

Close Study: Close Viewing Esther Bubley

Artist: [Esther Bubley](#) (Phillips, Wisconsin, 1921—New York City, 1988)

Work: [Untitled \(Washington, D.C.\)](#), 1943; Gelatin silver print, 9 x 8 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Jill and Jeffrey Stern; © Jean Bubley; Photo by Lee Stalsworth

Target grade range: 6-8

DPCS Curricular Unit: Everyday DC

DPCS Curricular Arc: Interaction/Other

DPCS Curricular Theme: Community and Viewpoint

Note: Annotation is a key feature of Close Study, ensuring that students are engaged in the process of evidence gathering. Annotation can take a range of forms across grade levels and disciplines. Annotation can provide assessment information as to each student's depth of comprehension. Additionally, it can be a useful tool for launching critical discussions. Encourage students to annotate this work physically or virtually.

Round 1

Type of Question: General Understanding/Responses

Sample Question: **What are your eyes drawn to first in this photograph? Why might that be? What do you notice next?**

Guidance: The goal of this conversation is to generate a range of student responses to the work. There is no wrong answer, but rather the idea is to open the conversation and create an environment in which students see the value of both their own opinion and the possible range of opinions.

Round 2

Type of Question: Key Details

Sample Question: **Where and when do you think this photograph was taken? What clues support your thinking?**

Guidance: The conversation should focus on gathering evidence from the image; formal and technical evidence, as well as evidence based on the imagery. Student responses should include discussion of specific visual aspects of the work. You may ask guiding questions such as, **“How would you describe this scene to someone who can’t see it?”** OR **“What do you notice about the people in this photograph?”** pushing students to focus on the visual aspects of the work and how they might begin to support the responses discussed in Round 1.

Round 3

Type of Question: Structure

Sample Question: **Esther Bubley chose a shallow depth of field when taking this picture, meaning that the figures and objects in the foreground are in focus, while the background is blurry. Why might have she chosen this compositional technique?**

Guidance: This discussion should focus more specifically on how the structure of the work is supporting the students' interpretations of the work. This conversation might be around compositional strategies, the use of evocative visual designs, or the inclusion of distinct features.

Round 4

Type of Question: Intent/Inferences

Sample Question: **Women artists played active roles recording the impact of World War II at home and aboard. Esther Bubley worked for the Office of War Information (OWI) when she took this photograph. OWI, a United States government agency that operated between 1942 and 1945, created and disseminated media (like photographs, radio broadcasts, and films) to connect the soldiers on the World War II battlefield to civilian communities. What message(s) do you think the artist was trying to convey through this photograph?**

Guidance: Unlike the intentional omission of information in other rounds, prior to asking students to respond to this question, the teacher should provide some context for the work. This context should come in the form of another visual work. The nature of the context should promote the goals of the overall lesson or unit. This work might be:

- Another work by the same artist
- A work that serves a similar purpose in a more familiar context
- Another work from the same school, movement, or genre

Possible Contextual Works:

- Louise Dahl-Wolfe, *Margaret Bourke-White*, ca. 1940; Gelatin silver print, 10 x 10 1/2 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Helen Cumming Ziegler; Photograph by Louise Dahl-Wolfe © 1989 Center for Creative Photography, Arizona Board of Regents
- Louise Dahl-Wolfe, *Five Star Mother, Nashville*, ca. 1943; Gelatin silver print, 14 x 11 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Helen Cumming Ziegler; Photo by Lee Stalsworth
- Edna Reindel, *A Woman at Lockheed Fastening the Plastic Canopy of the P-38 (from the series, "Women at War")*, 1943; Oil on canvas, 37 1/2 x 26 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of the artist; © Edna Reindel; Photo by Lee Stalsworth

Round 5

Type of Question: Opinion/Application

Sample question: **If you were to capture a photograph to communicate a message about Washington, D.C., during an impactful moment in history and this photograph would be seen by people around the world, a) what moment would you choose, b) what message would you like to share, and c) what artistic choices would you make to communicate that message visually?**

Guidance: This round is asking students to internalize the knowledge and information built in the previous rounds by using the concepts generated to visualize a work that applies to a personal goal of communication. The direction of this question is directly related to the broader thematic goal of the lesson or unit.



Esther Bubley, *Untitled (Washington, D.C.)*, 1943; Gelatin silver print, 9 x 8 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Jill and Jeffrey Stern; © Jean Bubley; Photo by Lee Stalsworth



Louise Dahl-Wolfe, *Margaret Bourke-White*, ca. 1940; Gelatin silver print, 10 x 10 1/2 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Helen Cumming Ziegler; Photograph by Louise Dahl-Wolfe © 1989 Center for Creative Photography, Arizona Board of Regents



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