflect in their journals. Students may choose their favorite photograph to discuss in detail. Students may wish to use some ideas and observations that were discussed during class.

The Attack
Objectives: Students will observe and analyze photographs. Students will give detailed descriptions of these photographs.

This activity relates to language arts and writing, students will practice answering a typical CMT question. The materials you will need are as follows:

Photographs five, six, and seven

Laptop and projector (if possible)

Laser pointer (if possible)

Journals

Pencil/pen

Begin the lesson by discussing photographs five, six, and seven. Discuss different aspects of the photographs. For example, what is the focus of each photograph? What is the first thing you notice? Teachers may want to talk about how the photographs are "ordered," they show how the event progressed.

Another important aspect of this photograph is the texture. I would ask students to describe the texture. Is it smooth or grainy? Are there horizontal and vertical lines present in this photo? It is important to discuss many different aspects of the photograph. The more students do this, the more comfortable and confident they will become with their observations.

Students should compare and contrast these photographs. How are they the same? How are they different? Again, the discussion should be rich with words such as color, composition, and mood.

At the end of the activity, students will respond to the following question in their journals. Choose one word or phrase that best describes these photographs. Explain why you chose this word or phrase. This question is an example of a typical question that is asked on the CMT. So it is important that students are familiar with this type of question.

The Aftermath

Objectives: Students will observe and analyze photographs. Students will discuss the photograph and make a connection.

This activity relates to language arts and writing, students will practice answering a typical CMT question. The materials you will need are as follows:

Photograph nine

Laptop and projector (if possible)

Laser pointer (if possible)

Journals

Pencil/pen
Begin the lesson by discussing photograph nine of the aftermath. Discuss different aspects of the photograph. For example, what is the focus of the photograph? What is the first thing you notice? The striking feature in this photograph is the sunlight shining in the windows. The sunlight shines in the upper right portion of the photograph but follows through the photograph horizontally. The light is an important feature in this photograph. It represents hope. It tells the observer that a higher being is watching over. The light from the window is the only light around. Because of the attack there is no power of any sort. So this ray of sunshine is shedding light on a very dark building. It sheds light on a hopeless and devastating event.

Another important aspect of this photograph that should be discussed is the interesting viewpoint that the photographer chose. He did not take the photo looking straight on at the staircase; instead he chose to take the photo at an angle. The staircases and escalators are positioned in the center of the photograph but on a diagonal, rather than simply being vertical.

Next, discuss how there are no people in the photograph. There is no sign of life, just debris and broken windows. Teachers may want to ask students about the mood of this photograph. The discussion should be rich with words such as color, composition, and mood.

At the end of the activity, students will respond to the following question in their journals. *What is your first reaction to this photograph? Explain using specific details.* Students will be making a connection to the photograph. This question is an example of a typical question that is asked on the CMT. So it is important that students are familiar with this type of question.

**The Rescuers**

Objectives: Students will observe and analyze photographs. Students will discuss the topic of heroes and make a connection.

This activity relates to language arts and writing, students will practice answering a typical CMT question. The materials you will need are as follows:

Photographs ten and eleven

Laptop and projector (if possible)

Laser pointer (if possible)

Journals

Pencil/pen

Begin the lesson by discussing photograph ten of the rescuer. Discuss different aspects of the photograph. For example, what is the focus of the photograph? What is the first thing you look at? Teachers may want to talk about the position of the rescuer and the buildings in the background.

Another important aspect of this photograph is the texture. I would ask students to describe the texture. Is it smooth or grainy? Are there horizontal and vertical lines present in this photo? It is important to discuss many different aspects of the photograph. The more students do this, the more comfortable and confident they will become with their observations.
Next, discuss photograph eleven of another rescuer. Students should compare and contrast these two photographs. How are they the same? How are they different? Again, the discussion should be rich with words such as color, composition, and mood.

At the end of the activity, students will respond to the following question in their journals. What is a hero? Do you know someone that is a hero? If so, why is he/she a hero and how is he/she different from the heroes in these photographs? Students will be making a connection to the photographs. This question is an example of a typical question that is asked on the CMT. So it is important that students are familiar with this type of question.

**Historic Events**

Objectives: Students will observe and analyze photographs. Students will be asked to write a title for these two photographs.

This activity relates to language arts and writing, students will practice answering a typical CMT question. The materials you will need are as follows:

Photographs twelve and thirteen

Laptop and projector (if possible)

Laser pointer (if possible)

Journals

Pencil/pen

As the final activity for this unit, I wanted to show two very historic events. The two photographs, twelve and thirteen, are similar in many ways but also very different. Students should discuss how these photographs are similar and how they are different. Franklin took the photograph of the firefighters hoisting an American flag amongst the debris of 9/11 (photograph twelve). Franklin said that he thought of Rosenthal's image of the U.S. marines raising the American flag on Iwo Jima in 1945 (photograph thirteen).

Photograph twelve seems to show hope and a sense of pride. The firefighters hoist an American flag amongst all the debris and filth. The American flag is in the center of the photograph. It seems to be that important detail that simply "grabs you." The red, white, and blue of the flag stand out amongst the gray pile of debris. The flag is a symbol of patriotism. It stands for freedom, justice, equal rights, equal opportunity, and much more. The attack did not destroy our patriotism, instead it strengthened our spirit.

Photograph thirteen, is another historic photograph. It is Rosenthal's photograph of the U.S. marines at Iwo Jima in 1945. The photograph is taken from a side view. We cannot see the soldier's faces in this photograph. What was important in this photograph was the raising of the American flag. It stood for victory and pride. The photograph captures the heroic.

These two photographs show students how history "repeats itself." The two photographs are very similar. They represent American pride. They also relay an important message; the message tells us that by working together we can achieve anything, we can be victorious.
After the discussion, students should respond to the following question in their journals. *Both of these photographs do not have titles. If you were asked to give these photos titles, what would the titles be and WHY?* This question is an example of a typical question that is asked on the CMT. So it is important that students are familiar with this type of question.

**Sources for Research**

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Santella, Andrew

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Poffenberger, Nancy
Fun Publishing Company
2001

*September 11, 2001: The Day That Changed America, Vol. 1*

Wheeler, Jill C.
ABDO Publishing Company
2002

**Web Sources**

http://digitaljournalist.org/issue0110/interviews_intro.htm

This is the Digital Journalist website titled, "Seeing the Horror." View the photos in the Main Gallery--great photos that include the photo of the NY Skyline before and after and firefighters hoisting the flag.

http://www.skipsprints.com

Go to photos of NY to see more photos of the NY skyline.

http://en.wikipedia.org

World Encyclopedia website is great for any information you need on the Twin Towers or anything else.

http://www.americaswonderlands.com

Go to NYC 1998 to see photo of the World Trade Center.

http://www.flickr.com

Search September 11 to find excellent photographs.

http://endex.com

Search for information on the Statue of Liberty or Twin Towers.

http://www.iwojima.com

Rosenthal's Photograph of marines at Iwo Jima

http://nhps.net/curriculum

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