Teaching Appropriate Use of Historical Evidence: Analyzing Images

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Introduction

The AP U.S. History Curriculum Framework defines the Appropriate Use of Relevant Historical Evidence in the following way:

**Appropriate Use of Historical Evidence**

*Historical thinking involves the ability to describe and evaluate evidence about the past from diverse sources (written documents, works of art, archaeological artifacts, oral traditions, and other primary sources), and requires the students to pay attention to the content, authorship, purpose, format, and audience of such sources. It involves the capacity to extract useful information, make supportable inferences, and draw appropriate conclusions from historical evidence, while also noting the context in which the evidence was produced and used, recognizing its limitations, and assessing the points of view that it reflects.*

The following activities take students from guided to independent practice working with analysis of images. When working with students on this skill, it is helpful to give them a graphic organizer centered on a protocol that helps them address these questions. In the appendix, you will find the protocol for image analysis.
Image Analysis Activity

In this activity, students are introduced to an image analysis protocol used to interpret visual sources and to connect them to a larger historical process. The protocol helps students understand how combining visual examination skills with primary source skills affects their understanding of the source and of the issue being discussed.

Procedure

- Provide a prompt that requires students to take an historical position. For example: How did the Great Depression change the social fabric of the United States?
- After introducing and discussing the prompt, give the students the image analysis protocol (Appendix A) and two or three photographs related to the prompt (e.g. photographs taken during the Great Depression).
- The class then turns to the image protocol and analyzes one image as a class using a “think aloud” strategy. In this activity, you will model how to “read” an image by walking students through the questions in the protocol. This provides a model for students on how the protocol should be used and what each category and question means.
- Then assign students to pairs and have them use the protocol to analyze the second image. As you circulate, make sure students are addressing links between the images. Have pairs report out and compare their results as a whole group, discussing the implications in light of the prompt.
- Repeat the process with the third image, again with special emphasis on links with others in the set.
- Students use their results from the analysis of the set to construct a tentative thesis that answers the prompt. At this point the class debates their thesis statements to see which is most persuasive given the evidence.

Check for Understanding

Give students an opportunity to make any changes to their thesis based on the classroom discussion. Have them mark their changes clearly on their original thesis. They should include an explanation of why they changed their thesis, using one of the images discussed in class in their explanation. Collect these thesis statements and explanations as an exit ticket and address any lingering misunderstandings the next day.

Guided Practice

In guided practice, the teacher closely monitors and directs the students as they practice a task for the first time independently.

Purpose

This activity builds students’ understanding of analyzing images as historical evidence.

Objective

After this lesson, students will be able to:
- Interrogate images and apply their analysis to a historical question.

Think Alouds

In a think aloud, teachers model thinking while reading for students. The best approach is to project the source in a way that allows you to annotate as you read (for example, using an overhead projector). In the case of primary source analysis, you can model the use of the protocol for students by thinking aloud about each section of the protocol. The importance of a think aloud is to model historical thinking for your students as you read. Once the students are comfortable with the protocol, you can have individual students do this for the class.
Applying Historical Context to Analyzing Photographs

In this activity, students review the image analysis protocol used to interpret visual sources and then practice it with images related to Vietnam.

**Procedure**

- Provide a prompt that requires students to take an historical position. For example: To what extent did the media influence American public opinion about the Vietnam War?
- After introducing and discussing the prompt, give the students the image analysis protocol and project the photograph of South Vietnamese General shooting Nguyen Van Lem during the Tet Offensive.
- The class then turns to the image protocol and analyzes one image as a class using a “Think-Aloud” strategy. Ask the students what emotions this image would elicit, what impact this image might have on public information, and what contextual information would help them understand the image further.
- After the class describes their initial impressions, distribute photographer Eddie Adams’ account about taking the photo. Tell students to read his account looking for important details that help to add to their understanding of the image.
- As they read, they should note that Eddie Adams describes the background of the general and the person being shot and also discusses the impact of his photograph on public opinion. The background of Nguyen Van Lem makes analyzing this image a lot more complicated. This is one of the best photographs for analyzing the importance of context and the complicated impact of images on public opinion.
- Then assign students to pairs and have them use the protocol to analyze the other images. As you circulate, make sure students are addressing links between the images. Have pairs report out and compare their results as a whole group, discussing the implications in light of the prompt.

**Check for Understanding**

Ask students to choose one image and write a short paragraph describing the importance of context for understanding the impact of the image on American public opinion.
Historical Image Presentations

In this activity, each student uses the image analysis protocol to interpret a single image, presents their image to the class, and connects the images to a larger historical context.

**Procedure**

- Provide a prompt that requires students to take a historical position. For example: While the 1950s were a time of increasingly homogeneous mass culture, many artists challenged the conformity of the decade. Support, refute, or modify this claim using evidence from the period.

- After introducing and discussing the prompt, give the students the image analysis protocol and the list of artists.

- Assign students an artist to research. Encourage students to begin by researching the artist and discovering how historians and critics have described the artist’s work. Often this research will lead to specific images that the students may choose to use. Students have a lot of freedom to choose and interpret images. You can ask them to show you their image for you to approve prior to them completing their project. You can also choose specific images rather than artists if you want to focus the discussion further on specific aspects of the 1950s (such as a photograph of Sputnik or of Lucille Ball). Students should research their assigned artist for homework, choosing an image to share with the class and completing the protocol for that image.

- The next day (or later in class if you have a long enough bloc), students take turns sharing and analyzing their image concentrating on whether their image is promoting or challenging conformity. The whole class participates in the discussion by commenting on the question of conformity. Ask the other students if their analysis of the image leads to a different interpretation than the one presented. Challenge the presenting students to defend their interpretation by citing specific aspects of the image or evidence they learned from their research such as the context of the image or of the point of view of the artist.

- Students use their results from the class analysis of the images to construct a tentative thesis that answers the prompt. At this point, the class debates their thesis statements to see which is most persuasive given the evidence.

**Check for Understanding**

Give students an opportunity to make any changes to their thesis based on the classroom discussion. Have them identify three pieces of art that support their thesis and at least one piece of art that could be used to counter their thesis and explain why.

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**Independent Practice**

**Purpose**

To build student mastery of applying historical context to an image through independent practice.

**Objective**

*After this lesson, students will be able to:*

- Apply the Image Analysis Protocol to a variety of images.
- Make an effective historical argument and support it with evidence.

**Supplementary Activity**

Prior to this activity, you can have the students analyze a background reading about culture in the 1950s such as Robert Hughes, *American Visions*, pages 507-508.

Teachers can develop student understanding of the prompt by playing a song for analysis such as “Little Boxes” by Malvina Reynolds. Students should be able to identify which lyrics are describing conformity as well as understanding that the song is challenging conformity.
1950s Image Presentation Assignment

Goals:
1. Explore the culture of the 1950s
2. Discuss the theme of conformity
3. Practice analyzing images

The 1950s and early 1960s were marked by “homogeneous mass culture as well as challenges to conformity by artists, intellectuals, and rebellious youth.” Support, refute, or modify this claim using evidence from the period.

Preview activity: What did conformity mean to cultural critics in the 1950s?

Norman Rockwell
Little Boxes – Malvina Reynolds

Assignment:
1. Research your image and artist and complete the protocol for your image – describe then interpret.
   - Begin by researching the artist
   - How have historians and critics described the artist’s work?
   - Your research may lead to a specific image that you may choose to use, but you have a lot of freedom to choose and interpret your image.
2. Present your image to the class
3. Be prepared to argue whether your image is promoting or challenging conformity.

Artists – You pick the image – from the 1950s!

1. Grandma Moses
2. Andrew Wyeth
3. Norman Rockwell
4. Mad Magazine
5. Time Magazine
6. Life Magazine
7. Walt Disney
8. Jackson Pollock
9. Mark Rothko
10. Willem de Kooning
11. Roy Lichtenstein
12. Herblock
13. Clifford H. Baldowski (Baldy)
14. Gordon Parks
15. Elliott Erwitt
16. Vivian Maier
17. Ernest Withers
18. Mort Walker: Beetle Bailey or Hi and Lois
19. Thomas Hart Benton
20. Edward Hopper
Protocol for Historical Examination of Images

1. Sourcing:
   › Who created the image?
   › Date?
   › Title of image?

2. Observation - Examine the image
   › What is the subject matter? (is it recognizable?)
   › What is the style or approach? (realistic, abstract – recognizable but altered, or non-objective)
   › How is the image composed? (arrangement, sub-images, focus, positive/negative spaces, quads)
   › What technique is used in the image? (paint, color, light/dark, texture, depth)

3. Interpretation - Analysis of the image as historical evidence
   › Content
     • What is the story of the image?
     • What is the mood (emotions)?
   › Point of View of creator
     • What is the Point of View of the creator on the topic expressed in the image?
   › Purpose
     • Why did the artist create the image?
   › Intended Audience
     • For whom was the image created?
   › Context
     • What’s the historical context at the time that this image was created?
     • How might that have influenced the artist?

4. Application - does your image promote or challenge conformity in the 1950s?