

Shout Freedom!

Educator Resource Grades 9-12

Shout Freedom! includes fifty-five photographs by forty-seven photographers who were among the hundreds who were active in the Photo League in the early to middle decades of the twentieth-century. All of the works are from the collection of the Columbus Museum of Art. This educator resource is for teachers of grades 9-12.

The goals of the *Shout Freedom!* educational resources are to:

1. understand the significance of the Photo League as a social and artistic organization.
2. consider how documentary photography can raise awareness about social issues and effect social change.
3. examine the social issues documented by the Photo League and their relevance today.

The student outcomes are as follows:

1. Students will be able to explain how documentary photography is used to raise awareness about social issues and effect social change through discussions, art projects, and/or written essays.
2. Students, through facilitated debate, art projects, or written essays, will develop and express informed opinions about censorship—specifically how it has affected artists in the past and today.
3. Students will form and express a deeper understanding of the social issues documented by the Photo Leagues and the relevance of those issues today.

The Photo League educator resource activities found on this website address the following National Visual Arts content standards:

Content Standard #2: Using knowledge of structures and functions

Content Standard #4: Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

Content Standard #5: Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

Content Standard #6: Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

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The Photo League

The Photo League was an organization made up of amateur and professional photographers who were dedicated to utilizing photography to document social issues in the United States. Existing from 1936 to 1951, this New York City-based organization had three main purposes:

1. Educational: providing lectures, darkrooms, and classes on history, techniques, and esthetics;
2. Social: using documentary photography to effect social change;
3. Aesthetic: developing and promoting photography as a fine art.

Photo League members believed that photography could be used to document social problems and inspire action for positive change.

Censorship and Art:

In 1947, the Photo League was blacklisted by the United States government under suspicion of being associated with the Communist Party. This listing arose because the league had supported some causes that were also supported by the Communist Party. This blacklisting made it very difficult for the Photo League to function successfully, as it had for the previous ten years. The government labeled the organization as a “clear and present danger” to the United States. As a consequence of the listing, the Photo League disbanded in 1951.

Cold War Politics and McCarthyism:

From the late 1940s until the mid-1950s, the United States government was adamant about preventing the spread of Communism. The government was particularly concerned with preventing the proliferation of Communist politics on home soil. A large-scale investigation of private citizens, artists, university professors, and other public figures took place in order to prevent the development of a Communist Party presence in the United States.

During what is often referred to as the “Red Scare,” or “McCarthyism,” many United States citizens were unduly accused of being associated with Communist activity, and many found themselves censored and blacklisted by the United States government as threats to the safety of the country’s citizens. Many lives and careers were negatively affected by false accusations during this time.

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ART SPEAKS. JOIN THE CONVERSATION.