

Picture It: JFK in High School

Topic: Biography of John F. Kennedy

Grade Level: 3- 6

Subject Area: Social Studies

Time required: 1 class period

Goals/Rationale

- Practice skills biographers use such as analyzing and interpreting photographs and writing captions
- Use primary source material to gather biographical information
- Encourage a questioning approach to learning about history
- Demonstrate how captions can be used to convey important and interesting information

Essential Question

How do historians gather information about a person to write a biography?

Objective

Students will be able to:

- make observations and inferences, and pose questions about a photograph
- write a creative, informative caption to interpret the photograph

Connections to Curriculum Standards

National Council for History Education
History's Habits of the Mind 3, 8 and 10

National History Standards:

Chronological Thinking

Historical Comprehension

Historical Analysis and Interpretation

Historical Research Capabilities

Prior Knowledge and Skills

The students should be familiar with the terms observation and inference. They should have some background knowledge about John F. Kennedy.

Historical Background and Context

This photograph was taken around 1934 during Jack's high school years at the Choate School in Connecticut. He was about 17 years old at the time. With snow in the background, the photograph was probably taken on school grounds in the winter or early spring. In a relaxed pose, Jack and his three friends, Ralph "Rip" Horton, Lem Billings, and Butch Schriber (left to

right), appear at ease with one another, as young friends might be for the camera. Jack and his companions are dressed in the fashion of the time for boys attending an elite boarding school. Notice how all the young men are wearing shirts and ties, and sporting hairstyles of the era. Jack's face seems somewhat pale and thin, perhaps from a recent illness; his poor health plagued him throughout his life. Notice, too, how he holds a golf club in his hand. He was a member of the golf team and also played football and basketball at Choate.

Additional Information

Joseph Kennedy sent both Jack and his older brother, Joe, Jr., to Choate, a private boarding school, during the Great Depression. These four friends, with several others, formed a club called the Muckers, a name they adopted after the headmaster used this term to rebuke boys he considered "troublemakers" in the school. In his senior year, Jack was nearly expelled from Choate for his antics as a Mucker, but after disbanding the group, he was allowed to stay. He graduated in the middle of his class and was named "most likely to succeed" by his classmates.

Materials

- Copies of the photograph of John F. Kennedy with fellow members of the Muckers Club at the Choate School. Left to right: Ralph Horton, Lem Billings, Butch Schriber, and John f. Kennedy. (c. 1934)
- Chart paper

Procedure

In this lesson students examine a photograph and make observations and inferences about what they see. They pose questions and consider the historical context of the photograph. After comparing their inferences to information provided by the teacher and secondary source material, they write a creative and informative caption for the photograph.

1. Record students' observations on chart paper. Have students observe the photograph closely for at least two minutes. You may want to have magnifying glasses available to examine the photograph. Show them a photograph folded into quadrants. Ask them to look at each quadrant of their own photograph. Discuss the following questions: What do you notice in each part of the photograph? Can you find John F. Kennedy? What is he wearing? What other people do you see? What objects do you notice? What place do you see?
2. Record students' inferences on chart paper. How old do you think John F Kennedy is in the photograph? Who might the other people be? What might their relationship be and what makes you think that? What do you think happened right before it was taken? What do you think happened right afterwards? What might it tell you about John F. Kennedy?
3. Record students' questions on chart paper. What does this photograph make you wonder about? (You can model a question here – i.e, "I wonder who these other people are in the photograph?") What questions do you have about the photograph and the people in it? How might you find the answers to these questions? You may choose to have students use the

additional resources below to gather more information about JFK's experience in high school.

4. Discuss the background information with students after analyzing the photograph. What further questions arise from this information? Refer to the chart paper with students' observations, inferences, and questions. As a class, make edits and additions based on information they have acquired through discussions and research.

Assessment

Ask students to write a caption that provides information they think readers should know about the photograph. The caption should go beyond a description to shed new light on the image. Their writing should reflect their observations, inferences, and questions about the photograph.

Extensions

1. Students may research biographies of John F. Kennedy to see if they can locate the photograph and find out more about it. See JFK's biography on our website www.jfklibrary.org and the resources below for more information about his experience at Choate.
2. Students may select images from the media gallery. They may write creative captions after researching the photograph. As a class project, use a series of the photographs with captions to make a photo-biography of John F. Kennedy.
3. Have students create a rubric for analyzing captions. What makes an excellent caption? Use the rubric as you read nonfiction books to analyze the quality of the captions.

Additional Resources

Books

Cooper, Ilene. *Jack. The Early Years of John F. Kennedy*
New York: Dutton Children's Books, 2003.

168 pages; illustrated. Includes source notes, bibliographical references, and index.

Note: A description of the childhood and youth of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the thirty-fifth president of the United States.

Grades 6 – 8, and young adult. A thorough look at Kennedy's boyhood and early political career, illustrated with black and white photographs and primary documents such as hand written letters and report cards.

Heiligman, Deborah. *High Hopes. A Photobiography of John F. Kennedy*

Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2003. 64 pages; illustrated. Includes bibliographical references and index.

Note: Photographs and text trace the life of John F. Kennedy.

Grades 4 – 6. This handsomely designed biography, generously illustrated with photographs and primary documents, reveals the impressive accomplishments of Kennedy's abbreviated presidency.

Rappaport, Doreen. Illustrated by Matt Tavares. *Jack's Path of Courage*
New York: Hyperion Books, 2010.

48 pages. Includes bibliographical references, timeline, author's note and illustrator's note.

Grades 2 – 5. One of an impressive series of bibliographies that include direct quotes in the text. Bold, full-page illustrations and informative but limited text make JFK's life story accessible to younger readers.

Sommer, Shelley. *John F. Kennedy: His Life and Legacy*

New York: HarperCollins, 2005.

152 pages: illustrated. Includes bibliographical references and index.

Note: A look at the many roles of John of Kennedy, how he shaped 20th-century history and continues to influence American life today.

Grades 5- 8. Written by a former staff member of the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum, this biography provides interesting anecdotes, photographs from the Kennedy Library, and an introduction by Caroline Kennedy.

Zarnowski, Myra. *History Makers: A Questioning Approach to Reading and Writing Biographies*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003.

124 pp. Includes bibliographical references.

Note: A text for teachers which outlines an approach to biography.

This readable, useful text, describes a thoughtful approach to biography based on the author's classroom experience with elementary students. With clear explanations including classroom materials and samples of children's work, this book provides a practical, innovative guide to studying biography with elementary students. Zarnowski includes annotated bibliographies of recommended biographies to use with students. See Chapter 5 for more information about captions (and sidebars, timelines, and authors' notes.)

Magazines

Cobblestones. JFK Issue. May 2007.

Articles on JFK's early years, the PT 109, the election of 1960, the New Frontier, foreign affairs, and the assassination. Includes timelines, games, and other activities.

Websites

<http://www.jfklibrary.org/>

The John F. Kennedy Library website includes photographs, biographies, speeches, and lesson plans.

<http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/Life-of-John-F-Kennedy>

A biography of John F. Kennedy.

<http://www.nps.gov/history/NR/TWHP/wwwlps/lessons/33jfk/33jfk.htm>

A biographical inquiry-based unit developed by the National Park Service. Focuses on JFK's birthplace at 83 Beals St in Brookline, MA, now a national historic site. Questions guide students in the examination of photographs and texts.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/kennedys/filmmore/index.html>

This site, based on the American Experience from PBS, includes a timeline, photographs, and a family tree.

<http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/Media-Gallery>.

Photographs from the Kennedy Presidential Library archives.

http://archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/photo_analysis_worksheet.pdf

Additional materials on analyzing photographs and other primary source material.



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