



Name: _____

Analyzing Photographs

1. Think about the last time you took or saw a photograph from our own time. Why was that photograph taken? Did it capture that moment in history and show what it is like to live today?

2. Now look at the primary source photograph. What do you think is happening in this photograph? Write three words with your first impressions.

3. Describe what you see in the photograph as if you were telling someone who couldn't see it.

Encounter





Now that you've become familiar with the photograph, it's time to take a closer look at it.

Investigate

4. First, look for a title or caption. Is there any information that will help you understand the photograph better? If so, summarize it.

5. What clues in the photograph itself might help you figure out where or when it was taken, or what's happening in it?

6. Is this a formal or informal photograph? Is it a candid shot, or are the people posed?

7. Do you think this photograph was intended to be public or private? What do you think is the purpose of this photograph?

8. What else do you notice in this photograph? Is there anything that surprises you?





Once you've learned everything you can from the photograph, it's time to build on your knowledge.

9. Now that you know more about the photograph, how have your first impressions changed about what was happening in it?

10. If someone took this photograph in a different time or today, how would it change?

11. How does this photograph add to your understanding of a historical event or people's lives in the past?

Build



How can you add to the story?

- * What do you think happened one second after the photo was taken or one hour after?
- * Create a story from the perspective of one of the people in the photograph.
- * Write your own caption for the photograph, or write a story that goes with it.
- * Gather similar photographs into a book and write about them all together.



Tips for Studying Historical Photographs

Historians use their knowledge of the past to help figure out when photographs were taken. It's a little bit like being a detective. You collect a series of clues and do some research to find a possible date for a photograph. Here's some tips to help you do it!

Photography was invented in the 1820s, but it didn't become popular until the 1840s. Any photograph you see was almost certainly taken after 1840. Color photography was invented in the 1890s, but it didn't become popular until the 1960s. **Be careful though!** Today, photo-graphers sometimes add color to black-and-white photographs, even very old ones. Likewise, lots of people today take black-and-white photographs rather than color. So whether a picture is in color or black and white doesn't always indicate how old it is.

The first four things to look for in a photograph:

- 1) **Signs.** Many signs contain at least the year, if not the full date. Maybe it's a banner reading "Old Home Day Exeter 1905" or a placard in a store window that says "Spring 1935 Special." Signs can contain lots of other important information too, about where the photograph was taken or what is happening in the photograph, so read them carefully.
- 2) **Technology.** In the decades since photography became popular, technology has changed the world a lot. What modes of transportation are in the photograph—trains (invented in the 1820s)? cars (invented in the 1890s)? Segways (invented in 2001)? If one of these is pictured in the photograph, then the photograph must have been taken after that technology was invented. What about other technology, like telephones and telephone wires (became popular in the 1880s), radios (became popular in the 1920s), tvs (became popular in the 1950s), desktop computers (became popular in the 1980s), or any kind of electrical appliance or lights? Also think about all the things that go with the development of technology. If there's a gas station in the picture, then you know it was taken after cars became popular, even if there aren't cars in the photo.
- 3) **Fashion.** The clothes people wear have changed a great deal over time, especially women's clothing—their skirts in particular. By learning about women's fashions, you can get an idea of what time period a photograph was taken. Were the women wearing long skirts? Then the photo was probably taken before 1920. Were the women's skirts very wide, like a bell? Then the photo was probably taken before 1880.
- 4) **Buildings and Landmarks.** By studying the buildings and landmarks in the background, you can narrow down when a photo was taken. For example, if the library in your town was built in 1890 and it appears in the background of the picture, then the photo must have taken after 1890.

Collect all your clues and see what they tell you about your photograph!

