

Journeys With Lange, Steinbeck and the American Family
Paula Simonson, 2018 Steinbeck Institute

Objective:

Literacy.RI.7 - Compare and contrast a text to an audio, video, or multimedia version of the text, analyzing each medium's portrayal of the subject (e.g., how the delivery of a speech affects the impact of the words).

Literacy.W.7 - Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.

Literacy.W.8 - Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

Literacy.SL.4 - Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

Literacy.SL.5 - Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and findings and emphasize salient points.

Context:

This lesson is designed for any secondary ELA classroom but can be easily adapted to history classrooms. This lesson would also be a cross-curricular format for English and History classes.

Materials:

- Classroom set of depression era photos by Dorothea Lange
- Classroom set of chapters ten through twelve of *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck.
- Optional: Selected readings from *The Harvest Gypsies* by John Steinbeck
- Access to chromebooks/internet
- Pencil/pen, notecards

Time Span:

Five to ten forty-five minute class periods, depending on the desired final outcome and presentation of projects.

Procedures:

1. Begin with an introduction to photojournalism by giving students a set of depression-era photos by Dorothea Lange. Do not provide any history or background. Ask students to analyze photos and then use a notecard to write a short summary about what they noticed and what they believe the photographer was attempting to communicate.
2. Once students have completed writing, have a guided classroom discussion and allow a time of sharing.
3. Optional - After discussion, allow students to read and annotate *The Migrant Experience*. This will help give some understanding and context to the Lange photographs. Once they have completed the article, hand the photographs back and ask them to write again, using the information they have learned from the article. Ask them to include how ideas about the images changed from the first viewing. To shorten the lesson, simply provide students with some historical information about the depression and then move to the next step.
4. Ask students to write original one to two sentence summaries for each photograph.
5. Now that you have introduced students to the power of photojournalism, give students a copy of chapters ten through twelve of *The Grapes of Wrath*. (Selected reading from *The Harvest Gypsies* would also be a good option). Read the chapters together in class if time allows. Give students time to ask questions and/or share/write what they may know about their own family and the histories of their ancestral journeys.

Extensions:

- Have students continue research by collecting an assigned number of family photos and create a personal photojournalism project, patterned after the style of Dorothea Lange. Have students create the pictorial collection on Google Slides, Prezi, or any presentation format you choose. Pictures must be organized in a logical or chronological order and should each have an original caption which details the time and the significance of the photo in the collection.
- Ask students to identify and analyze passages from *The Grapes of Wrath* and/or *The Harvest Gypsies*, demonstrating how these passages reflect the same concerns depicted by Lange's photographs in an essay.
- You may choose to have students create a written research paper to go along with the project outlining the positive and negative impacts that their families experienced as they traveled.
- Ask students to bring the research close to home and write about how they personally may or may not have been impacted by the travels and struggles of their ancestors.
- Introduce students to images which have been used by media to manipulate how they see and understand certain historical events and analyze how viewers can be impacted without knowing the details/context surrounding an image. See Washington Post article in the resources below.

Rationale:

Students will be given the opportunity to consider the impact and connections between the works of Lange and Steinbeck while using written and verbal language to express how they were affected by the images and too use appropriate language and writing skills to create accurate summaries/captions for personal family history photo collections. They will also gain a deeper understanding of historical events that shaped their own families. Students will also practice the power and importance of good research and documentation while finding relevant photos for final presentations.

Resources:

Fanslow, Robin A. *The Migrant Experience. Voices from the Dust Bowl: the Charles L.Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection, 1940 to 1941.* American Folklife Center; Library of Congress, 1998. Electronic. <https://www.loc.gov/collections/todd-and-sonkin-migrant-workers-from-1940-to-1941/articles-and-essays/the-migrant-experience>.

Museum of Modern Art. Dorothea Lange. <https://www.moma.org/artists/3373>. Electronic.

Schmidt, Samantha and Kristine Phillips. *The crying Honduran girl on the cover of Time was not separated from her mother.* Morning Mix: The Washington Post, June 22, 2018. Electronic. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2018/06/22/the-crying-honduran-girl-on-the-cover-of-time-was-not-separated-from-her-mother-father-says/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.5e10251b5872

Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath.* New York: Penguin Group, 1939. Print.

Steinbeck, John. *The Harvest Gypsies.* California: The San Francisco News, 1936. Print.

Contact Information: pasimonson@wsd.net