Students as photojournalists: critical literacy and point-of-view using depression-era migrant workers photographs

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Focus/Summary

Connecting to Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*, this lesson asks students to think about point-of-view through the lens of a photojournalist. Students will be expected to think critically about what it might have meant to be a migrant worker during the Great Depression and to capture this understanding by writing captions to accompany photographs of depression-era migrant workers.

Vital Theme and Narrative

The use of journalistic point-of-view to teach critical literacy.

Objectives

Students will be able required to discuss the Great Depression from the migrant workers’ point-of-view by creating captions to accompany photographs of migrant workers. Students will also be expected to create formal, journalistic writing, in the form of a news article to accompany their chosen photograph.

Procedures

Opening the Lesson

Students will read the lyrics to the song, “Union Medley” by Peter, Paul, and Mary (Appendix A). They are to answer the following questions: Who is the “you” in the song? Why might PP&M have decided to use a medley of songs in this creation? Who might benefit from joining the union? Who might not benefit? In what ways would it have been difficult for migrant workers to join the union? How might this particular group of laborers have benefited (or not) from joining the union? What does PP&M believe about unions? How do you know?

Developing the Lesson

Students will view Dorthea Lange’s *Migrant Mother* photo (Appendix B). In pairs, students will discuss the following questions: What is this woman’s story? Who is she? Where is she from? What does she do? Are these her children? If not, whose children are they? In what period of time was this picture taken? How do you know? If you were going to write a caption for a
newspaper about this picture, what might the caption be? Students will then report to the whole class what they discovered in their paired groups.

**Concluding the Lesson**

Show students a series of migrant worker photographs (a compilation of websites where images can be found is in Appendix C). Allow students to choose five photographs (they should have about 20 – 25 as a pool to choose from). Students should individually write a 2 – 5 sentence caption for the five photographs they chose. One way to approach this analysis is through the use of a primary document analysis guide (see example – Appendix D). Students should think specifically about what they know about depression-era migrant workers and the ways in which they lived. Students are taking on the role of photojournalist. They should therefore be reporting what they see (not historical fact necessarily-although their work should be grounded in the history they have learned). Students will then share with the class their favorite photograph and caption. They should be prepared to explain why this particular photo is their favorite.

**Assessing Student Learning**

Students will write a newspaper article to accompany the photograph they chose. The article should be 150 – 250 words. The article should be written as if the student were a depression-era journalist, writing about migrant workers. Students should emphasize “facts”, not opinion in the article, understanding of course that “facts” are the ones they are generating (rather than actual historical facts). The point of this lesson is not to generate factual historical data. It is to encourage students to think about how migrant workers from the Great Depression lived and worked. This is a lesson in critical literacy and point-of-view.
Appendix A:

(www.peterpaulandmary.com/music/f-24-01.htm)

UNION MEDLEY:
  YOU GOTTA GO DOWN AND JOIN THE UNION
  PUT IT ON THE GROUND
  UNION MAID
  WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED
  WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?
(Words and Music by Woody Guthrie)(Ray Glaser / Bill Wolff) (Words and New Music Adapt. by Woody Guthrie)(Adapt./Arr. - Robert DeCormier / Peter Yarrow / Noel Paul Stookey / Mary Travers) (Florence Reece)

You gotta go down and join the union
You got to join it by yourself
Ain’t nobody here can join it for you
You gotta go down and join the union by yourself

spoken:
Working in the factories would kill a dog
Working on the belt line killed your soul
Working in the limestone and cement quarries withered your lungs
Working in the cotton mills shot your legs and feet all to hell
And working in the steel mills burned up your spirit
  like a gnat that lit in the melting pot
But out of this whole mixing bowl of hell and high water
The working folk have marched against Billy clubs,
  against machine guns
And they sang their way through the whole dirty mess

Now, the bank men have got their union, and the
  landlords got their union
And the finance men got their union
But down south and out west
On the cotton farms and working in the orchards and fruit crops
It’s a jail house offense for a few, common everyday workers
To form them a union and get together for higher wages
Honest pay and fair treatment.

-Woody Guthrie, 1941

You gotta go down and join the union
You got to join it by yourself
Ain’t nobody here can join it for you
You gotta go down and join the union by yourself
If you want a raise in pay all you have to do
Is go and ask the boss for it and he will give it to you
He will give it to you, my boys, he will give it to you
A raise in pay without delay; He will give it to you

Oh, put it on the ground, spread it all around
Dig it with a hoe and it will make your flowers grow

Oh, the men who own the industries they own no bonds or stocks
They own no yachts and limousines or gems the size of rocks
They own no big estates with pools or silken BVD’s
Because they pay the working man such fancy salaries

Oh, put it on the ground, spread it all around
Dig it with a hoe and it will make your flowers grow

There once was a union maid who never was afraid
Of the goons and ginks and the company finks
And the deputy sheriff who made the raid
She went to the union hall where a meeting it was called
And when the company boys came around
She always stood her ground

Oh, you can’t scare me, I’m sticking to the union
I’m sticking to the union, I’m sticking to the union
Oh, you can’t scare me, I’m sticking to the union
I’m sticking to the union ‘till the day I die

This union maid was wise to the tricks of the company spies
She couldn’t be fooled by the company’s stool
She’d always organize the guys
She’d always get her way when she struck for better pay
She’d show her card to the company guard
And this is what she’d say:

Oh, you can’t scare me, I’m sticking to the union
I’m sticking to the union, I’m sticking to the union
Oh, you can’t scare me, I’m sticking to the union
I’m sticking to the union ‘till the day I die

We shall not, we shall not be moved
We shall not, we shall not be moved
Just like a tree that’s standing by the water
We shall not be moved
Black and white together
We shall not be moved
Our union is forever
We shall not be moved
Just like a tree that’s standing by the water
We shall not be moved

We shall not, we shall not be moved
We shall not, we shall not be moved
Just like a tree that’s standing by the water
We shall not be moved

They say in Harlan County there are no neutrals there
You’ll either be a union man or a thug for J.H. Blair

Which side are you on, which side are you on?
Which side are you on which side are you on?

Don’t scab for the bosses, don’t you listen to their lies
Us poor folks haven’t got a chance unless we organize

Which side are you on, which side are you on?
Which side are you on which side are you on?
Appendix B:


![Mirant Mother](image)

Appendix C:

Websites where migrant worker images can be found:

http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fachap03.html

http://www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/S00000429.shtml

http://museumca.org/picturethis/3_2.html

Appendix D:

3. Historical Context
   Important people, events and ideas at the time of the image's creation
   Local/Regional: people, events, and ideas of the time ___________
   National: people, events, and ideas of the time ________________
   World: people, events, and ideas of the time ________________
   Conclusions about local/regional, national, and world context at the
time _________________________________________________________

4. Identify the Habit of Mind and Vital Theme and Narrative Represented
   Habit of Mind ______________
   The way you used this Habit of Mind to analyze the image ________
   __________________________
   Vital Theme and Narrative __________
   Evidence the image represents this Vital Theme and Narrative ____
   __________________________
   Evidence the image relates to other sources (1st-/2nd-/3rd-order)
   through this Vital Theme and Narrative __________________________
   __________________________

5. Relationship to a Discipline in the Social Sciences/
   Social Studies
   Discipline __________________________
   Evidence of relationship __________________________
   NCSS Theme __________________________
   Evidence of relationship __________________________