**Using Photographs to Teach Social Justice**

*Teaching Tolerance*

*Using Photographs to Teach Social Justice* is a series of 12 lessons. Each lesson focuses on a contemporary social justice issue. These lessons are multidisciplinary and geared toward middle- and high-school students.

Students like photographs. They’re visual and engaging, so they make great learning tools. Photographs are an excellent way to capture the spirit of an event or idea. However, learning how to interpret photographs can be challenging. These lessons will help students learn to think about photos more deeply.

In addition, the lessons will expand students’ knowledge of social justice issues. They can be used to supplement another lesson or readings, or they can stand alone.

**Overarching Objectives**  
Each lesson in the series builds background knowledge about a particular social justice issue and addresses at least one English language arts skill. The lesson objectives also promote critical thinking skills. Here are some of the issues and skills addressed in the lessons:

* understand that people experience injustices
* understand why and how people take action to address injustice
* recognize how experiences are shaped by membership in groups defined by race, gender, socioeconomic status, culture, ethnicity, ability
* recognize how the historical moment and the social context shape experience
* develop empathy for people whose experiences differ from their own.

They should also help students “read” photographs by getting them to:

* describe what they see in a photograph;
* understand that photographs are not merely reflections of reality, but mediated images that convey many meanings;
* see that photographs have both denotative meanings (those that are literal) and connotative meanings (those that are constructed through individual and collective associations);
* understand the importance of the context in which a photograph was taken, and determine how specific photographs fit into the context in which they were taken;
* identify the mood of a photograph and determine what elements contribute to creating that mood;
* analyze color, light and shadow, and how they contribute to a photograph’s meanings;
* analyze the composition of photographs, including how photographers shape meaning by choosing how to crop images;
* identify a photograph’s point of view.

**Essential Questions**

* How do photographs convey meaning? How do viewers contribute to constructing that meaning?
* How are photographs similar to and different from other kinds of communication?
* What role can photographs play in revealing injustice? What role can they play in encouraging people to take action against injustice?
* How do photographs show activism and activists?

**CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**

**THEME 1: Understanding People’s Perspectives**

1: [Exploring Identity](http://www.tolerance.org/activity/using-photographs-teach-social-justice-exploring-identity)

2: [Affirming Our Commonalities and Differences](http://www.tolerance.org/activity/using-photographs-teach-social-justice-affirming-our-commona)

3: [Supporting Social Border Crossings](http://www.tolerance.org/activity/using-photographs-teach-social-justice-supporting-social-bor)

**THEME 2: Exposing Injustice**

4: [Exposing Racism](http://www.tolerance.org/activity/using-photographs-teach-social-justice-exposing-racism)

5: [Exposing Gender Bias](http://www.tolerance.org/activity/using-photographs-teach-social-justice-exposing-gender-bias)

6: [Exposing Anti-Immigration Sentiment](http://www.tolerance.org/activity/using-photographs-teach-social-justice-exposing-anti-immigra)

7: [Exposing Homelessness and Poverty](http://www.tolerance.org/activity/using-photographs-teach-social-justice-exposing-homelessness)

**Theme 3: Confronting Injustice**

8: [Confronting Unjust Laws](http://www.tolerance.org/activity/using-photographs-teach-social-justice-confronting-unjust-la)

9: [Confronting Unjust Practices](http://www.tolerance.org/activity/using-photographs-teach-social-justice-confronting-unjust-pr)

10: [Legal Action: The Supreme Court](http://www.tolerance.org/activity/using-photographs-teach-social-justice-legal-action-supreme)

11: [Advertisements Promoting Activism](http://www.tolerance.org/activity/using-photographs-teach-social-justice-advertisements-promot)