

Analyzing Historic Photographs

GRADES 3-8



Overview

This activity is geared toward participants in grades 3-8. The estimated amount of time to deliver this lesson is 45 minutes.

In this lesson, participants will discuss the role of a historian and discuss how to interpret photographs to learn about the past. Participants will then evaluate the process of using photographs to extract historical information and think of further context that might be needed to learn about a particular topic.

This lesson has five photographs attached that can be used for this lesson; however, the facilitator is welcome to select any five or six images for participants to analyze.



Objective

Participants will be able to identify considerations one should take when analyzing historic photographs to learn about the past.



Materials

- Pencils
- Historic photographs (1 for every 6 participants)
- Post-it notes
- Optional: Contextual Information for Photographs
- Analyzing Photographs Worksheet



Set Up

Select five or six images you would like the students to analyze. There should be at least one photo for five students. Arrange historic photographs on tables around the room, with no more than two items per table. You may wish to create a handout with contextual information of photos to hand participants after they analyze the photos.



Inquiry

Ask participants:

- How do you think historians learn about history?

Discuss methods of storytelling or how stories can be passed down. Discuss how we can learn about the past (using images, objects, etc.) and make connections between learning about the past and thinking like a detective to determine what may have taken place at a point in history, keeping different perspectives in mind.

Let them know that historians look at primary sources to learn about history. Ask them if they have heard of primary sources.

- What is a primary source?
- What are some examples of a primary source?



Investigation

Define a primary source and how historians use them. Model questions historians may ask when they see a historic photograph while presenting a photograph.

- What do you see? Why do you say that?
- What do you think was happening while this photo was being taken?
- Who might be taking the photograph? Why might they be taking it?
- If you were there, how would you feel during that moment?
- Is there anything you wish you knew more about this photograph?
- Is there anything you can notice that no one else can?
- What can this image tell us that you might not learn anywhere else?



Activity

Analyzing Photographs

Hand each student an “Analyzing Photographs” worksheet. Have participants examine images. Participants should write their responses to the images (questions, remarks, etc.) on posts-its and place them near the respective item. NOTE: Responses should be intellectual or emotional responses rather than merely stating what the item is. Participants can move over to a new image/object once they have written their thoughts on a post-it. This cycle can be repeated until all photographs have been analyzed. Have participants answer the following question:

- How can the information you learn from these photos help you understand the event they are connected to?

At this point, give a bit of context as to what each object/image is. If the images all come from the same historic owner, share information about that individual. If using the photos provided, you can share the “Contextual Information: Gun Tub 10” handout provided below. Have participants pair with a partner and identify questions they still might have about the photographs.

Have participants share their questions. If needed, add any historical content that may be missed after each student presents.

- What can images tell us about the past? What is challenging about this process?
- What could potential next steps be as a historian?
- What other primary resources could help provide context on this topic?

Share a Photograph

Have participants find a photograph that they believe tells others the most about them or their family. Participants should bring this photograph and share it with a peer, inviting them to analyze the photo. Have participants answer the following question:

- How can the information you learn from these photos help you understand the event or person they are connected to?



Lesson Connection

See our lesson, **Analyzing Historical Documents**, for content on how historians interpret written documents to learn about the past.



Background

A primary source is a document or physical object that was written or created during the time period of study. Photographs, journal entries, artifacts, letters, newspapers, oral histories from crewmembers, deck logs and cruise books are all great examples of primary sources. Each of these primary sources can provide particular information. Historians use primary sources to try to figure out what happened at certain points of history.



Additional Resources/References

For access to primary source documents:

<http://docsteach.org/>

<https://www.fold3.com/>

<http://dp.la/>



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Documents and Images

Photo A



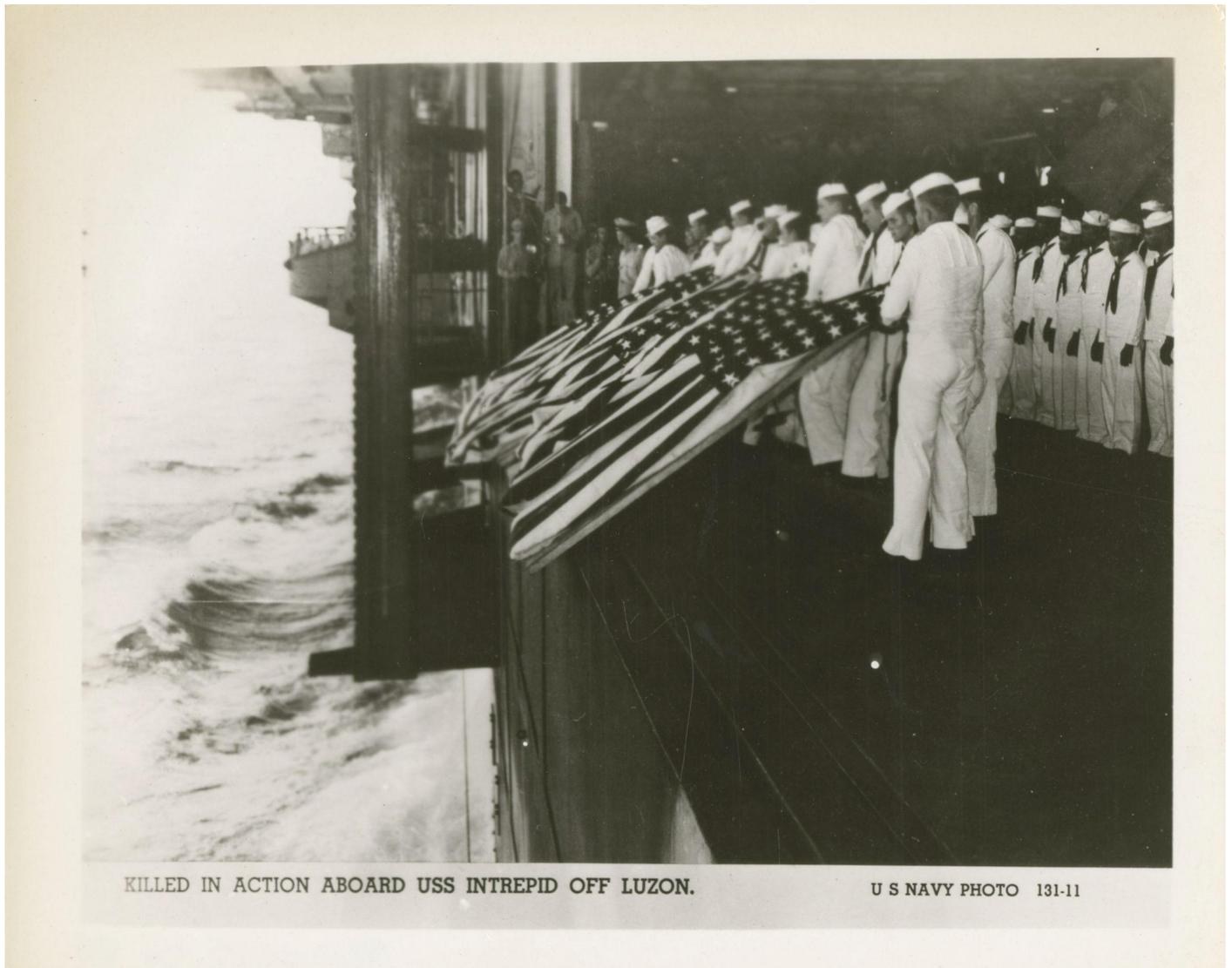
Credit: National Archives

Photo B



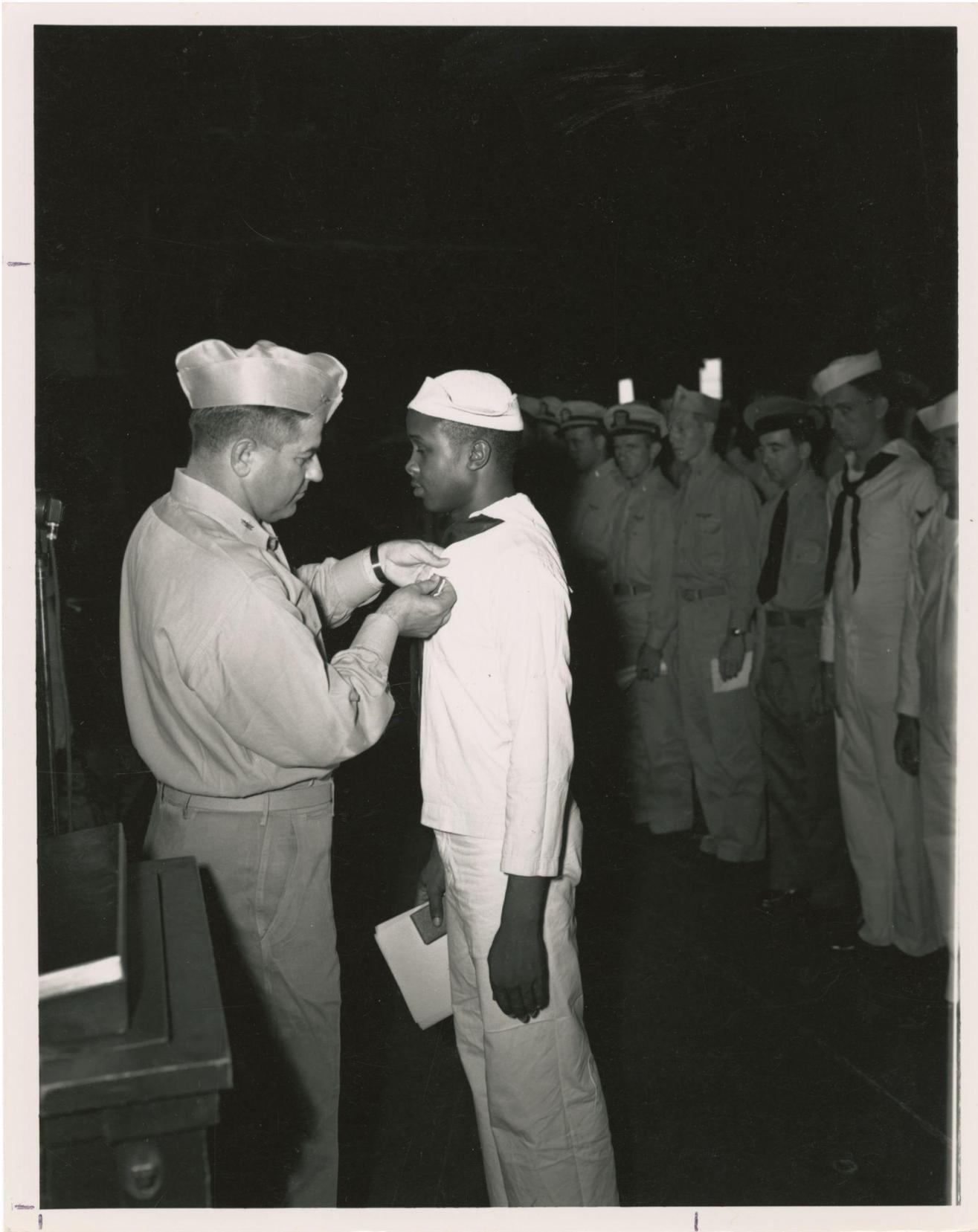
Credit: Collection of the Intrepid Museum. P00.2012.01.82

Photo C



Credit: Collection of the Intrepid Museum. P00.2012.01.82

Photo D



Credit: Collection of the Intrepid Museum. P00.2012.01.89

Photo E



Credit: Collection of the Intrepid Museum. P00.2018.06.19

ACTIVITY: ANALYZING PHOTOGRAPHS

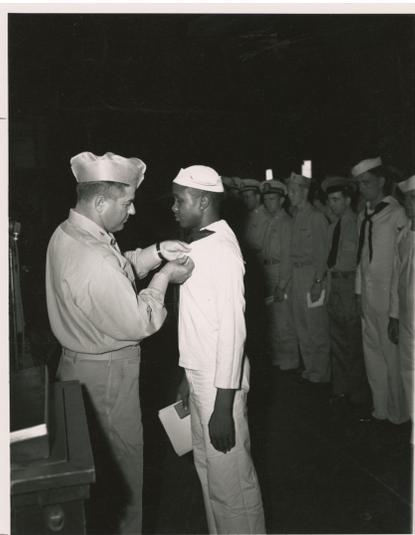
1. Use the sentence starters below to respond to the photographs you see on individual post-its.
 - I notice that...
 - I think that while this photo was being taken...
 - I think the person taking the photo was....
 - I think the photographer took this photo because...
 - If I was there while this photo was being taken, I would feel...
 - Something I want to learn more about is...
 - Something this photograph can tell me that I can't learn anywhere else is...
2. Once you analyze all the photographs, answer the following: How can the information you learn from these photos help you understand the event they are connected to?

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION: GUN TUB 10

The majority of Black Americans serving in the Navy during World War II served as cooks or waiters in the officers' mess. On some ships, including *Intrepid*, some Black sailors had an additional assignment: operating anti-aircraft guns during combat. On *Intrepid*, the sailors selected for gunnery training were given their own battle station called Gun Tub 10. Their weapons were 20mm Oerlikon guns, the shortest-range of *Intrepid's* anti-aircraft guns. They were trained by Alfonso Chavarrias, a Mexican-American who was stationed in Gun Tub 10 with them.



On October 29, 1944, during combat in the Philippines, a Japanese kamikaze airplane barreled toward Gun Tub 10. Japan had only recently started launching kamikaze attacks, so the crew was not familiar with this tactic. The gunners stayed at their battle station, shooting away the plane's left wing. The damaged plane crashed into their position, killing 10 men and badly burning others. Chavarrias was one of the men who was killed. Six of the surviving sailors were promised one of the highest honors in the Navy, the Navy Cross, but were instead awarded the Bronze Star for valor.



One man, Alonzo Swann, maintained he and the others had been promised the Navy Cross, the Navy's highest honor. Swann gathered documentation showing that he and his shipmates were originally awarded the Navy Cross. Nearly 50 years later, after Swann went to court, he and four other Black sailors received the Navy Cross for their bravery during that attack.

