

# CLASS PROJECT GUIDES FOR FOUR COURSES

Below are a set of class projects designed for teachers to use in four courses – high school American History, middle grades social studies or advisory, middle or high school English class and a photography course. While three of the four project guides are linked to specific content areas, they easily can become integrative units drawing together knowledge and methods from different disciplines. Each project guide has a statement about:

- Context and resources
- Student objectives
- Activities
- Outcomes
- Extensions

The class project guides are based in interaction between the teacher and students. Teacher and students together generate directions for their work. The teacher is a facilitator and a mentor; the teacher also seeks other adults, from inside and outside the school, to work with students as resources and even as mentors. The objectives make connections between students' own lives and what they are studying and connections between what students already know and the new materials and ideas they will explore. The activities are primarily investigation, exploration and problem solving and presentation of findings in a range of written, oral, and visual formats. The work is both individual and collaborative. The work is to be shared with an audience, the class itself and other people in the school. The audience may also include people from outside the school, friends and families and the larger community. Teachers will find many opportunities for assessment or learning, done by students as individuals and in groups as well as by engaged adults, including the teacher, visiting experts, or community volunteers.

While these class projects are designed for American schools, they could easily be adapted for schools in other countries. Some resources (see list) have international components. The Rogovin photographs are international in scope and lend themselves easily to teaching and learning in diverse cultural settings

## Course 1: High School American History

In teaching American labor history, teachers can use the Family of Miners and Working People portfolios to explore living and working conditions in mining towns and the efforts of American miners to organize labor unions. The teacher can use the photos more generally with labor history topics, for example, post-Civil War union organizing, the campaign for the eight-hour day, immigrant workers, women organizing unions, or farm worker unions. The photographs can be used at any intersection of labor history or the conditions of working people.

The photographs are to be used in conjunction with other materials (e.g., primary source readings, texts, literature, music, films.) See "Methods for Teaching with Photographs" in this Teaching Guide. See also *The Power in Their Hands* (in "Teaching Resources") for a detailed curriculum, primary sources, activities and role plays for teaching U.S. labor history.



Family of Miners



Family of Miners

### • Objectives

- Students learn about the living and working conditions in mining towns and the efforts of American miners to organize labor unions.
- Students learn about key movements in U.S. labor history, the struggle for workers' rights in the development of the U.S. economy.
- Students examine their beliefs about the rights of workers and their own willingness to risk organizing for fair wages and safe working conditions.

### • Activities

- Miners' History - From studying these photographs students discuss living and working conditions of miners. Though contemporary, the photos repeat a historic reality of miners' lives (Family of Miners, Appalachia, photographs 1-6.)
- In small groups, students research selected key incidents and issues in American labor history; for example, 1892 Homestead steel, the 1892 Couer d'Alene miners' strike, child labor and sweatshops, the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire and the organizing by New York City women garment workers, the 1930's organizing of industrial unions, agricultural labor (share croppers, tenant farmers, migrant workers). The class develops common research questions and pools resources. Each group presents their story and analysis using diverse presentation methods (e.g., media, narrative debate, drama).
- Students identify the contrasting viewpoints of workers and owners, labor and management, in any of those historical situations and debate the need for workers' rights. How are workers' rights established? What makes them legal? Who monitors them? How are they enforced?
- Students create a family tree showing the employment history of their family. They interview family members about their work life and work history. They write an interpretive essay, or other document, about their discoveries, reflecting on the significance of what they have learned.
- Environmental issues – what are the long-term implications of different types of mining (people, land)?
- Students role play organizing a labor union as safety conditions in their mine decline. The teacher writes short character descriptions describing persons' motives and interests. Students assume the role of union organizers, the teacher is mine boss/manager or owner, and the rest of the students are approached to join the union.
- Students develop an oral history project about a local industry. They interview veteran employees about changes they have experience in that industry over the decades. They relate that industry to local economic development. Students probe for points of view of the workers, the owners, and any related union organizing.
- Students develop an interview project to document a current local labor issue, e.g., low wages at chain stores, unsafe working conditions, or undocumented workers. They learn to create factual and probing questions for interviews with people of different viewpoints.

## • Outcomes

- Students share research about major themes in US labor history.
- Students research particular aspects of family work history and local labor history and present their findings to the class or a public audience, such as a history fair.
- Students examine their own attitudes about doing manual and other kinds of labor, and about workers' rights and organizing to improve working conditions. They use a variety of research sources and methods of presentation.

## • Extensions

- Any of the methods mentioned in the Activities (e.g., role plays, interviews, historical research) are complex and learned over time. The teacher will model using it, and any class guests may share their knowledge and experience with that method. These are powerful experiences that students can continue to use throughout their lives in widely divergent situations

## Course 2: Middle Grades Social Studies Class or Advisory



Working People

The middle grades (generally Grades 6-8) teacher can use the Family of Miners and Working People photographs with students in a project to explore attitudes toward jobs that require physical labor and reasons people choose the jobs they do as part of a project about the students' futures. In the middle grades students are making big choices that will impact the rest of their lives. They consider which high school to attend, their intention to graduate, which courses they want to take, plans for further education and future work.

Middle grades teachers often want to help their students consider these choices seriously, reflect on their interests and dreams, and learn about the resources available to them. For many students, eighth grade is a critical juncture in their lives. They have little belief that they can develop abilities that could take them into valuable, interesting work. This project needs to be designed for and with the specific students who are doing the project.

For the teacher, carrying out such a project will be influenced by how much the teacher knows about the realities of high school choices in that school district, including the school-to-work support programs that the high schools offer. Many school districts offer summer programs to bridge middle school to high school, to visit colleges and identify resources to help students graduate from high school.



Working People

The Family of Miner and Working People photographs are an entry point for many discussions and investigations in which students consider their work and education futures. For useful materials in creating such projects, see Teaching Resources section.



Working People

### • Objectives

- Students analyze their own work experiences, attitudes and expectations about work and those common in their family and neighborhood.
- Students develop a plan for high school and course choice, for exploring work through internships and active involvement in their communities, and identify resources for this exploration.
- Students and the teacher investigate the kinds of work done in their neighborhood and locality.

### • Activities

- Using the Working People or Family of Miners photographs, students write about the work miners do and their working conditions. They discuss manual labor, skilled and unskilled work, and their attitudes and beliefs about why people do those jobs. Discussions would explore the relationship of particular jobs to class background, immigrant status, race, gender, and education of the workers in those jobs.
- Students interview friends and family about their job experiences. They write about their own aspirations and goals. They identify the steps to take toward advancing their education and acquire the experience and skills necessary to find and secure sustaining jobs .
- Students may be doing service learning hours, internships, or after school jobs. They may have a talent or skill that others value (repairing bikes, singing, or cartooning). What is engaging in those experiences? Can they be work as well? Lead to new perceptions of work?
- Students analyze what activities and services they would like the school to offer to meet their interests and needs and then collaborate on developing them.
- Students observe and analyze their work experience by writing in journals. They identify people at their work site who are helpful to them and interview them. Taking their own photos of people at work would add documentation to the discussion and extend their discussions of the Rogovin photographs.
- Students research the education, training and experience necessary for a challenging job that interests them. They identify ways to volunteer in order to learn more about that work. Finding mentors, with the help of the school, might be a larger project to undertake with help of the teacher.
- Students look for ways to learn about jobs in their community and to bring people into the school to talk about and to be interviewed about their work.
- Students read from The Autobiography of Malcolm X and other literature about people's motivations for doing the work they do, obstacles they met, and responses to changing work conditions.

- **Outcomes**

- Students write a personal essay about changes in their view of themselves and their future school and work plans which are presented to the class.
- Students share their essays with each other.

- **Extensions**

- Middle grades teachers may decide to work with other staff to improve the school's opportunities for students to experience work and educational choices. Many high schools are experimenting with ways to engage students with the workforce such as in the health industry, high value industrial production, information technology, communication, environmental protection and community development. Developing partnerships with companies and participating staff members requires outreach and nurture; the rewards, however, are often readily apparent to business, schools, city government and the participating students.
- Teachers and students may embark on a more extensive study of their local community, assessing the needs of young people and other groups for more services and resources, designing ways to create them and advocating for resources to create them. This study may lead to entrepreneurial or volunteer projects. Many schools and organizations have led the way that it is easy to identify resources and models for doing this work.

## Course 3: English Class – Coming of Age in the Neighborhood



1973 Lower West Side



1985 Lower West Side



1992 Lower West Side

The teacher uses the Lower West Side (Triptychs and Quartets) photographs to discuss and write about how a neighborhood functions, changes over time in family relationships, or growing up in their own neighborhood. The teacher provides literature about coming of age and urban neighborhoods and students select the books they read.

The reading and writing circle or workshop methods are widely used at all grade levels in many American schools. As a teacher's experience with these practices deepens, the reading and writing circles contribute to building a learning community of respect and trust in a classroom. For rich discussion and examples of teaching with these methods see books listed in Teaching Resources by Christensen; Daniels and Bizar; Rogovin; and Zemelman, Bearden, Simmons and Leki.

This guide includes a list of teachers' highly recommended young adult literature around the themes of coming of age and living in a neighborhood. We know the list is only a beginning and that teachers will easily add their favorites.

## • Objectives

- Students develop as confident writers with a personal voice that comes from writing about their experience, beliefs and feelings about coming of age and living in their neighborhood.
- Students read widely and work collaboratively in both the reading and writing process.
- Students share their writing publicly, as in school magazines, local paper, or with younger students.

## • Activities

- Read in literature circles
  - Small groups of 4-6 read the same fiction or non-fiction book about coming of age in a neighborhood.
  - Students take literature circle roles they have developed for reading a book together (e.g., discussion director, illustrator, literary luminary, researcher). They read outside of class and use class time for discussion of the book's story, ideas and writing style.
  - Students choose a method for re-presenting their book to the class, such as a critics' panel, dramatic enactment of a scene with discussion, or interviews with characters.
- Students write about growing up in their neighborhoods in several styles (e.g., journal, narrative or descriptive essays, dialogues, dilemma stories, poems) through the collaborative writing process. In the writing process, students work in small groups to:
  - Brainstorm
  - Write first drafts
  - Share drafts for feedback
  - Revise for second drafts
  - Share with teacher
  - Revise for final draft
  - Share final draft with the class. Publish.
- In sharing their writing, students can explore feelings about identity (who they are), tensions between themselves and their families, and attitudes toward other cultural groups. They will need to practice attitudes of respect toward others in order to feel safe as they talk. Teachers can use these discussions as part of the yearlong effort to create community in the classroom.

## • Outcomes

- Students will add many writing pieces to their writing portfolio. They will be able to see development of their point of view, their use of words, their arguments and ideas, of the length and details of their writing.
- Students will be more confident of their own voice and enjoy sharing their writing with each other.
- Students may understand and appreciate their cultural differences, letting go of some fear and stereotypes and feeling more open to people from different backgrounds.

## • Extensions

- Trips outside of school to explore neighborhoods safely enrich the discussion of coming of age in neighborhoods. Students will want to help plan those trips, and family or community members will be essential to supporting the trips. Again, this is easily a yearlong project.

## Course 4: Photography Class

The teacher uses the Milton Rogovin Lower West Side (Triptychs and Quartets) portfolio for a project on taking family photographs. The photographs are called “triptychs and quartets,” as there are three or four photographs of the same individuals or families in one neighborhood taken over a twenty or thirty-year period. They show changes in individuals and their relationships over time.

Through the Center for Documentary Studies (CDS) at Duke University, Wendy Ewald has done extensive work with teachers on using photography to teach writing to children. The CDS web site and Wendy’s book, coauthored with Alexandra Lightfoot, *I Wanna Take Me a Picture, Teaching Photography and Writing to Children*, offer valuable resources for working with younger children and can be easily adapted to other age groups. This book incorporated a set of Rogovin’s work and home photographs from his *Working People* series.



1974 Lower West Side



1985 Lower West Side



1992 Lower West Side



2001 Lower West Side

### • Objectives

- Students compare and analyze family photographs for their expressiveness and meaning.
- Students learn about the elements of photography and analyze how these elements contribute to the expressiveness of the photographs.
- Students take meaningful photographs of their family and neighbors.

### • Activities

- Students brainstorm about good choices of subjects for portraits and elements of a good portrait.
- Students explore the people and the objects in the Rogovin photographs, with imaginative dialogues, assuming their points of view, as the characters change over the decades.

- o Students learn about the basic elements that the photographer works with – light, composition, focus (near or far, sharp or soft), the background, and use of black and white or color. In viewing a photo, students discuss how the photographer used these elements to create the meaning and expressiveness of a photo.
- o How does the photographer use available light? Does the photographer add light from an additional source, e.g., a flash? How does light affect the meaning of the photograph? The expressiveness?
- o How does the composition complement or affect the meaning of the photograph? The expressiveness?
  - Is selective focus used? If so, to what end?
  - How does the photographer use the people’s environment to express their lives? How does the environment/background give information about the people in the photographs?
  - Why do you think the photographer worked in black and white? How would the photographs be different in color?
- o Students discuss how a photographer relates to the people in his/her pictures. As passerby, observer, an acquaintance, friend or peer? With what kind of attitude? What kind of relationship do they have? What is the photographer looking for? What enables a photographer to capture the essence of a person? How does a photographer capture the person in a natural moment?
- o Students may compare their experience in taking pictures of people with different kinds of cameras (digital, disposable or cell phone cameras, SLR single lens reflex). Students may share their photos in discussion of these questions. How does the choice of camera affect the quality of a photograph?
- o Did you get a “Kodak smile”? Is that what you wanted? A pose? Is that from the casualness with which these cameras are used? Or from the limitations of the camera? Or do you get an expressive photograph that tells you quite a bit about a person? How does the photographer get beyond a subject’s tendency to pose for the camera? Students study individual photographs and talk about their own photography to develop answers to these questions.
- o Students complete assignments with family photographs. Students share the photos and discuss their work.
- o Students write about their photographs in journals, essays, poems or other descriptive, analytic and expressive modes. They can write about the artistic choices they made and the significance of the photographs. Students talk about what they learned about taking family portraits, how the photography affected their relationships, or changes in how they perceive themselves as photographers, as well as other topics generated in the class.

- **Outcomes**

- Plan a photo exhibit at school or in a neighborhood space. Have an opening night for students, families, neighbors, friends and teachers. Each student talks with viewers and answers questions about their photographs and the artistic choices they made.
- Students will share copies of the photographs they took with their subjects and discuss their reactions.
- A student might like photography enough that they might volunteer to photograph for their school newsletter or community newspaper. He/she might continue photographing after the class has concluded and what might have started as a class could become a hobby or future profession.