



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1993 Volume IV: The Minority Artist in America

Photography: The Art and Science

Guide for Curriculum Unit 93.04.01
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I have written this unit to be used in classrooms with students in grades 4-12. I believe that there are activities which can be used to supplement learning in any subject. The lessons I have included are science, art, writing, reading, and math. The bibliography includes beautiful photo essays, photography catalogs, and books about photography in general that should stimulate the interest of young photographers. I would hope that the experience of using a camera, manipulating images, or experimenting with the art of photography would be much more important than sitting in a classroom learning the history of black photographers, but this is important, too.

The text of this unit is a brief history of blacks in photography since photography was introduced in 1839. I began this research as an undergraduate photography major frustrated by the fact that although there were images of blacks in the texts used in my history of photography classes, there were no images by black photographers. I was almost certain that there had been black photographers. I knew for sure of James Van Der Zee, Roy DeCarava, Gordon Parks, Louise Jefferson, and others. My professors were not able to offer assistance in my quest. I was fortunate enough to have been living in New York City at the time, where I could take advantage of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, a branch of The New York Public Library.

I think the information in this text includes more detail than is needed to teach a unit about the art of photography, but I want black children to know how much of their history is tied to this very important art form. I want black children to be photographers, either amateur or professional. It is important to document the lives and achievements of blacks in the communities in which they live.

What black photographers can expect for the future can only depend on how hard they are willing to work. As history has demonstrated, success in the field of photography requires three times the effort of that in any other field. But the persistence and perseverance of blacks, proven throughout the last one hundred years, says that it can be done. It is key to remember that photography is only fifty years younger than the United States. And while it has continued to play a key role in the shaping of our self image as blacks. We must remain vigilant, we must continue to contribute our thoughts, ideas, and images as black Americans photographers if we are to be truly integrated into the fabric of and remain contributors to American History.

(Recommended for Language Arts, Science and Math, Grades 4 -12)

Key Words

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