

American Memory: Educator Lessons

INTRODUCTION

Acknowledgment is the first step towards healing.

This is the theme that underlies the project, “American Memory,” by Andrew Lichtenstein, who won the 2012 Aftermath Project photography grant, and whose work is featured in our book, “War is Only Half the Story, Vol 6.” It’s a simple premise – yet one that seems all too elusive in the case of so many past conflicts.

I still remember the moment I first saw Andrew’s work, during the judging for the 2012 grant. I was sitting in a back room at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, with photo curator Anne Tucker, and Stephen Mayes, then managing director of VII and now the executive director of the Tim Hetherington Trust, who were both on the judging panel with me that year. All three of us were taken with Andrew’s quirky photo of three women in Confederate dress (Civil War re-enactors) taking a break on a park bench in Montgomery, Alabama – and then taken aback by the caption, which informed us that the bench the women were sitting on was at the bus stop where Rosa Parks boarded the city bus she was arrested on in 1955 and helped launch the Civil Rights movement.

As we reviewed Andrew’s work, we were struck again and again by his ability to make a strong contemporary photograph on the site of a past conflict – and to make us think twice about what had happened, as well as what had, or had not, been acknowledged. It’s a powerful way to consider aftermath, and all its implications for who we are today – and what we can and should become.

These lesson plans by Fran Sterling, capture the essence of Andrew’s project and expands on it. The lessons are meant to engage students in critical thinking skills – and equally important, in visual literacy skills. This kind of learning is at the heart of The Aftermath Project – it’s as important as our mission to broaden the public’s understanding of the true cost of war and the real price of peace. Visual literacy is a kind of redemption from the shallow depth, hyper-speed of the Internet age. It engages us in moments, invites us to deep reflection, attention to detail, and connections from the heart. It reminds us of our humanity. And we need that, every day.

We hope you make great use of these lessons, and also of the other lesson plans on our website. We welcome your fruitage and your feedback.

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STANDARDS ADDRESSED

The four lessons created for Andrew Lichtenstein's *American Memory* Project were written to be followed in a sequence. If classroom time is limited, each can be integrated as a standalone lesson. Given the subject matter of the photographs, the lessons are recommended for upper middle school through university age students.

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the *American Memory* Project, a range of Art, History and English/Language Arts standards are addressed throughout the lessons. These include National and State Arts Education Standards, Language Arts standards of Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Viewing and Visually Representing, and current American History standards. All ask students to read closely, analyze different types of primary sources, and integrate knowledge and ideas to form a coherent understanding of a topic. To further explore standards and activities, the following sites may be helpful.

For information on art standards:

[State and National Standards for Arts Education](#)

[The National Standards for Arts Education](#)

[The National Visual Arts Standards](#)

[National Coalition for Core Art Standards](#)

[National Core Arts Standards for Media Arts.](#)

For information on Language Arts Standards:

[Common Core State Standards Initiative: English Language Arts](#)

[College Board Standards for College Success: English Language Arts](#)

[National Council for Teachers of English](#)

[The Language Arts](#)

For information on American History Standards:

[Common Core State Standards Initiative: History/Social Studies 6-8 and 9-12](#)

[National Council for the Social Studies](#)

[National History Education Clearinghouse](#)

[College, Career and Civic Life: C3 Framework](#)

[National Archives Doc Teach](#)

LESSON 1: VISUAL LITERACY

“Calling attention to the injustices of the past is important, for me, because ignoring them can be worse than the original crime committed.”

-Andrew Lichtenstein, photographer

Introduction

Literacy for students today requires familiarity and fluency with a range of media. Increasingly visual literacy, or the ability to critically examine and understand visual media forms, is a necessary for students to navigate in the twenty-first century. These skills include the ability to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas they discover online or in print. Students then need to be able to conduct original research, answer questions, solve problems, and analyze these multiple media forms and create new print and non print texts.

Activity - Visual Literacy

Visual literacy includes the ability to critically look at a piece of media. Critical viewing does not mean you are critical, but it does require you to be an active viewer who has the skills and abilities to study all the elements of a piece of media and ask yourself a series of questions to elicit important clues and information to gain a deeper understanding of the material.

Describe

Begin by simply *describing* what you see occurring in the photograph. What details stand out to you? What objects are in the photograph? Focus on the describing details as an important first step in helping students build critical viewing skills.

Analyze

As a second step, begin to *analyze* the photographer’s choices. For example:

- How is the photograph composed?
- How is the use of light, shadow, perspective, or frame being used?
- What role does the title or caption hold?
- Why do you think the photographer choose this subject for a photograph for this project?

Interpret

As a final step, *interpret* the photograph. For example:

- Why this image? Why this historical event?
- What story do you think is being told? What details support your interpretation?
- How do these images inform our understanding of the aftermath of war or conflict?

LESSON 2: ARTISTS VIEWPOINT

“I believe that my decision to become a photographer was directly shaped by my fascination with history. The best pictures age with time, and become historical documents in their own right. I sensed that the search for images could lead me to places where I might be able to witness history in the making, rather than just reading about it.”

-Andrew Lichtenstein, photographer

Introduction

There are many ways to view a photograph and think about what a photographer has captured. The focus can be on composition, lighting, background, color or black and white film and more. There are also less visible details. One way to think about these type of details is to consider the photographer’s viewpoint, or perspective. A photographer can turn their lens to any number of subjects and convey to their audience a moment in time, a particular landscape or portrait. But it is their particular perspective that invites us, as viewers, to consider new ideas, new questions and perhaps new perspectives.

In our increasingly interconnected world, it is essential to ask students to gain skills in order to see and understand another’s perspective. As humans we have the ability to put ourselves in the mental shoes of others and imagine how others may think, feel or perceive an object or event. This ability “reflects a general and fundamental comprehension that one and the same object or event can be seen or construed in multiple ways, depending upon one’s point of view.”¹

The *American Memory* project challenges the notion of perspective by asking us to think twice about particular historical events including sites and what has, or has not, been acknowledged. As Sara Terry, founder and artistic director of *The Aftermath Project*, notes “It is a powerful way to consider aftermath, and all its implications for who we are today-and what we can and should become.”

Activity - Visual Diary

In each photographic essay included in *The Aftermath Project*, artists include an artists’ statement capturing in words insights into their work. Have students create a small notebook we will call a Visual Diary. A Visual Diary is a journal where

¹ Henrike Moll and Andrew N. Meltzoff, “How Does it Look? Level 2 Perspective-Taking at 36 Months of Age.” *Child Development*, March/April 2011, Volume 82, Number 2, p. 1.
http://ilabs.washington.edu/meltzoff/pdf/11Moll%20Meltzoff_PerspectiveTaking_ChidDev.pdf
accessed May 25, 2014.

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students are invited to record impressions, words, drawings, or whatever comes to mind. Discuss as a group what they may think a visual diary would be and if time allows, have students decorate the cover with these ideas in mind. A few questions that may be helpful in the discussion could be:

- What is a diary?
- What do people commonly use a diary for?
- When you think of creating a visual diary, what may be different? What may be similar?

Read

Please read Andrew Lichtenstein's artist statement prior to viewing his photographs. As you read his perspective, underline words and phrases that stand out to you and communicate his perspective.

View

First view: After reading his artist statement, select approximately ten photographs in the American Memory Project. Project them in class or print the photographs and circulate in class. It is important to have students view the images without Andrew Lichtenstein's captions for this first round. Ask students to write down impressions, words, or phrases that arise as they view each image without the artist's caption.

Second View: Repeat the same viewing technique with the ten images and allow students to read the captions for each photograph. Again, ask students to record new thoughts, feelings or impressions after hearing the artist's perspective.

Reflect

Choose one image from the collection that caught your attention more than others. In your visual diary, reflect upon your own process of viewing his images with and without his perspective to inform your viewing. If it is helpful, consider the following questions:

- How did your perspective of the photograph change or shift after learning the artists' perspective?
- Why do you think the photographer choose this historical event and this particular image to examine for this project?
- After learning more about the site photographed, what questions would you like to ask the photographer?

If time allows, have students share in pairs or as a large group the process of viewing photographs through this exercise. What did they enjoy? What did they find challenging? What new insights did they gain about the art through this visual literacy exercise?

LESSON 3: A HISTORICAL MOMENT

“History is all around us, in the air we breathe, and it is very much alive.”

-Andrew Lichtenstein

Introduction

Each site located and photographed by Andrew Lichtenstein in the *American Memory* Project is a site of American history. This lesson will ask students to practice the skills of a historian by selecting one image from Lichtenstein’s project, conducting online research about the historical event to deepen their historical understanding of the event itself, and then choosing one historic image to display alongside their selected *American Memory* image for a final project.

Activity - A Historical Moment

Read Photographer Andrew Lichtenstein’s artist statement that explains what inspired him to create the *American Memory* Project.

American history is neither just about men and women seeking freedom from tyranny or a tale of racial expansion written in blood. Like all nations, both, and everything in-between, have existed, often at the same time. History is a constant back and forth struggle between generosity and greed, hidden power and democracy, a confusing muddy- gray swirl of lives well lived and others abandoned, snuffed out before their time.

What does make America unique is our belief in our own national myths- that this city on a hill is truly exceptional and apart, untainted by the evils and corruption of the old world. This disparity between what we say and what we do has been America’s great weakness, and the source of her power. It makes us hypocrites, but propels us forward and gives us a set of ideals that we are always struggling to live up to. As an American, it was both the cruel realities of this nation’s past, and her ability to constantly strive to do better, that inspired me to create this American Memory series of photographs.

Reflect

Ask students to reflect and write about this specific passage with the following prompts in mind:

- Do they agree or disagree with Lichtenstein’s definition of what makes America unique? Specifically cite in their reflection which sentence supports or refutes their opinion.
- What is their definition of the word memory? Why do they think he choose the title for his visual essay *American Memory*?

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Research

Ask students to select one photograph that they would like to investigate further. Explain that the photograph they choose should be understood as a primary source and are similar to letters, newspaper reports, art or personal accounts from a particular moment in history. Once chosen, inform students that their research is aimed at directing them to ultimately choose a historical image to display alongside Lichtenstein's photograph for a final class project.

The following process may be helpful in guiding students' research and image selection:

Step 1: Analyzing the Selected Image

Have students revisit a process for analyzing a photograph. The [Photo Analysis Worksheet](#) from the United States National Archives may be helpful. This worksheet, or a process similar, will be the first step in students identifying the focus of their investigation. This process can also be a helpful step for students to narrow their keywords as they begin the online research.

Step 2: Internet Search and Identifying Historically Relevant Materials.

One critical skill of a historian is to be able to discern relevant and credible evidence from unreliable information. With the wealth of information available via the internet, it is becoming critical for students to develop strong internet search skills. Before allowing students to research independently, the following questions and skills may be helpful to review.

- What is a keyword search?
- What is a search engine? What search engines are recommended for historical research?
- What is a reliable URL address? How do I read a URL address and/or look at a website and know that it is an organization or institution that is reliable?
- How do I search for credible historical images?

Note: Before students engage in their own research, it may be helpful to practice internet research by referencing the following exercises developed on [The Learning Network: Teaching and Learning with The New York Times blog](#).

Step 3: Selection of a Historic Image

After researching and learning more about the history surrounding their selected *American Memory* image, students will then be asked to select another historic image to stand-in for Lichtenstein's photograph. Explain that the image selected will be ultimately displayed for a whole class exhibition. Each student will also write their

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own artist statement to explain their choice of image. It may be helpful to ask students to adhere to these general principles when selecting their image:

- (1) Why are you choosing this image?
- (2) How does their selected image inform their understanding of Andrew Lichtenstein's photograph?
- (3) Can you provide reliable reference citations for the selected image?
- (4) How does the image selected inform your artist statement?

Step 4: Images Present and Past: Gallery Opening

The gallery opening is an opportunity for each student to display their selected image and artist statement for the entire class. The students should understand that their image and statement should be displayed in a visually engaging manner.

In class gallery openings, sometimes called gallery walks, are opportunities for students to publically exhibit their learning and demonstrate to the class their particular perspective. It is also an engaging exercise for all student voices to be heard and for interdisciplinary learning to be elevated. For more information on structuring a gallery walk click [here](#).

LESSON 4: CITIZEN HISTORY

Introduction

The final lesson will be a culminating, hands-on activity for students to integrate the previous three lessons and photograph and caption a local historical site, event or person of their choosing.

Explain to students that the previous three exercises of analyzing visual images, examining perspective and conducting historical research was aimed at preparing them to create their own contribution to the *American Memory* enterprise. While their images will not be formally integrated into Andrew Lichtenstein's project, the spirit of his work is to inspire each of us to engage with our local history, research it and capture the history in some visual way.

Activity

1. Ask students to investigate and choose a local historical event, place or person of interest.
2. Explain that they will be capturing this history through a photograph in the spirit of Andrew Lichtenstein's *American Memory* project. Students can photograph vis-à-vis their camera phone or other camera as long as the image can be printed. They can choose black and white or color and need to consider all the elements previously discussed that make a visually engaging and compelling image.
3. Out of the collection photographed, ask students to select one to print and caption.
4. Depending upon resources, time and objective, the local *American Memory* project can be displayed in class, through a website, within the school building or, if available, a local library, community center or civic space.

LESSON 5: COMPARISONS AND CONTRASTS IN THE AMERICAN MEMORY PROJECT

Introduction

As photographer Andrew Lichtenstein asks, ‘History is everywhere. Why choose this particular history to photograph? And what image should I select to represent the meaning of this history?’

The images selected from the American Memory Project for The Aftermath Project, *War is Only Half the Story*, volume VI, can be understood and viewed as singular images. They can also be understood within the context of larger historical experiences in American History. And some images traverse the boundaries of time and illuminate several historical moments.

The following lesson activity challenges students to synthesize their understanding of American History through contemporary photographs included in the American Memory Project. The activity can be implemented as an individual assessment or as culminating lesson with students discussing the role of historical memory in fully understanding our nations’ history.

Resources

1. Print from *The Aftermath Project*, Vol. VI, or have online access to the following twelve images:

(p. 36.) Cross Keys, Virginia, 2011.

(p. 45) Montgomery, Alabama, 2011.

(p. 46) Galveston, Texas, 2010.

(p. 48) Scottsboro, Alabama, 2011.

(p. 60) Money, Mississippi, 2010.

(p. 33) Bristol, Rhode Island, 2010.

(p. 54) Eads, Colorado, 2009.

(p. 57) Mankato, Minnesota, 2012.

(p. 59) Sturgis, South Dakota, 2011.

(p. 50) Gila River Indian Community, Arizona, 2012.

(p. 53) Independence, California, 2012.

(online only) Miery, Rhode Island, 2010.

2. Print or have access to Andrew Lichtenstein's narrative captions for each image.

Activity

Exercise A: Visual Commonalities

1. Spread out all twelve images with access only to the geographic location and the date of the image. Group images according to common visual cues you identify and/or interpret as central to the overall image. For example, grouping images with landscapes or buildings as central.
2. After arranging the images according to your self-designated groups, come up with an organizational title. Be prepared to explain, either in writing or in larger group discussion, the rationale for your grouping and explanation for the title chosen.

For example, the images grouped together with landscapes could have the organizational title as "The hidden stories in our backyard."

Exercise B: Historical Topics

1. Ask students to spread out all eleven images and group them according to what they believe to be their connective historical experience. This process is dynamic. It expects students to use their prior knowledge and bridge it with present day images of the past. It can be an activity done individually, but given the possibility for engaging dialogue, the exercise lends itself to small group work. This exercise also requires students to use their historical understanding skills such as an integration of knowledge, analyzing primary source materials and interpretation of central historical ideas.
2. After arranging the images based on their individual or group ideas, distribute and read the narrative captions authored by the photographer, Andrew Lichtenstein. After reading his perspective, revisit your grouping of images and decide if they align with the photographer's vision? After discussing the groupings, compose a working title that reflects the larger historical experience in the images.

For example, if you believe some of his photographs captured the American experience of immigration or westward movement, these could be two separate titles or they could be one large group under the umbrella of immigration.

Exercise C: Compare and Contrast

1. After engaging in one or both of these exercises, choose several images that are both visually different and also represent different historical experiences.

Like a close reading of text, engage in a close “reading” of both images. It may be helpful to use the following questions to guide your inquiry.

- What is noticeably different between the two images?
- Even though they were chosen based upon differences, after looking more closely are there similarities?
- What image captures your attention more? Why?
- How do you now understand these images as historical documents?
- What image do you believe calls our attention to past injustices in American History most strikingly?

Educator Guidelines to Images

While there are numerous historical titles that could be given to the grouping of the images selected, the following general outline may be helpful in guiding students. The page numbers given correspond to *War is Only Half the Story*, vol. VI (2012) and can also be found on the educator section of *The Aftermath Project* website. Please take note of the page number indicated for each photograph.

American Slavery

(p. 36.) Cross Keys, Virginia, 2011.

(p. 45) Montgomery, Alabama, 2011.

(p. 46) Galveston, Texas, 2010.

American Civil Rights Movement

(p. 48) Scottsboro, Alabama, 2011.

(p. 60) Money, Mississippi, 2010.

Native American History

(p. 33) Bristol, Rhode Island, 2010.

(p. 54) Eads, Colorado, 2009.

(p. 57) Mankato, Minnesota, 2012.

(p. 59) Sturgis, South Dakota, 2011.

(online only) Miery, Rhode Island, 2010.

Japanese Internment

(p. 50) Gila River Indian Community, Arizona, 2012.

(p. 53) Independence, California, 2012.