

For All the World to See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights

Pre-Visit Lesson #1: Representations in Media

For standards in your state see:

<http://www.educationworld.com/standards/state/toc/index.shtml#math>

Grades: 5-12

Time Required: 1-2 class periods

National Curriculum Standards (McREL):

- **Visual Arts, Standard 1:** Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts
- **Visual Arts, Standard 3:** Knows a range of subject matter, symbols, and potential ideas in the visual arts
- **Civics, Standard 11:** Understands the role of diversity in American life and the importance of shared values, political beliefs, and civic beliefs in an increasingly diverse American society
- **Civics, Standard 14:** Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life
- **History, United States, Standard 29:** Understands the struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil liberties
- **History, United States, Standard 31:** Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States
- **Language Arts, Standard 5:** Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process
- **Language Arts, Standard 9:** Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

Objectives:

- Students will gain an understanding of how the strategic use of visual media can help propel a social movement.
- Students will gain an understanding of the varying types of visual imagery used during the Civil Rights movement
- Students will gain an understanding of the visual elements of a historic photograph as well as develop photograph analysis skills.

- Students will gain fluency in using and managing technology-based information sharing resources

Materials:

- Computer and internet access
- Copies of “Analyzing Historical Photographs” for each student (attached)

Student Instruction:

1. Inform your students that your class will be visiting an exhibit at your local museum called *For All the World to See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights*. Ask your students if they can predict the subject matter of the exhibit.
2. Have a discussion about the differences between the written word and the visual image in their ability to communicate, inform, and even persuade. Follow this discussion with the following quote by Walter Cronkite: “*I don’t think that simply words could have aroused the emotions of the American people as much as seeing pictures of the confrontation...that consciousness could have never have come to the American people without pictures.*”
3. Ask your students what qualities photographs have that make them sometimes more powerful than words. Inform them that in the *For All the World to See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights* exhibit, many of the images they will encounter are deemed powerful in the transformation of the civil rights movement because they represent one of the following:
 - a. Positive images of African American success and achievement
 - b. The promise of integration
 - c. Documentation of the Civil Rights activism (sit-ins, marches, boycotts)
 - d. Violence and aggression
 - e. Black solidarity and anti-establishmentarianism
4. Inform your students that in a few minutes they will be viewing a seven minute video that shows images from the Civil Rights movement. The video captures photographs that fall into all of the categories above and possibly more. While the video does come with sound (music), please mute it so that students can view the photos in silence. The video can be found here: <http://www.neok12.com/php/watch.php?v=zX740e5d78506742784d7c7f&t=Civil-Rights-Movement>
5. Following the video, take another moment of silence. Then ask students how they felt as they were viewing the images. This should underscore the fact that images are powerful vehicles of emotional content.
6. Next, instruct each student to pick one type of image from the Civil Rights era (it can be one from the video if they wish) to investigate in further detail. The Library of Congress website has photo documentation of the Civil Rights movement (http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/084_civil.html), as does the Civil Rights Movement Veterans website at <http://www.crmvet.org/index.htm>. The image they select should fall into one of the following five categories: **positive images of African American success and achievement, black solidarity and**

anti-establishmentarianism, racial violence and aggression, promise of integration, documentation civil rights activism.

7. After students have selected an image to analyze, ask them the question: “Can a photograph tell the whole story?” According to Dr. Maurice Berger, the curator for *For All the World To See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (and author of the book by the same name): “*No image could act alone, of course. No image, could, by itself, change the world, for every visual representation is dependent on context: the words, circumstances, distribution, and beliefs that endow pictures with greater levels of meaning and influence.*”
8. Next, instruct each student that they will be learning the more complete story behind the image by giving it some historical context. Distribute a copy of the “Analyzing Historical Photographs” worksheet for each student to complete (attached). This worksheet is suitable for all categories of photographs.
9. **Extension:** As a follow- up to your visit to *For All the World To See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights* turn your student’s attention to a video that was produced by the Ad Council following the 9/11 attacks. The PSA, entitled “I am an American,” can be viewed here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDzEz6-v4Wc>
10. Have an open discussion comparing and contrasting the visual media from the civil rights movement to the visual media used in the PSA. Ask you students, “Have we progressed as a society? Are we more tolerant than we were in the 1950s and 1960s?”

Analyzing Historical Photographs

1. What category does the image you selected represent? Why did you choose it?
2. Describe the setting of the photograph.
3. Who is featured in the photograph?

If the photograph contains a specific individual who was actively or historically involved in the Civil Rights movement, can you identify the person? Who is it?

Write about the contributions this person made to the Civil Rights movement.

If the photograph contains a crowd of people or more generalized subject matter, what practice or idea does it represent?

4. What do you notice about the background of the photograph? The foreground?
5. How does knowing about a photo's time period and location help you to figure out what is going on?
6. How can you learn about history from a photograph?
7. What lessons from these photographs can be applied to your life today?

Post-Visit Lesson #1: The ME in MEdia

For standards in your state see:

<http://www.educationworld.com/standards/state/toc/index.shtml#math>

Grades: 5-12

Time Required: Two class periods, with one homework assignment in between

National Curriculum Standards (McREL):

- **Life Skills, Standard 1:** Contributes to the overall effort of a group
- **Life Skills, Standard 4:** Displays effective interpersonal communication skills
- **Visual Arts, Standard 3:** Knows a range of subject matter, symbols, and potential ideas in the visual arts
- **Arts & Communication, Standard 1:** Understands the principles, processes, and products associated with arts and communication media
- **History, Standard 29:** Understands the struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil liberties

Objectives:

- Students will gain an understanding of the differing media forms present during the Civil Rights movement and today
- Students will gain an understanding of how media influenced opinions during the Civil Rights movement and today.
- Students will gain an understanding of the messages communicated by the media to their target audiences.

Materials:

- Copies of handout “The ME in MEdia” (attached)
- Media access (internet, print, TV, film)

Student Instruction:

1. Remind your students of their recent visit to the local museum to see the exhibit called *For All the World to See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights*. Ask your students what the exhibit was about, using the title as reference.
2. While students may have a working knowledge of the historical period of United States history known as the Civil Rights movement, they may struggle more with the concept of visual culture. First ask them to roughly define the time frame for the modern Civil Rights movement in the United States (post WW2 – early 1970s). Then, define visual culture on the board as follows: *the total range of visual images*

characteristic of a group of people with shared traditions, transmitted and reinforced by members of the group. Ask your students to give examples of the range of visual images that social groups living during the civil rights movement may have witnessed (examples include: photography, film, TV, newspapers, magazines, books, art, objects, etc.).

3. Follow the discussion on what constituted the visual imagery of the time period with questioning about the social groups consuming and represented in the imagery. Ask students “Were all social groups represented in visual form during this time?” “Were people of all ethnicities equally represented in visual imagery?” This should lead directly to the point that the African American position in visual media mirrored their status in the mainstream culture: marginalized, oppressed, yet poised to overcome. In fact, African Americans were either portrayed negatively in the media, or erased from it completely. Follow this statement with another question, “When you recall your visit to the exhibit, what images or artifacts stand out in your memory? Why did these make an impression on you?”
4. Bring the discussion into contemporary society and media by asking students “Do you think all social groups (this includes gender, sexual orientation, religious, and ethnic groups) are represented equally in the visual media of today?”
5. Cite information from a 2001 study by Children Now:
 - *The 8 o’clock “family hour” is the least racially diverse hour on television. Only one in eight (13%) of the programs broadcast during this hour have mixed opening credits casts. By contrast, two thirds (67%) of programs during the ten o’clock hour, when the least children are watching, have mixed opening credits cast.*
 - *African Americans account for the majority of non-white prime time characters, comprising 17%, followed by Asian Pacific Americans (3%), Latinos (2%) and Native Americans (0.2%). In addition, the study found that most on-screen racial number of diverse programs decreases significantly when focusing on a show’s main characters only.*
 - *Latino representation on prime time decreased from 3% of total characters last year to 2% this year. Asian Pacific American characters increased from 2% to 3%. By contrast, Latinos and Asian Pacific Americans make up 12% and 3.6% respectively of the national population, according to the 2000 U.S. Census*
6. How do your students feel about this representation (or misrepresentation) in the media? Has this changed as our outlets for media and entertainment have become more internet- based?
7. Inform your students that several scholars have studied this phenomenon and ways to combat it. For example, social activist **bell hooks** examined the powerful forces and motives behind race representations in *Hoop Dreams*, the OJ Simpson case, Madonna, Spike Lee, and Gangsta rap. She noted, “The issue is not freeing ourselves from representations. It’s really about being enlightened witnesses when we watch representations.”
8. Ask students what they think **bell hooks** means when she calls on people to be “enlightened witnesses.” Inform your students that they will have an opportunity to be “enlightened witnesses” as they watch representations in their own media worlds.

9. Divide students into four groups, each group representing a different form of media that they will in turn “witness” and document.
 - Group one: movies/film
 - Group two: TV
 - Group three: the internet, including outlets like YouTube and social media forums (Facebook, twitter, blogs, etc.)
 - Group four: print media, including magazines and newspapers.
10. Media assignments are in group format, but work will occur individually. Distribute a copy of the attached observation sheet, “The ME in MEdia” to each student. Give them at least 2-3 days to complete it in order to accumulate a large sample.
11. Review students’ observations in class. Ask questions like:
 - Have we progressed as a society in our representations of social groups in the media since the modern civil rights movement?
 - What do you think about media outlets that cater to specific social groups? Is this ok?
 - What specific media outlets should consider and respect the range of diversity in America as they produce and distribute images?
 - Will this exercise change the way you view and respond to images in your media world?
 - If you could take a photograph of the social or ethnic group you most readily identify with, what would it look like?

The ME in MEdia

What form of media are you analyzing?

Describe the media:

Additional media description:

Photography/images:	Relationship between words and images:
Colors:	Computer graphics:
Vocabulary used in the media:	Other:

What is the message of the media?

How does the design support this message?

What grabs your attention?

Is there an intended audience? Who is it? What audience group, if any, is left out?