

# THE AMERICAN IMAGE

The Photographs of John Collier Jr.

<http://americanimage.unm.edu>

## Teacher Guide - The American Image: The Photographs of John Collier Jr.

Content Areas: Social Studies, Language Arts, Visual Arts, Technology

Grade Levels: 9 – 12

Projected Length: 1 - 3 class periods (one hour per class period)

### Rationale:

Activities on this website guide students through an in depth investigation and exploration of historical media. Our goal is that these activities will build and hone observation skills that can then be used on visual images everywhere, in print and on screen.

### Historical Background:

This website features photographs John Collier Jr. took for the Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information (FSA/OWI) during the war years of the 1940s. The FSA/OWI hired John Collier Jr. to document day-to-day life in America with a focus on issues of civil defense and public morale. He was assigned to travel the country and capture images that conveyed specific moments or moods. Some of these images were eventually used in a campaign to convey messages about life on the American home front during the war years. For more information on John Collier Jr. check the "Biography" section of the website. For a look at hundreds of his photographs check the "Collection" section of the website.

### Teaching Process

**General Tips:** Be sure to preview the entire site and become familiar with all of its features. The site contains three main activities, a biography of John Collier Jr. and a large collection of his photographs. In each activity, there is a brief introduction and a section titled "About this Activity" that has information for teachers, some historical background and extensions. Additionally, for two of the activities, there are worksheets you can download to more easily work off line. The activities on this website may be used as a group or individual project and in any order depending on your preference.

**Active Looking:** This activity guides students through an exploration of design, circumstances and content. Once students begin the activity, they will see three photographs, each with accompanying questions and pointers about what to look for. Once they've considered these three examples, they can use the questions on the downloadable activity worksheet to look at other photographs. Follow the directions in the "In the Classroom" section of "About this Activity" and download the activity worksheet from the website. First use worksheet questions with other John Collier Jr. photographs and then investigate visual media everywhere.

**The Shooting Script** This activity allows students to compare John Collier Jr.'s photographs with modern ones found on the public website Flickr. Read the "Historical Information" section in "About this Activity" for more information about why John Collier Jr. took these particular photographs. Once students begin the activity, they will see sets of photographs that have been categorized with similar "tags" or phrases. For each pair of photographs, there

are several questions to consider – when were they taken, how can you tell, what is similar or different and who might be the intended audience. These questions and other pointers are listed at the bottom of the page and in the activity worksheet. As an extension, you can use this activity worksheet with other pairs of images. **Important Note** – this activity uses images that are drawn directly from the Flickr website which is a public, open community. In some rare cases, inappropriate photographs may appear.

**The Propaganda Filmmaker:** This activity features an innovative program that allows students to creatively interact with film clips, graphics, and photographs produced during the 1940s to support the US effort in World War Two. Beyond John Collier Jr.'s photographs, sources for this piece came from several websites that are listed in the “About this Activity” section. Students can create their own 60-second propaganda piece, review it, post it, rate it and email it. For an additional take on creating propaganda, see the suggestions in the “In the Classroom” section of “About this Activity.”

### **New Mexico Education Standards**

#### **Social Studies**

Benchmark I-B: United States History

I-B-5 Analyze the role of the United States in World War II to include events on the home front to support the war effort.

I-B-9 Explain how United States history represents a framework of knowledge and skills within which to understand the complexity of the human experience

#### **Language Arts**

Content Standard I: Students will apply strategies and skills to comprehend information that is read, heard, and viewed.

Benchmark I-C: Demonstrate critical thinking skills to evaluate information and solve problems.

Benchmark I-D: Apply knowledge of reading process to evaluate print, non-print, and technology based information.

Content Standard III: Students will use literature and media to develop an understanding of people, societies, and the self.

### **National Education Standards**

#### **Visual Arts**

NA-VA.9-12.3 Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

NA-VA.9-12.4 Understanding the Visual Arts in relation to History and Cultures.

NA-VA.9-12.5 Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

#### **Language Arts**

NI-ENG.k-12.7 Evaluating Data

#### **Technology Standards**

NT.K-12.2 Social, Ethical and Human Issues

NT.K-12.3 Technology Productivity Tools

#### **Social Studies Standards**

NSS-USH.5-12.8 Era 8: The Great Depression and World War II