

## Mexico at the Hour of Combat

### Sabino Osuna's Photographs of the Mexican Revolution



Using Photographs as Primary Sources

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## Teacher's Guide

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Cover photo: Sabino Osuna, Portrait of Pancho Villa, ca. 1910-1914, this and all photographs, courtesy of Sweeney Art Gallery and Special Collections Library, University of California, Riverside.

## Overview

The Mexican Revolution is one of those events in history that brings to mind iconic images. There were essentially two revolutions occurring at that time, the political and social revolution happening on the ground, and the journalistic revolution of the groundbreaking photographer/Revolutionary relationship. The photographs of Sabino Osuna document the early years of the Mexican Revolution and depict one person's viewpoint of the event. The Visual Literacy exercises in this curriculum will utilize these photographs to understand how visual images shaped the events as they were happening and, as primary sources, add to our understanding of this chapter of Mexican history in a broader context. As primary sources, students will look for evidence of historical events while considering the photographer's intention while documenting the Revolution. Students will examine what choices were made during the photographic process, whether that included framing of particular images or planning and choice of people, places and events to document by the photojournalist. Selection of images by the media in real time influenced the interpretation and understanding of events by those individuals participating in or experiencing the Revolution and ultimately led to the shaping of national pride and Mexican identity. These lessons will also explore how documentation of events like revolutions have changed over time. The Mexican Revolution was the first conflict covered by *attached* journalists. Firsts in other conflicts, such as television coverage in the Vietnam War and the use of social media by revolutionaries during the Arab Spring uprising will also be explored. Finally, students will study how museum exhibitions shape one's understanding of historical events, by using photographs and other media and real objects to tell one version of the story.

The lessons were developed with the intention that students visit the museum exhibition; however, they can stand on their own for critically examining any photograph as a primary source with any historical event. Teachers are encouraged to use and adapt the lessons as necessary to enhance their classroom curriculum and best serve their students.

The following are excerpts from the exhibition that will assist the teacher with background information for the lessons.

## Background Information

### ***Mexico at the Hour of Combat: Sabino Osuna's Photographs of the Mexican Revolution***

The Mexican Revolution was a major armed conflict that began in 1910 with an uprising led by Francisco I. Madero against longtime dictator Porfirio Díaz. The Revolution is generally considered to have lasted until 1920, although the country continued to have sporadic outbreaks of warfare well into the 1920s. The Revolution gave birth to the Mexican Constitution of 1917, and led to the creation of the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (National Revolutionary Party) in 1929, renamed the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI) in 1946. Under a variety of leaders, the PRI held power until the general election of 2000.

The Mexican Revolution offered a nascent generation of photographers an opportunity to document a moment of drama, celebration, and tragedy. Advances in technology such as the regular use of halftones in popular periodicals and the ability to transmit images phototelegraphically contributed to an increased use of photography to tell the story of the Revolutionary. Both sides in the conflict relied on the visual exposure that photojournalism could provide. Gun and camera were intimately connected, and the photographers were aware that they were recording history.

### **Sabino Osuna**

Sabino Osuna was among the hundreds of photographers who appeared on the scene to photograph the Revolution. He was a skilled portrait photographer who lived in Mexico City, and as a photographer, and therefore a noncombatant, Osuna was able to get close to the action. The images he produced cover primarily the early years of the Revolution, in particular the *Decena Trágica*, the ten days in February 1913 when the Madero government was overthrown and the old order briefly restored.

The fifty-six images selected for the exhibition come from the Osuna Collection of 427 glass negatives that are held in the University of California Riverside Libraries Special Collections & Archives. The Osuna collection is historically important as well as visually impressive and coherent, possessing a single point of view.

## **Identity and nationalism- Inventing a Nation through Photography**

The impact of the Mexican Revolution on arts and letters was immediate and profound. It promoted a vigorous nationalism and inspired an examination of every aspect of the national, social and cultural life aimed at clarifying Mexicans' conception of their national identity.

### **The *attached* photographer -**

The Osuna Collection of photographs of the Revolution exemplifies the worldwide attention that focused on the first major revolution of the twentieth century. The Revolutionary forces opposed to the dictatorship attracted Mexican and foreign photographers, filmmakers, reporters, and war correspondents. With an uncommon sense that history was being made, these eyewitnesses attached themselves to military groups and took to the field of battle. Pancho Villa's military and personal reputation was such that reporters, war correspondents, songwriters, filmmakers, and photographers followed him from battle to battle, and the novelist Martín Luis Guzmán was his personal secretary. As nonpartisan observers, photographers covered the events and enjoyed the liberty of moving freely among the rival troops. They carried no weapons and posed no threat to the warring factions.

### **Revolution and the Changing Nature of Photography**

Some of the photographs of battle scenes of the Revolution convey the distinct impression that the soldiers and the Revolutionaries trusted photographers. Some photographs record the presence of other photographers walking, camera in hand, across corpse-strewn battlefields. In two striking photographs the photographer includes his own shadow. The Revolution also saw a proliferation of photographers, evidenced in the repetition of people and scenes in work by different photographers. Many images of the same scene differ only slightly in composition, because numerous photographers were present at the same important events, and it is only the positions from which they took their photographs that account for slight variations among the images. Documentary photography and filmmaking emerged under censorship during the Porfiriato, and a good number of photographs in the Osuna Collection demonstrate that photographers were permitted to cover official functions. However, unfavorable images of the government, of poverty, exploitation of the poor, and deplorable social conditions were initially forbidden.



People calling for the resignation of President Porfirio Díaz on a Mexico City street after learning of Francisco I. Madero's military victory at Ciudad Juárez on May 24, 1911.

As the Revolution unleashed political and social forces previously repressed by the Porfirista-controlled press, images of revolutionary soldiers with cartridge belts draped across their chests and faces shaded by large sombreros, stacked rifles and uniformed soldiers resting on the ground, and groups of uniformed officers with waxed, curled moustaches standing at ease in front of a train, became more frequent, despite censorship.



General Guadalupe Narváez

### Historical perspectives – War Photography

Today much of the Osuna Collection could be placed in the category of photojournalism and its subset of war photography. Accounts of the history of the latter tend to start with Roger Fenton, Jean-Charles Langlois, and Léon Ménéhin in the Crimean War (1853–1856); and Mathew Brady and Alexander Gardner during the U.S. Civil War (1861–1865). Historical accounts tend to skip World War I and go on to give special attention to the Spanish Civil War, a war that galvanized the Western world into taking sides, because it was one of the first in which civilians and cities were targets. This was also the first war for which the Leica camera—with its fast shutter speed, its portability, and its cartridge of 36 frames—was available to allow photographers to get close to the action. In effect, war photographers became fellow combatants, and thus they had to choose the side from which they “shot.”

### Role of photography in books and museum exhibitions –

In this light, the Mexican Revolution might be considered a missing chapter in these scholarly works. However, in the advent of this century, several new scholarly works focused on photography of the Mexican Revolution, and in 2010 museum exhibitions were mounted on the basis of this research in connection with the bicentennial of the nation and the centennial of the Revolution. Both these books and exhibitions drew upon the 500,000-image Archivo Casasola, which spans the years 1900 to 1940, and which is housed at the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia’s Fototeca in Pachuca, Hidalgo.



Sra. Madero handing out sandwiches to the troops.

## Pre-visit activity

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### OBJECTIVES

Analyze photographs for content and context through observation, reflection and inquiry.

Summarize how photographs are used as primary sources and distinguish the strengths and limitations of using photographs as primary sources.

Explain the role images in media have in shaping history, establishing nationalism, developing identity, etc.

### SUMMARY

In part one of the lesson, students will use the photographs of Sabino Osuna as primary sources to analyze the content of the photographs and relate that to the context of the historical event. In part two, students will discuss how these photographs were viewed by the individuals experiencing the Revolution and how that influenced the shaping of their national pride and cultural identity.

### PROCEDURE

1. Start with a discussion of how we learn about history. Students' answers may include methods such as individual memories, stories, written accounts, objects, photographs and other media images, etc., that provide information and understanding about historical events. This exercise will use photographs to demonstrate how they relate historical events. Discuss what a *primary source* is and how photographs can serve as primary sources. (The Library of Congress has a great teacher professional development online module about teaching with photographs as primary sources. See Resources section for link.)

### GRADE LEVEL:

6<sup>th</sup> and up

### ESTIMATED TIME:

60 minutes

### MATERIALS:

Printed photographs or computer monitor

One student worksheet per group or per student

Graphic organizer

### ASSESSMENTS:

Writing samples

Student participation in small group work and whole class discussion

### EXTENSION:

Have students research questions they have about specific people, places, and events depicted in the photographs using other primary sources

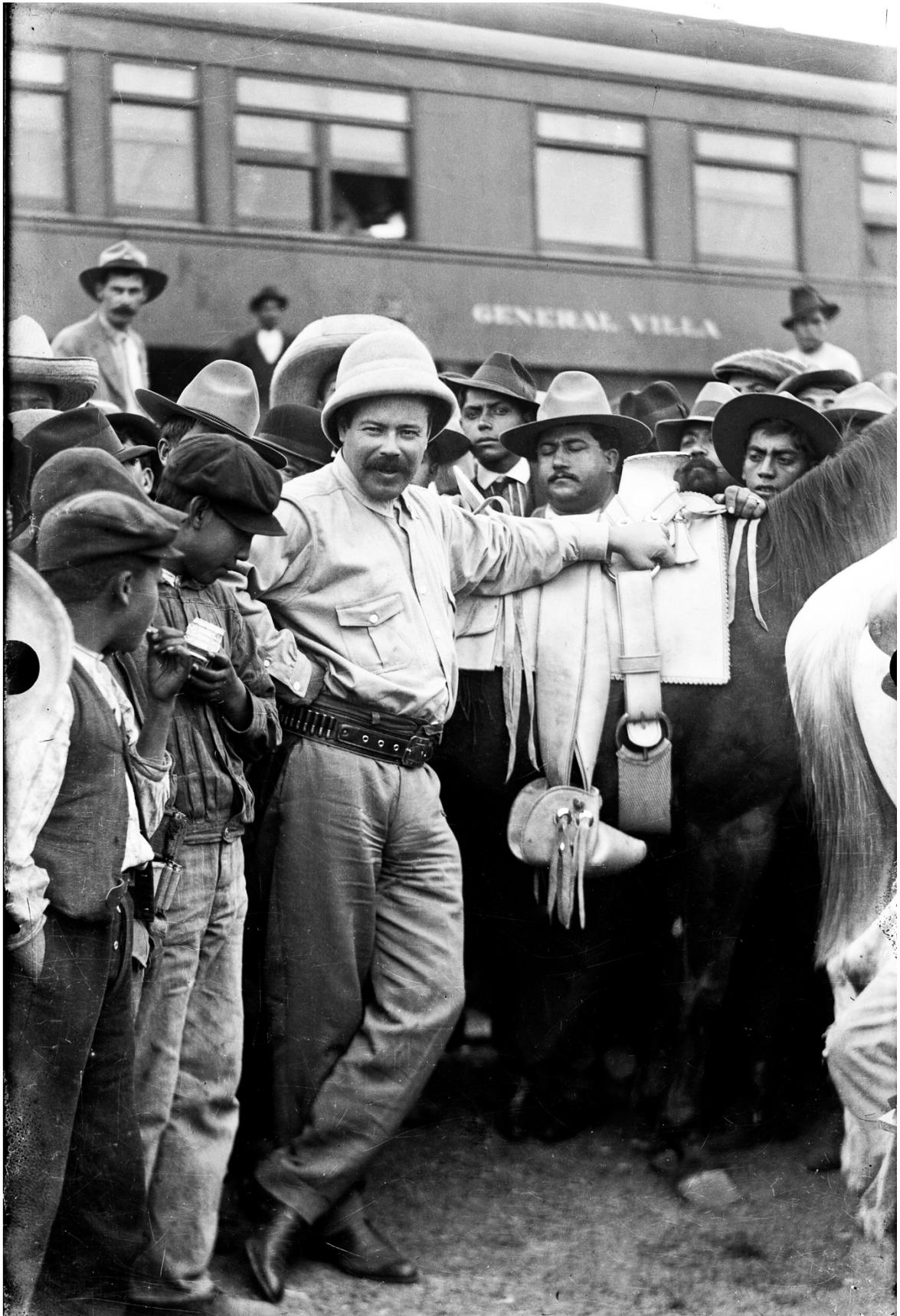
Preface this exercise with a brief description of the Mexican Revolution followed by an explanation of Sabino Osuna, a Mexican photographer turned *photojournalist* during the early years of the Mexican Revolution. (The curriculum *¡Viva la Revolución!* has great background information about the history of the Mexican Revolution. See Resources section for link.)

2. Explain that students will work in groups to examine a set of Osuna's photographs and complete a worksheet to document *content* of the photographs to determine facts that can be discerned from examining the photographs versus information that can be inferred and requires more research. Each group will report out on one picture, with the other groups adding any new ideas or information, to complete a graphic organizer to summarize the class' thoughts.

3. The photographs (shown on pages 8-13) can be displayed on a computer monitor, Smart- or Promethean Board or can be printed for each group. Divide the class into six groups of about equal size and have each group examine and complete the Student Worksheet for one of the photographs. Encourage the students to use their best observation skills to identify what they see in the photograph and discuss what they think is happening.

4. When all groups have finished, show the photograph as each group reports out to the entire class, and arrange a graphic organizer like that shown on page 16 on a Smartboard or butcher paper to summarize each group's report. Open up the discussion to the entire class so other groups can add any new ideas or information. When the graphic organizer is complete, conclude by discussing if there are any agreements or disagreements with the *interpretation* of the photographs and whether the students' understanding of the Mexican Revolution is limited, given these images were not studied in a broader *context*.

5. Discuss how the interpretation of the photographs occurred when the pictures were first published. How can the interpretation of primary sources shape understanding of events among those individuals participating in or experiencing the events? Discuss how this can unify or divide groups. How can that influence *cultural identity* or *nationalism*? Finally, discuss how the students understanding of the events of the Mexican Revolution may be limited by analyzing just a few photographs. Explain how the museum visit will present these photographs in a broader *context* that will help expand their understanding of the historical event – while still only presenting one viewpoint.



Francisco "Pancho" Villa after dismounting from his horse.



Felicistas in the YMCA



Felicistas firing from the roof of the Ciudadela.



Gutiérrez and Zapata



Giving water to a wounded man.



A People's Army: Soldiers, Soldaderas, and their children.

## Student Worksheet – Page 1

| <b>Study your photograph carefully and answer the following questions</b> | <b>List and describe facts about the photograph's <i>content</i></b> | <b>List uncertainties and questions about the photograph that require more research (a broader <i>context</i>)</b> |
|---|--|--|
| What objects are in the photograph?                                       |  |  |
| Who is in the photograph?   |  |  |
| Where was the photograph taken?   |  |  |
| What is happening in the photograph?                                      |  |  |



## Class summary of Sabino Osuna's Photographs

| Title of Photograph | Details of photograph's <i>content</i> | Details of photograph's <i>context</i> | Notes |
|---------------------|--|--|-------|
|                     |  |  |       |
|                     |  |  |       |
|                     |  |  |       |
|                     |  |  |       |
|                     |  |  |       |
|                     |  |  |       |

## Museum visit activity

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### OBJECTIVES

Analyze photographs for content and context through observation, reflection and inquiry.

Develop a photo story of an historical event.

### SUMMARY

In part one of the museum visit activity, students will use the analysis skills gained from the pre-visit activity to look for photographs with specific content to determine how the photographer is relating historical events. In part two, students will choose photographs that tell a particular story to “curate” their own exhibit. Students will evaluate how the Museum relates historical events; what choices the photographer and *curator* made to shape our understanding of the Mexican Revolution. Students will view the photographs in a larger context and compare their understanding of historical events after visiting the exhibition with their understanding before visiting the exhibition.

### PROCEDURE

1. Print both sides of the museum visit activity worksheet for each student.
2. Review some of the content they will be looking for, then allow the students to work individually or in groups to complete side one of the exercise.
3. When side one is complete, the students can return to the exhibition to complete side two. If students have cell phones, they can take pictures of the photographs (without flash) chosen for their stories to refer to while answering the questions.

### GRADE LEVEL:

6<sup>th</sup> and up

### ESTIMATED TIME:

60 minutes

### MATERIALS:

Exhibit worksheet for each student

### ASSESSMENT:

Writing samples

**Mexico at the Hour of Combat Exhibit Activity**

The photographer Sabino Osuna consciously photographed specific people, places and events of the Revolution as well as photographed subjects in the moment. Complete this exercise to walk in the shoes of the photographer and see how *documentation* of an event takes place.

| <b>Look for and find photographs that depict:</b>  | <b>Briefly describe who or what is in the photograph, what’s happening in the photograph, and where the photograph was taken</b> |
|--|--|
| Staged (planned) portrait or group photographs   |  |
| Candid (taken in a moment of time) photographs of revolutionary action or everyday tasks |  |
| Fighters in:<br>Business suits   |  |
| Work clothes   |  |
| Military uniforms  |  |
| Women:<br>Supporting the troops  |  |
| Children:<br>Experiencing the Revolution   |  |
| Other photographers  |  |

Work individually or in groups to find photographs that show and tell a story. Possible topics could be:

Warring sides of the conflict

Portraits of influential individuals

Role of women in the Revolution

List or take pictures of your selected photographs and answer the following questions.

Write your topic here \_\_\_\_\_

Why did you choose these particular photographs?

List them here

Describe why they were chosen

Give evidence for how these photographs are useful to tell your story.

By selecting only a few photographs, what's not told about your story? How might this influence one's understanding of the entire event? How might looking closely at one piece of the story enhance the entire story?

Compare your chosen photographs with your classmate's. List any photographs that stand out as favorites. Describe how some photographs become iconic and representative of an event.

## Post-visit activity

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### OBJECTIVES

Compare how media images have changed throughout history and postulate how that influences our understanding of history.

Design an exhibit or write a photo story of an historical or current event.

### SUMMARY

Students will equate the pre-visit and museum visit experiences to the study of media and how it has changed throughout history. They will then design their own exhibit or write their own photo story to synthesize these concepts.

### PROCEDURE

1. Start with a discussion of how media images have changed throughout history and how that can influence our understanding of events. Compare the Osuna photographs taken during the Mexican Revolution with television news coverage of the Vietnam War and with social media documentation of the Arab Spring uprisings. Find appropriate images on the internet to show while discussing the following.

Briefly discuss how the technology of creating photographic and moving images has changed over time and how that impacted how people processed information about news events. The Osuna photographs were viewed by a limited number of people, mainly those who had access to printed resources. The images of the Vietnam War were viewed nearly every day in real time in millions of people's homes around the world through television and printed resources. The social media documentation of the Arab Spring uprising occurred by the people who were making history and experiencing it in real time and was accessed by

### GRADE LEVEL:

6<sup>th</sup> and up

### ESTIMATED TIME:

60 minutes class time for research

Homework assignment

### MATERIALS:

Access to online databases of photographs

Student's photographs

### ASSESSMENTS:

Story development

Writing samples

people around the world not necessarily associated with the uprising but who also contributed to the content. In all instances, the journalists were able to get very close to the action.

2. Compare these historical changes in media and discuss how they can change how one consumes information from the media and how one understands history.

3. Next, students will pick an event in history using images from an online database, or develop a story of a current event, using their own photographs taken in the past, or their own photographs taken in real time, to write a newspaper article or curate an exhibit where the photographs tell the story, with little writing of captions. Examples of current events that may be of interest to students include homecoming or sports events, holiday celebrations, family vacations, etc. If time allows, use class time to complete this activity or assign it for homework.

4. As a writing assignment, instruct students to analyze their photographs (chosen or taken) as they did previously (you can use the Student Worksheet) and further answer the following questions.

- How many photographs did you capture or select with the intent to relate a particular story?
- If you took your own photographs, how many were taken just in the moment? Did you selectively frame the photograph? Why?
- If you could choose only one photograph to represent this event (which commonly happens in news stories), which would it be?
- What would be left out of the story if this were the only photograph viewed?
- How does this happening in the media shape our view of historical events?
- How do single points of view in media stories and museum exhibits, limit our understanding of history?

## Glossary

Arab Spring: a series of uprisings in Arab countries, beginning in Tunisia in December 2010, in which protestors challenged the existing authoritarian regimes

Attached: to assign a journalist to travel *alongside* a military unit or a political campaign, having the liberty to move freely among rival groups

Content: the people, places and things seen in a photographic image

Context: the set of circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, situation, etc.

Cultural identity: the feeling of belonging to a group

Curator: a person who selects content for a presentation, whether in a

museum, art collections, or on a website

Documentarian: a writer, photographer, or other artist whose works constitutes a document or documentary of an aspect of life

Embedded: to assign a journalist to travel *within* a military unit or a political campaign and report from one side

Felicistas: the supporters of Félix Díaz, nephew of former president Porfirio Diaz, who opposed the Madero and Carranza governments in Mexican rebellions between 1913 and 1920

Interpretation: the ways in which information is communicated to others

Nationalism: spirit or aspirations common to a whole nation

Photojournalist: a news photographer whose work dominates written copy

Primary source: pertaining to or being a firsthand account, original data, etc., or based on direct knowledge

Revolution: a major and sweeping change in society and the political structure, especially one made suddenly and often accompanied by violence

Soldaderas: women in the military who participated in the conflict of the Mexican Revolution

Vietnam War: a conflict, starting in 1954 and ending in 1975, between South Vietnam (later aided by the U.S., South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand, and New Zealand) and the Vietcong and North Vietnam.

## Resources

### Books:

Chilcote, Ronald H. *Mexico at the Hour of Combat: Sabino Osuna's Photographs of the Mexican Revolution*. Laguna Beach: Laguna Wilderness P, 2012. 119 pp. ISBN: 9780-9728-5444-3.

### Curricula:

Smithsonian in Your Classroom: History through Primary Sources

Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

[http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/images/educators/lesson\\_plan/every\\_picture/every\\_picture.pdf](http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/images/educators/lesson_plan/every_picture/every_picture.pdf)

Through the Lens: Creating Santa Fe

Palace of the Governors/New Mexico History Museum

[http://www.palaceofthegovernors.org/pdfs/TTL\\_curriculum.pdf](http://www.palaceofthegovernors.org/pdfs/TTL_curriculum.pdf)

¡Viva la Revolución! An Educator's Guide to the Mexican Revolution

University of New Mexico, Latin American and Iberian Institute

<http://lail.unm.edu/outreach/lesson-mexican-revolution.php>

### Websites:

Exploring Photographs

The J. Paul Getty Museum

[http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom\\_resources/curricula/exploring\\_photographs/index.html](http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom_resources/curricula/exploring_photographs/index.html)

Library of Congress

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/professionaldevelopment/selfdirected/photographsandprints.html>

The American Image: Photographs of John Collier, Jr

University of New Mexico, Maxwell Museum of Anthropology

<http://americanimage.unm.edu/>

## Common Core Social Studies Standards

### Key Ideas and Details:

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8

Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text (or photograph).

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text (or photograph).

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.