

Delta State University
NEH Landmarks Workshop
The Most Southern Place on Earth

Lesson Plan

Historic Buildings and Spaces in the Mississippi Delta: Analyzing Photographs

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Grade Level 4-12 – Teachers should adjust activities for the age and ability of their students.

I. Mississippi Curriculum Connections

- Mississippi Studies (4th grade) Framework – Competencies 1, 3, & 5
- Mississippi Studies (9th grade) Framework – Competencies 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5

II. Objectives

- Students will sharpen their powers of observation and develop research skills.
- Students will develop awareness of historical and current built environment.
- Students will understand that places are unique and have stories to tell.
- Students

III. Procedures

For the Teacher:

Communities across Mississippi and the nation have many homes, commercial buildings and other historic places that can help us understand the cultural, social, economic and political history of our state, region and nation. In essence, places can tell us the story of our state and its people if we work to understand what those places might “say” and the “language” in which those lessons might be conveyed.

Students can learn that spaces and places in our communities are vital repositories of the history or prehistory of our state – Indian mounds that suggest the Native American story; classical mansions of the Antebellum period that suggest the wealth and politics of “King Cotton”; wooden dogtrot houses or barns that convey a sense of the yeoman farmer; sharecropper cabins that help relate the continuing influence of cotton agriculture as well as the development of unique cultural contributions like the Blues; cotton gins, railroad depots, factory buildings and warehouses suggest developments in transportation and industry that have greatly impacted Mississippians... the possibilities are nearly limitless.

Opening the Lesson:

The label “historic” is applied to many things...from Greek temples to baseball cards. When it comes to buildings, it can be safely said that most buildings are built and most spaces developed with a fairly specific use in mind. The buildings may be beautiful, or they may be ugly. The spaces may be open or cluttered. As long as they serve the function required of the building or space, most people don’t give much thought to the place itself. Unfortunately, most people wouldn’t care if the buildings are torn down to make room for newer buildings or if spaces are irreversibly altered.

However, because buildings are built and spaces are developed primarily with an end-use in mind, they can relate a great deal about the culture, economics and politics of the period when the building was built and used or the space was developed. Buildings and places can be great teachers of history, and photographs of buildings and places can relate a great deal about the period during which the photograph was taken.

So what makes a building or place historic, and, by implication, worthy of preserving and interpreting? On the board or on an overhead, write the question: “What makes a building or place historic?” Working individually or in small groups, ask students to

seriously reflect on this question and write as many answers as they can. Have students share their ideas with the rest of the class and generate a class list answering the question.

Developing the Lesson:

1. **Criteria for Listing on the National Register of Historic Places**

The National Register of Historic Places is the nation's official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation. Authorized under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Register is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate and protect our historic and archeological resources. Properties listed in the Register include districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects that are significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture. The National Register is administered by the National Park Service, which is part of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Compare the student list with the following criteria adapted from the National Park Service criteria for the National Register of Historic Places. Have students copy the following list to learn, explaining each criteria at the student's level of understanding:

- **Age** (students can discuss "How old is old"!) – To qualify for the National Register of Historic Places, properties must be at least fifty years old, although a few special exceptions can be made.
- **Association with Historic Events or People** (students can discuss what makes people and events "historic" at this point) – Properties listed as National Historic Landmarks are considered to be of particular national significance, while those listed on the National Register of Historic Places are considered to be of particular state and local significance. Generally, this means the property reflects significant patterns in national, state or local history; and/or is associated with the life of a significant person in national or state history.
- **Historic Integrity** (being relatively unchanged from the time of its construction or the time during which the historic events or people were associated with the building) – Properties may also be listed as exceptionally valuable architectural specimens for the study of a period, style or method of construction.

2. **Analyze Farm Security Administration photographs from the Mississippi Delta**

Have students access the Library of Congress digital collection of Farm Security Administration Photographs (<http://www.loc.gov/pictures>). Search for "Perthshire, Mississippi". Student search results should show four pages of photographs taken by Farm Security Administration photographer Marion Post Wolcott in 1939-1940, with 74 photographs total.

Have students complete the attached photo analysis worksheet (available at www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/) for as many photographs as the teacher feels necessary to illustrate the objectives of the lesson effectively.

Have students discuss the findings recorded on their worksheets.

3. **Is the place photographed historic?**

- Have students discuss or write a paragraph addressing whether each photograph records a place that is historic. They should support their answers.
- Have students discuss whether the place photographed still exists. Why do they believe it still exists? Why do they believe it no longer exists? Discuss historical themes/events that may have contributed to the preservation of the place in each photograph or to the destruction of the place in each photograph.

Assessing Student Learning:

Teachers may develop assessment opportunities in addition to the following:

- Students should learn the following glossary terms: historic; National Park Service; National Historic Landmark; National Register of Historic Places; neglect; demolition (and additional terms as determined by the teacher).
- Students should understand and be able to relate the National Park Service criteria for the National Register of Historic Places.
- Students should write a paragraph assessing "Is the place photographed historic?"
- Students should write a paragraph assessing reasons preservation or destruction of place photographed.
- Students should participate in various classroom discussions

Extending the Lesson:

The possibilities for extending the lesson are limited only by the desire, time and creativity for the teacher and students. Some possible extensions include:

- Utilizing the Library of Congress digital collection of photographs, have students search and analyze photographs of other Delta cities/sites.
- Take a field trip to area historic places/buildings . If more than one building is visited, have students compare “What makes the place historic?”
- Students could create photographic collages of historic buildings/places in their area or across the state.
- Students could collect oral histories from people associated with area historic buildings/places.
- Students could create a timeline connecting local historic building/places to significant national, state and local historic events.

IV. Materials/Resources

- Library of Congress digital collection of Farm Security Administration Photographs (<http://www.loc.gov/pictures>)
- Photo analysis worksheet (available at www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/)

Historical Photo Analysis Worksheet

Step 1. Observation

A. Study the photograph for 2 minutes. Form an overall impression of the photograph and then examine individual items. Next, divide the photo into quadrants and study each section to see what new details become visible.

B. Use the Table below to list people, objects, and activities in the photograph.

Activities	People	Objects

Step 2. Inference

Based on what you have observed above, list three things you might infer from this photograph.

- A.

- B.

- C.

Step 3. Questions

- A. What questions does this photograph raise in your mind?

- B. Where could you find answers to these questions?