



## An Introduction to Primary Sources: Photographs in the Archives

**TARGET GRADE RANGE: 6-12**

### OVERVIEW

By looking closely at photographs from several moments in Savannah's history, students will learn the basic tools for analyzing photographic images using description and reflection in order to improve visual literacy, as well as to identify the strengths and weaknesses of using photographs as a historical tool. Students will create a brief story, journal entry, or art piece reflecting on the subjects of the photographs.

### What is a Primary Source?

A primary source is a first-hand, original account or record about a person, place, object, or an event. Oral histories, objects, photographs, and documents such as newspapers, census records, diaries, and journals are primary sources. Secondary sources are accounts, records, or evidence derived from original or primary sources. Textbooks are secondary sources.

### Objectives:

After completing this learning activity, students will be able to:

- Describe the subjects of photographs and place them in a historical context
- Understand the value of photographs as historical records

**Time Required:** 1 hour

**Topic/s:** Social Studies, Art, Creative Writing

### Standards:

- The student understands the visual arts in relation to history and culture (National Standard 4).
- VA6.RE.1 VA7.RE.1 VA8.RE.1 Reflect on the context of personal works of art in relation to community, culture, and the world. a. Identify how the issues of time, place, and culture are reflected in selected works of art. b. Interpret works or art considering themes, ideas, moods, and/or intentions. c. Define where and how we encounter images in our daily lives and how images influence our view of the world.
- VA6.CN.3 VA7.CN.3 VA7.CN.3 Utilize a variety of resources to understand how artistic learning extends beyond the walls of the classroom. a. Recognize the presence and meaning of visual art in the community. b. Explore the connection between personal artistic creation and one's relationship to local and global learning communities. c. Make interdisciplinary connections, expanding upon and applying art skills and knowledge to enhance other areas of learning.
- VAHSDR.RE.1 Reflect on the context of personal works of art in relation to community, culture, and the world. a. Consider the influences on works of art from a wide range of contemporary and traditional art through discussion and/or written response. b. Investigate and discuss how the issues of time, place, and/or culture are reflected in works of art
- VAHSDR.RE.3 Engage in the process of art criticism to make meaning and increase visual literacy. a. Formulate written and/or oral response to works of art through various approaches.



**Materials:**

Materials may be original or reproduction, at the discretion of the Archivist and Municipal Archives Director.

- “Photographs: Introduction to Photographs” handout, from *Engaging Students with Primary Sources*, developed by the Smithsonian National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center, in partnership with Thinkfinity, page 24 (available online at: <https://historyexplorer.si.edu/sites/default/files/PrimarySources.pdf>)
- “Photographs: Strengths and Limitations: handout, from *Engaging Students with Primary Sources*, developed by the Smithsonian National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center, in partnership with Thinkfinity, page 25 (available online at: <https://historyexplorer.si.edu/sites/default/files/PrimarySources.pdf>)
- Photograph Analysis Worksheets (1 per student per station)
  - “Analyze a Photograph” handout, developed by the National Archives and Records Administration (available online at: [https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/photo\\_analysis\\_worksheet.pdf](https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/photo_analysis_worksheet.pdf))
  - “Tips for Reading Photographs” handout, from *Engaging Students with Primary Sources*, developed by the Smithsonian National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center, in partnership with Thinkfinity, pages 26-28 (available online at: <https://historyexplorer.si.edu/sites/default/files/PrimarySources.pdf>)
- 5 – 10 photographs from the Municipal Archives
  - Teachers conducting the program in the classroom may use the Sample Photographs Packet provided or identify photographs from the Municipal Archives Online Digital Image Catalog at [www.savannahga.gov/DigitalCollections](http://www.savannahga.gov/DigitalCollections). Municipal Archives staff can provide additional images on-demand based on subject needs, as available.
- Paper, pencils, markers to create reflective responses



## PROGRAM:

### Introduction: (10-15 minutes total)

- Introduction to concepts of archives and archival work, and the City of Savannah Municipal Archives
- Introduction to photographs
- Talk through the process of analyzing a picture together for the first station

### Rotating Stations: (30 minutes)

- Break students into 5-10 groups (depending on the number of students – groups should be between 3-5 students) and assign them a station to start. Each station will take 10 minutes, then rotate to the next station.
- Have a photograph that students can pick up, hold, pass around etc. Have the Photograph Analysis Worksheets available at the station.
- Have students closely analyze the picture, describing what the occasion is, what the perspective is, who or what is pictured, how they think the subjects feel, what they are wearing, what we can learn from the image, etc.
- After 7-10 minutes, switch to a new station, repeat the process 3-4 times. Depending on the size of the group, there may need to be a period where the students can go around and look at each of the remaining pictures briefly.

### Creative Reflection (15 minutes)\*:

Have students decide on a favorite image and create a reflective response to it.

Examples:

- A journal entry written as if you were a subject of the photo writing about the day the photo was taken
- Write a newspaper article about the event (who, what, when, where, why)
- A drawing of a detail of the photograph that catches your attention
- A drawing of what happened right before or right after the photograph was taken

Have students stand by the photograph they choose and ask for volunteers to share their reflection.

*\*Alternatively, teachers may assign this as a take-away reflection or journaling assignment.*