



Yale-New Haven  
Teachers Institute®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2012 Volume I: Understanding History and Society through Visual Art, 1776 to 1914

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## **Questioning the Accuracy of War Images: John Trumbull's Paintings of the American Revolution and Photographs from the American Civil War**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 12.01.10  
by Kristin Wetmore

This unit has students compare visual responses to two different time periods: the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. The images are John Trumbull's historic paintings at the Yale University Art Gallery and Civil War photographs that are also in Yale's collection. Students will discuss them and then determine whether and how they reveal, criticize, or report the events that they depict. Artists and historians interpret historical events. I would like my students to understand that this interpretation is a construction, and to examine specifically visual means of interpreting historical events.

Students should be able to question the accuracy of artwork, to determine how the image is biased, and to ask what message the artist is trying to convey. This unit can be used for a photography course, art history course, U.S. history course or even an English course studying literature of the Revolutionary War or Civil War. These images do not have to be used consecutively, nor do they have to build on each other. They can be used individually at different points in the curriculum, if it is set up chronologically.

(Recommended for Art History, Photography, and Social Studies, grades 9-12)

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