

## “Reading” Photography



There is a saying, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” To the poor reader, this is an important observation. Students who have trouble reading or comprehending written words can learn a great deal by examining photographs and illustrations that are found in their textbooks. Some students, however, do not realize that they can increase comprehension by “reading” photographs. They consider photographs much like written text. They passively look at them but don’t really focus on what can be learned from them. Therefore, if students are to use photos to increase comprehension, they must be taught how to “read” them. When examining photos, students must consider not only the content of the work, but also the intent of the photographer or artist who created them.

When students examine a **photograph**, they should look for the obvious:

- Who or what is depicted in the photo?
- When was the photo taken?
- Where was the photo taken?

There are other things, however, that students should consider to make the examination of the photo more meaningful. Most of these considerations concern why the photo was taken or why the author or editor chose to use a particular photo in a particular section of text. When taking a photograph, the photographer decides where to stand, how to frame the subject, as well as what should be included in the background. Therefore, some additional questions students should consider when examining photos include:

- Is the picture a candid shot or was it staged?
- Why do you think the photographer emphasized certain features in the photograph?
- What do you think is the real focus of the photograph?
- What might have happened right before or right after the photo was taken?

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**To Teach** students to “read” photographs, use Selection 14 and Graphic Organizer 20. You may want to make a transparency of the picture or show it as part of a PowerPoint presentation. Follow the steps in the left column to help the students understand how to examine photos.

1. Show students Selection 14 (the picture of the World Trade Center after the attacks of September 11, 2001).
2. Use the questions on Graphic Organizer 20 one at a time, to analyze the photo:
  - a. What is the subject of the picture?
  - b. What objects in the picture do you recognize?
  - c. What objects in the picture do you not recognize?
  - d. When do you think the picture was taken?
  - e. Is the picture a candid or staged one?
  - f. What happened immediately before or after the picture was taken?
  - g. What was the photographer’s purpose?
  - h. Why is the picture included in your textbook?
3. Allow time for discussion of each question.

## Analyzing Photographs

1. **What is the subject of the picture?**  
*The destruction of the World Trade Center*
2. **What objects in the picture do you recognize?**  
*Skyscrapers, building cranes*
3. **What objects in the picture do you not recognize?**  
*Destroyed buildings*
4. **When do you think the picture was taken?**  
*After Sept. 11, 2001*
5. **Is the picture a candid shot or a staged one?**  
*Answers will vary and can generate good discussion.*
6. **What happened immediately before or after the picture was taken?**  
*Answers will vary but may include plans for caring for families of victims, retaliation.*
7. **What was the photographer’s purpose in taking the picture?**  
*Answers will vary but may include to document history or arouse emotions.*
8. **What was the reason for including the photograph in your textbook?**  
*Answers will vary but may include to illustrate a historical event.*

**To apply** the reading photographs strategy, look at other pictures in the textbook. Have students repeat the process they used in the practice session.

**To extend** the strategy, have students write or role-play a dialog that might have occurred before, during, or after the photograph was taken.

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## Selection 14



**Analyzing Photographs**

**1. What is the subject of the picture?**

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**2. What objects in the picture do you recognize?**

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**3. What objects in the picture do you not recognize?**

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**4. When do you think the picture was taken?**

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**5. Is the picture a candid shot or a staged one?**

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**6. What happened immediately before or after the picture was taken?**

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**7. What was the photographer's purpose in taking the picture?**

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**8. What was the reason for including the photograph in your textbook?**

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