



# PERSPECTIVES IN PRIMARY SOURCES

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## LESSON PLAN

**GRADE LEVEL** High School

**OVERVIEW** As an introduction to the PACFTB [Pittsburgh Hill District Digital Learning Tool](#), students are invited to examine several photographs from ca. 1938 to initiate discussion of perspective, meaning making, and understanding. This exercise will assist in revisiting notions of historical context and perspective throughout study.

### ANCHOR STANDARDS

CCSS.US History 8.1.U.B	Evaluate the interpretation of historical events and sources, considering the use of fact versus opinion, multiple perspectives, and cause and effect relationships.
CCSS ELA-LITERACY.RI.7	Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums determining which details are emphasized in each account.
CCSS ELA-LITERACY.SL.1	Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

### PENNSYLVANIA CORE STANDARDS

CC.8.5.I	Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.
CC.1.5.A	Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

### BIG IDEAS

- Photography is a medium for visual storytelling that conveys narratives and evokes emotions.
- Perspective helps to define the attributes of historical comprehension.

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How does perspective alter meaning and understanding?
- How do photographs construct narratives, and how might these narratives differ depending on the photographer's intent of audience?
- What role do historical context and bias play in shaping our understanding of visual sources?
- How do different perspectives contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of a historical context or community?

### CONCEPTS

- Historical literacy requires a focus on time and space, an understanding of the historical context, and an awareness of point of view.
- Comparing the perspectives of different photographers, particularly Arthur Rothstein and Charles "Teenie" Harris, encourages students to recognize diverse viewpoints within a community and challenge stereotypes.
- Understanding the historical background of the FSA and New Deal provides context for the images and encourages students to connect historical events with visual representations.

## VOCABULARY

Perspective  
Visual storytelling  
Primary source  
Historical context

Bias  
Nuance  
Community perspective  
Local history

New Deal  
Farm Security Administration (FSA)

## COMPETENCIES

- Evaluate how perspectives and bias influence the interpretation of historical sources - both that of the creator and the viewer of the source.
- Analyze the role of visual storytelling in shaping historical narratives.
- Compare and contrast visual representations of the same community to identify differing viewpoints.

## MATERIALS

[Houses on "The Hill"](#) (image one) by Arthur Rothstein

[Houses on "The Hill"](#) (image two) by Arthur Rothstein

Six or more select Teenie Harris images. Twelve suggested images are linked in the references section below.

[Primary Source Analysis Tool](#) handout (optional)

[Arthur Rothstein, FSA \(Farm Security Administration\) photographer.](#) (optional)

[Charles "Teenie" Harris biography](#) (optional)

## PREPARATION

If desired, print copies of Arthur Rothstein's *Houses on the Hill* images without titles or identifying information. If the images are to be projected onto a screen, remove the title and metadata from the visual.

Select and print six or more of the Teenie Harris images. For the sake of this exercise, titles and metadata are not needed for the initial discussion.

## SUGGESTED INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURES

Present [Arthur Rothstein's 1938 Houses on "the Hill"](#) image without the title or additional context. The image could be projected onto a screen or printed as a handout. If sharing it digitally, be sure to remove the title or additional information. Initiate a discussion via the Observe-Reflect-Question (ORQ) technique. As students respond, record phrases or keywords on a whiteboard or chalkboard in three columns for all to see.

Observe	Reflect	Question

**Observe:** Begin by asking what participants notice about the image? In this initial observation stage, focus only upon what is seen and avoid making inferences.

*Possible responses:* black and white photograph, older vehicles from 1920-1940s, sloping hill, open windows, electric and telephone cables, near a city skyline, Hotel name in distance, two trees, without parking meters, only a couple of people on the street.

**Reflect:** Then ask students what they think they might know and why? Students should be encouraged to speculate upon what is within the image.

*Possible responses:* the Pittsburgh skyline: Gulf Tower, William Penn Hotel, Koppers Tower, Hill District, 1930-1940 based upon cars

**Question:** What questions emerge about the photograph? Delve deeper.

*Possible responses:* Who took this? Why was this taken? Where is this? Where are the people? What was happening during this time period?

Then offer the second [Arthur Rothstein 1938](#) image without the title or identifying information. Ask the participants to take part in the ORQ exercise once. Again, take notes of responses.

**Observe:** What do you notice first about the image?

**Reflect:** What do you think you might know? Why?

**Question:** What questions emerge about the image?

Open the discussion with a few probing questions:

- How does the shift in physical perspective alter your response to the image?
- Has your understanding of the area photographed changed? If so, how?
- Who is the intended audience? Why was this photograph taken?

Finally, offer background information for both images:

Both images from the Library of Congress are entitled: *Houses on "The Hill" slum section, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*. These were taken July 1938 by photojournalist [Arthur Rothstein](#) as part of the [Farm Security Administration](#) (FSA). He was the first staff photographer of the FSA and worked with them from 1935-1940. The FSA was part of the New Deal to combat rural poverty.

Discuss photography as a means of visual storytelling. In today's age of social media, we have been challenged to understand that images do not necessarily reveal the reality of a situation. Students may recount various social media filters, angles, and "highlight reels" of curated images. Even when conducting virtual meetings or classes, the screen may not show the mess on the floor, the other people in the room, or the comfy slippers one is wearing.

If the photograph is understood as a medium to convey a message, then it is a conduit for understanding. The exchange between photographer and viewer places meaning making on both sides of the photograph. One cannot assume that the intended meaning and the understood meaning of the image are the same.

Photography draws upon connection, emotion, and correlation. Return to the Rothstein images to ask:

- How do these images convey stories/create narratives? What is conveyed here?
- How does the angle, the framed subject(s) and the lighting impact the understanding of the moment captured? Or what emotions are conveyed?
- Why might the photographer change perspectives/angles?
- Where are the people? Is there evidence of people residing in this space?

Address the implications of labeling areas as "slum sections" and discuss how such language reflects societal attitudes and reinforces stereotypes. How might these titles reflect bias in historical documentation?

Around the same time the Rothstein images of the Hill District were taken, another photographer documented the same area. Divide the class into six or more groups and offer each a Teenie Harris image from the Carnegie Museum of Arts archive. Images were selected because they also are taken around the same time period, are outdoors, include people, and offer an alternative perspective; however, they are not representative of the entirety of the Harris collection. (See the [Carnegie Museum of Art Teenie Harris Archive](#) or [Historic Pittsburgh](#) online collection for additional photographs.) Ask students to respond to the images as a small group or pair. Designate a notetaker within each group to document responses to the following prompts. An optional [Primary Source Analysis Tool](#) handout may assist in notetaking.

- **Observe:** What do you notice first about the image?
- **Reflect:** What do you think you might know? Why?
- **Question:** What questions emerge about the image?

Encourage groups to share their collective observations with the entire class. These images by Charles “Teenie” Harris were part of his work with the local newspaper, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, and for his personal photography studio. Over a forty-year period, Harris took more than eighty-thousand photographs. They uniquely document and expand our understanding of Black community life in Pittsburgh from the 1930s-1970s.

Conclude by discussing perspective.

- How does Harris’s perspective offer a different understanding of the Hill?
- Who is the intended audience? Why was this photograph taken?
- How does the inclusion or exclusion of people alter your understanding of the place?
- If these were also given the subtitle: “The Hill” slum section, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, would your impression shift? Why might that title have been selected for the FSA images? (New Deal)
- In what way do you, as a student, bring your own perspective, experience, and potential bias into understanding these images?
- How might this understanding of perspective also be true when reviewing written pieces?

Encourage students to compare the perspectives presented in the Rothstein images with those from Charles “Teenie” Harris. Highlight the diversity of viewpoints within a local community and how different photographers can capture contrasting aspects of the same area. Discuss how diverse perspectives contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of history.

Throughout the exploration of the [PACFTB Digital Learning Tool](#), users will be offered primary sources (images, maps, newspaper articles, and advertisements) that span from 1920-1957. Returning to the concept of perspective as it relates to understanding, potential bias, and purpose will enhance discussion and inquiry.

## ASSESSMENT

As an introductory exercise, conversation and comments will reflect an understanding of how images can prompt important discussions about perspective and historical context. The PACFTB Digital Learning Tool facilitates exploration of multiple perspectives. Through the course of study address the concept of perspective in historical sources. Discuss how different perspectives may result from individual biases, cultural influences, or societal norms during the time period.

Option: exit tickets summarizing one key insight about perspective.

## EXTENSION/FURTHER STUDY

Invite students to:

- Explore the digitized [Teenie Harris Archive](#) at Carnegie Museum of Art or [Historic Pittsburgh](#) online collection.
- Discuss how images can inspire and influence change.
- Examine the impact of national policies on Pennsylvania communities and individuals. Explore the global context of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) and the New Deal, emphasizing how these initiatives had both national and local implications (see [Housing module](#)).
- Invite students to explore modern depictions of urban communities in media and discuss how these compare to historical ones.

## REFERENCES

- "About the FSA/OWI Black-and-White Negatives." *Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/fsa/>.
- Arthur Rothstein, FSA (Farm Security Administration) photographer. July 1938. *Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/fsa.8a09935>.
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- "Getting Started with Primary Sources." *The Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources>.
- Harris, Charles "Teenie." American, 1908-1998; [Centre Avenue with Gordon's Shoes, Just Right Bar-B-Q, Diamond's and Henry's Cafe, 2200 block of Centre Avenue at intersection of Kirkpatrick Street, Hill District, another angle](#). ca. 1938-1950, black-and-white: Agfa safety film; H: 4 in. × W: 5 in. (10.16 × 12.70 cm); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.10812; © Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.
- Harris, Charles "Teenie." American, 1908-1998; [Crowd before or after parade? in front of Northside Elks Lodge No. 124 on Wylie Avenue, Steinhaus Lager sign on building cross the street](#). ca. 1930-1950, black-and-white: Agfa safety film; H: 4 in. × W: 5 in. (10.16 × 12.70 cm); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.9522; © Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.
- Harris, Charles "Teenie." American, 1908-1998; [Dolores Stanton and Eleanor Hughes Griffin standing in front of George Harris' confectionery store, 2121 Wylie Avenue, Hill District](#). July 1937, black-and-white: Agfa safety film; H: 4 in. × W: 5 in. (10.16 × 12.70 cm); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.24809; © Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.
- Harris, Charles "Teenie." American, 1908-1998; [Man waving and seated on back of convertible car, with three other men inside car, on street with small crowd in background under Mellow Gold billboard](#). ca. 1940-1945, black-and-white: Ansco safety film; H: 4 in. × W: 5 in. (10.16 × 12.70 cm); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.10561; © Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.
- Harris, Charles "Teenie." American, 1908-1998; [Pittsburgh Crawfords baseball player and manager Oscar Charleston, posing in street clothes outside Crawford Grill No. 1, Wylie Avenue, Hill District](#). ca. 1937, black-and-white: unknown safety film; H: 4 in. × W: 5 in. (10.16 × 12.70 cm); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.6472; © Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.
- Harris, Charles "Teenie." American, 1908-1998; [Portrait of Floyd Britton posed with foot on running board of car with "Flash" sign in window, parked in front of Wesley Center A.M.E. Zion Church on Centre Ave. near Francis Street in Pittsburgh Hill District](#). Dec 1937, black-and-white: unknown nitrate film; H: 2 ¼ × W 2 ½ in (5.71 × 6.35 cm); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.40199; © Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.
- Harris, Charles "Teenie." American, 1908-1998; [Portrait of woman wearing dark long sleeved dress with buttoned front, and dark hat tilted to left, posed beside car...](#) ca. 1937, black-and-white: unknown nitrate film; H: 2 ¼ × W 2 ½ in (5.71 × 6.35 cm); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.40211; ©

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

Harris, Charles "Teenie." American, 1908-1998; [Row of storefronts, including Gordon's Shoes, Just Right Bar-B-Q, Diamond's, and Henry's Cafe, corner of 2200 block of Centre Avenue and Kirkpatrick Street, Hill District](#). ca. 1938-1950, black-and-white: Afga safety film; H: 4 in. × W: 5 in. (10.16 × 12.70 cm); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.10813; © Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

Harris, Charles "Teenie." American, 1908-1998; [Three men and woman standing on street, with convertible car and McTurner's Funeral Home in background, 2131 Centre Avenue, Hill District](#). ca. 1938-1946, black-and-white: Afga safety film; H: 4 in. × W: 5 in. (10.16 × 12.70 cm); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.12841; © Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

Harris, Charles "Teenie." American, 1908-1998; [Wylie Avenue with Crawford Grill No. 1, Harry's, Joe's Money Loaned, and the Crystal Barber Shop, Hill District](#). ca. 1942, black-and-white: Kodak safety film; H: 4 in. × W: 5 in. (10.16 × 12.70 cm); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.5810; © Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

Harris, Charles "Teenie." American, 1908-1998; [Wylie Avenue with parked cars and barber shop and sign for "Chicken 18", Hill District](#). ca. 1935-1945, black-and-white: unknown safety film; H: 2 ¼ × W 2 in (5.71 × 5.08 cm); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35. 7571; © Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

Harris, Charles "Teenie." American, 1908-1998; [Wylie Avenue with Pittsburgh Bible Institute, John's F\[...\] Market at 1103, and other businesses, looking towards downtown, Hill District](#). ca. 1935-1950, black-and-white: Kodak safety film; H: 4 in. × W: 5 in. (10.16 × 12.70 cm); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.7519; © Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

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