

LOOKING AT PHOTOGRAPHS

QUESTIONS TO ASK

A. IDENTIFYING THE PHOTOGRAPH

1. Who took the photograph?
2. Does the photograph have a title? Is anything written on the front or back?
3. How did you find the photograph? Where is the original located?
4. What is happening in the picture?
5. Suggest a title and an explanatory caption for the photograph.

Try not to draw final conclusions based on the analysis of only one photograph. Sometimes a photograph may only serve to reinforce a stereotype.

B. PUTTING THE PHOTOGRAPH IN CONTEXT

1. Why do you think the photograph was taken? Who was the intended audience?
2. Does the photograph illustrate a general theme, a historical period or a particular event?
3. Is the photographer interested in using artistic expression to make a point about the subject?

These "Questions to Ask" can also be applied to the analysis of posters, political cartoons, paintings, illustrations, and other pictorial sources.

C. DISSECTING THE PHOTOGRAPH

1. Divide the photograph into several parts and make a list of the objects pictured. How do the parts of the photograph help to explain the photographer's purpose?
2. What details in the photograph yield the most information?
3. Can the objects in the photograph be classified or organized into categories?

The People, Space, and Time approach provides a quick way to sum up a photograph:
People: Who is in the picture?
Space: Where was the photograph taken?
Time: Can you date the picture, or place it into a general period or sequence of events?

D. EVALUATING THE PHOTOGRAPH

1. How is the photograph useful in making inferences, deductions or generalizations about its subject?
2. What questions are prompted by the photograph?
3. Can you develop a more general hypothesis on the basis of this photograph?