The Big Picture
A HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN GREATER CINCINNATI

EPISODE ONE

"Capturing Life"
(1839 TO 1869)

Lesson 8: Photography and the Spread of Ideas

Background

Over the course of the 19th century, information spread more quickly and cheaply due to technological advancements such as lithography and the penny press. People collected portraits of loved ones, but also of celebrities who reflected their interests and ideals. Images of landscapes were used to tell important news stories and attract immigrants. Photography was part of this spread of ideas using images of famous people, civil rights figures, sensational news, and local attractions, for example.

Prompt

How were images used to promote ideas in the 1800s? How were images circulated? How was photography used to both dispel and foster stereotypes? Do we still use photography to shape identities and spread ideas?

Reference Images

Image 1
Jenny Lind, the "Swedish Nightingale," 1851, daguerreotype, Thomas Faris, Cincinnati Art Museum.

Image 2
Harriet Beecher Stowe, 1852, daguerreotype, Unidentified Artist, National Portrait Gallery.

Image 3
Frederick Douglass, c. 1852 (after c. 1847 daguerreotype), daguerreotype, Unidentified Artist, National Portrait Gallery.

Academic Fields

Fine Arts

- Connect various art forms to their social, cultural, or historical purposes.
- Analyze how art is used to inform or influence the beliefs, values, or behaviors of a community.
- Interpret how community context, beliefs, and resources influence works of art.
- Discover how cultural differences impact personal perceptions.
- Understand how works of art reflect diverse communities, viewpoints, and perspectives.
- Recognize contributions of the visual arts in everyday life.
- Examine personal and social contexts related to works of art.

Technology

- Critique specific instances of how technology has impacted access to information, communications and collaboration.
- Explain the positive and negative impact the use of technology can have on personal, professional and community relationships.

- Discuss and define how issues (e.g., economic, political, scientific and cultural) are influenced by the development and use of technology.
- Debate how demand for technology and innovation have reshaped the social, cultural, political and/or economic landscape, citing references and examples.
- Discuss how technological innovation has resulted when ideas, knowledge or skills have been shared across multiple fields.

Social Studies:

- Cultural biases, stereotypes and prejudices had social, political and economic consequences for minority groups and the population as a whole.

Documentary Reference Clips
Clip 1: The Rise of Daguerrean Studios, 8:05 - 9:47.
Clip 1: James Presley Ball, 22:32 - 30:35.

Discussion Questions
- How did the types of people who had access to taking photos and collecting photos change the way information was spread in the US in the mid-1800s?
- Do new groups accessing information relate to other social and cultural changes occurring in the US? (For example, the Seneca Falls convention or debates around slavery / the role of African Americans after the Civil War?)

Activities
- Look at several different photos from the period. What do you think was the inspiration for the photo? What was the purpose? To spread ideas, remind of family, establish a legacy, or something else?
- Who is Frederick Douglass? Why does it matter that his photo was circulated widely? Who was looking at these images? How does the way he looks (clothing or pose) give his ideas more credibility?
- Find another photo of an influential leader. How is the figure presented differently in order to align with or promote their ideas?
- Can you connect the importance of the way Frederick Douglass appears to changes in America at the time