


INSTRUCTIONS FOR INTERPRETING HISTORICAL IMAGES



A Jewish woman on a park bench labeled “For Jews Only.” This photograph was taken in Austria days after the Nazi annexation (1938). *Institute for Contemporary History and Wiener Library, London, England.*

Displaying more than 900 artifacts—including original photographs, moving images, documents, and objects—the Museum utilizes a wide-range of primary source materials to present the history of the Holocaust. Giving students the basic tools for analyzing and interpreting these primary source materials is important for helping them get the most from their visit to the Museum. The following activity directs students through a series of questions designed to help them critique and analyze historical photographs.



Have students in groups or as individuals complete the accompanying Activity Sheet about one or all of the photographs. Each person or group may then share their findings with the whole class. The activity is designed to move student observations and analysis from lower to higher levels of critical thinking.

When the students visit the Museum, teachers may wish to have students find the photographs and compare the captions the students have written with the captions in the Museum. Have students think about how the placement of the photographs within the exhibition segment and in relation to other photographs may affect the meaning or connotations of a photograph.

INTERPRETING HISTORICAL IMAGES

Use one of the accompanying photographs to respond to the following.

(1) *Describe the people and action portrayed in the photograph.*

- Who are they and what are they doing?
- Describe the clothing being worn.
- How old do they appear to be?
- Describe the people's facial expressions.
- Does it seem as if they are aware that a photograph is being taken?

(2) *Describe the setting in the photograph.*

- Are there objects or buildings in the photograph?
- Describe in detail the objects in the photograph.
- How are the individuals in the photograph using the objects?
- Is an event taking place? If so, what?

(3) *Consider the eye of the photographer.*

The photographer, making decisions about what will be framed within the camera's lens, predetermines even photographic images that appear to be spontaneous.

- Can you tell anything about the perspective of the photographer by what has been included in or omitted from the photograph?
- What do you think might be happening outside the frame of the photograph?

(4) *Write a caption for the photograph.*

A caption is a short description or explanation of a photograph or picture. It often includes information about what is happening in the picture, where and when the picture was taken, and who is in the picture. Using the information gathered above, write a caption for the photograph.

- How would the caption have been different if it had been published in a Nazi newspaper in 1935 or in an American newspaper in 1935?

HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS



A view of concentration-camp prisoners marching through a village while on a death march from Dachau to Wolfratshausen. This picture was taken from the upstairs window of a private home along the route (April 1945).

KZ Gedenkstätte Dachau, Dachau, Germany.



Jewish boy being forced to paint the word *Jude* (Jew) on his father's store in Vienna, Austria, within days after the Nazi annexation (March 1938).

Österreichische Gesellschaft für Zeitgeschichte, Vienna, Austria.



Nazi Party officials confiscate books in preparation for a book burning in Hamburg (May 1933).

Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Germany.



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