



## Introduction

In this seminar we focused on how to use photographs *actively* in the classroom. That is, we wanted to go beyond using photographs as simple illustrations -- this is Abraham Lincoln; this is Martin Luther King, Jr.; this is the Lower East Side; this is Yosemite -- and instead analyze what photographs mean and how they go about doing so. We spent a lot of time in class looking at individual photographs, studying them for prolonged periods, having conversations about them, as we tried to determine how and why the photographer chose this particular subject; how the photographer "designs" that subject, through cropping, tonality, point of view, orchestrated luck, type of camera, and many other aspects of photography as a truly creative practice. In short, we aimed to understand how photography does not so much copy the world but *invents* it, according to the imagination and historical situation of the photographer. Our discussions opened up photography for us all as a powerful medium for classroom instruction. Yes, we can use it to teach the specifics of American history, political and cultural. But beyond that, we can use it to teach our students, and ourselves, how to speak and write about the world -- how to summon the right language, how to become actively, thoughtfully engaged with what we see. In curriculum units ranging from African American history to war to childhood to the environment, participants in this seminar explored the special power of *talking about* photographs (instead of merely showing them) to make the past come alive.

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