

Is A Picture Worth A Thousand Words?

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Abstract:

Elizabeth Eckford was one of the Little Rock Nine—the first black students to attend Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. She was a fifteen-year-old tenth grader in the fall of 1957. Elizabeth first attempted to attend Central High on September 4, 1957. She was prevented from entering the building by the Arkansas National Guard, which had been ordered by Governor Faubus to keep black students out. Elizabeth moved towards the bus stop and an angry mob followed her. Will Counts photographed Elizabeth enduring hostile looks and racial slurs.

Fifth grade students will examine, reflect, discuss, and complete written analysis worksheets regarding photographs and the intent behind them.

Essential Questions / Enduring Understandings:

- How can we understand moments in history by examine and reflecting on photographs?
- How do photographs and images help deepen our understandings of the issues addressed by the Civil rights movement?

Materials:

- Photographs of Elizabeth Eckford from 1957 and forty years later in 1997.
- Photo Analysis Worksheet from National Archives and Records
- Five questions to consider while analyzing photographs adapted from historian James Curtis's website
- Three Visual Thinking Strategy questions
- Compare and Contrast graphic organizer available from any collection of organizers

Activities For Several Days

- Display photograph without caption of Elizabeth printed from National Archives. Observe and study the photo silently for 2 minutes.
- Encourage active and thoughtful verbal sharing responses by using 3 VTS (Visual Thinking Strategies) questions.
 - 1) What's going on in this photograph? This question opens up the discussion. It allows comments where students make personal associations and connections.
 - 2) What do you see that makes you say that? This question asks students to focus and ground their interpretations with the visual data presented.
 - 3) What else can you find? This question asks students to look for more details and encourages a more thorough examination.
- Record inferences from above discussion on Photo Analysis Worksheet from National Archives.

- Use the same photograph. Look with fresh eyes using questions developed by historian James Curtis. These 5 questions challenge the viewer to analyze and make sense of the photograph as historical evidence.
 - 1) Who took the photograph?
 - 2) Why and for whom was the photograph taken?
 - 3) How was the photograph taken?
 - 4) What can companion images tell us?
 - 5) How was the photograph presented? Sites to assist in investigating these questions might include Little Rock School District, NPR, and Little Rock Nine Foundation.
- Further extensions would be: Look at series of 5 photographs taken by Will Count and published on the front page of Arkansas Democrat. This clearly shows the National Guard actively turning Elizabeth away from school doors. Click on media tab on the Little Rock Nine Foundation site to easily access this. On same site look at an alternative photograph from a different angle taken by Will Counts. This was not published in the newspaper. It shows the angry crowd by no troops. Look at a photo on the 40th anniversary of the Elizabeth's attempt to enter Little Rock Central. In 1957, Elizabeth posed with the segregationist classmate who has screamed at her in that infamous image. They both attended a reconciliation rally and received an award from the national Conference for Community and Justice. Will Counts photographed this scene also. It can be accessed by clicking on Conference for Community and Justice contained in the text found on the Wikipedia site about Elizabeth Eckford.

Assessment:

- Construct teacher observation checklist to assess group participation and discussion.
- Evaluate written answers on photo analysis worksheet.
- Evaluate written answers to 5 questions focusing on making sense of photographs as historical evidence.
- Evaluate compare and contrast graphic organizer as a critical thinking tool.

Resources:

- www.loc.gov/pictures/item/00649675
- Three VTS questions taken from Visual Thinking Strategies, Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine
- <http://littlerock9.com/ElizabethEckford.aspx>
- James Curtis, "Making Sense of Documentary Photography," History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/Photos/June2003>.
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Eckford
- www.FacingHistory.org This site allows viewer to click on Little Rock School District and National Public Radio links.