

Japanese Book Binding: Studying Images and Text

A lesson based on the works of art in

A Letter from Japan: The Photographs of John Swope

At the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University

www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu

September 19 – November 30, 2008

Age Level: High School

Estimated Time: 240 minutes – Lesson can be broken up into 4 or 5 sections.

Specific Topic: Creating a book with images and captions using a Japanese book binding method.

The exhibition “A Letter from Japan: The Photographs of John Swope” presents Swope’s photographic documentation of post war prisoner releases in Japan. In 1945 John Swope was commissioned by the U.S Navy to travel to Japan for three weeks to document the release of Allied prisoners of war. While documenting these releases, Swope also photographed Japanese civilians and the country’s war-ravaged landscapes. Swope’s striking images, coupled with a letter he composed to his wife during the trip, create a highly complex portrait of a nation and its people as they move into peaceful times.

This lesson explores Swope’s longtime interest combining photographic images with text. Prior to his work in Japan, Swope produced two photographic books coupling his imagery with written word. Both of these books conveyed a story about people and place. His second book, *Bombs Away: The Story of a Bomber Team*, was artistic collaboration with writer John Steinbeck. Much of Swope’s photography created a visual narrative of his subjects and their experience. Often, Swope would capture people at silent or “in between” moments when no one was watching. These moments created powerful images and they could often convey meaningful emotions. As with his books, Swope added a written component to his work in Japan. During his 3 week trip, Swope wrote a letter to his wife detailing his daily experiences travelling, meeting people, and documenting events. His writing expanded the narrative of his photographs.

In this lesson students explore creating a visual narrative of a major 20th century event of their choice. After conducting research on the topic or event, students will use the images and written materials collected to create their own image/text journal narrating the event in photographic form. Each image will be accompanied by short text, either originally written work by the student or appropriate quotations from their research

This project can be applied in a writing, history, or art class. There is a writing activity included in the lesson to help students become familiar with the notion of writing about images; writing is also included within the book construction project. This lesson can be used as a project in conjunction with any type of history lesson examining a particular event. Additionally, this lesson also examines topics such as writing, artistic process, multimedia artmaking, composition, and storytelling.

Goals of this Lesson:

1. To examine the role of photography in World War II and other major 20th century historical/political events.
2. To understand how text affects the power of an image.
3. To convey a message about society through the effective use of images and text.

Illinois Learning Standards Fulfilled:

Fine Arts

- State Goal 25.A.5: Analyze and evaluate student and professional works for how aesthetic qualities are used to convey intent, expressive ideas and/or meaning.
- State Goal 26.A: Understand processes, traditional tools and modern technologies used in the arts.
- State Goal 27.A.4b: Analyze how the arts are used to inform and persuade through traditional and contemporary art forms.

Suggestions for Student Assessment:

Evaluate student work using the following criteria. It is advisable to share the criteria with your class before asking students to begin the assignment. Does the student's work:

1. Convey a message about society through the effective use of images and text?
2. Show an understanding of how images combined with text can create a dynamic visual narrative?
3. Utilize the appropriate methods of book construction and Japanese book binding?

Teaching Resources Necessary to Support this Lesson:

- Artworks displaying the use of images coupled with text from *The Photographs of John Swope* exhibition or works of art by other artists with a similar style of combining photos and text.
- A list of major historical/political/social/local events for students to sample from if they cannot think of their own.

Supply List:

- Magazines
- Newspapers
- 1 sheet of 18"x24" drawing paper
- 2 pieces of 6"x9" decorative paper
- 1 piece of plain white 6"x9" paper (for binding template)
- Bone folder (or smooth hard edge to reinforce folds in paper without marking it)
- Fetting knife (or dull metal butter knife)
- 2 clothes pins or binder clips
- Glue
- Pencil
- Ruler
- Awl (or needle tool)
- Dull sewing needle (about 2 inches long)
- Sturdy thread
- Wax

Note: Traditional bookmaking methods allow students to cut their own pages from large sheets of paper. If this method is not feasible, you may have the students cut 4 or 5 sheets of regular 8.5”x11” paper in half to create 8-10 sheets of paper that are 5.5”x8.5”.

Also, if you do not have the materials to sew the bookbinding, you may replace all the sewing materials with a rubber band, normal hole puncher, and a twig or popsicle stick. This alternative binding method is described in section XIII towards the end of this lesson.

Lesson Plan:

- I. If you are working with students who have little art background, it would be helpful to discuss/create an art term dictionary with terms that apply to this lesson. An example can be found at the end of this lesson in the Lesson Glossary section. **[10 minutes]**

- II. Share and explain works from *The Photographs of John Swope* exhibition and perhaps of other artists who created “photo-texts” such as Lewis Hine (*Men at Work: Photographic Studies of Modern Men and Machines*), Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell (*You Have Seen Their Faces*), and Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor (*An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion*). Contemporary artists who combine text with photography are Wendy Ewald (*Towards a Promised Land*), Jim Goldberg (*Rich and Poor* series), and Lorna Simpson. **[15 minutes]**

- III. Discuss the artworks individually by asking the following **[15 minutes]**:
 - What can you tell about the person/place/object in this photo just by looking at it?
 - Follow-up: What clues are in the photograph that helped you reach your conclusion?
 - How does the artist use elements of photography to express specific emotions in this image? (Elements of photography: Lighting, contrast, composition, cropping, zooming in/out, size of print, positive/negative space. These terms are defined in the Lesson Glossary at the end of the lesson.)
 - How would you describe the style of writing used in this photograph?
 - Follow-up: Is it factual, emotional, poetic, or personal?
 - Does the appearance of the type or font tell you something about the image?
 - What happens to meaning/purpose of the photograph when the text is removed?
 - Can the artist use text only instead of a photograph to make his/her point (vice versa)?
 - Do you think the artist wrote the text or did someone else write it?
 - What effect does the coupling of text with the image create in this work of art?
 - Follow-up: Does it enhance the message of the photograph? Does it help you understand the photograph? Does it give technical information about the photograph? Does it tell you something about the artist of the photograph? Does it tell you something about the writer of the text?
 - How does this work of art create a narrative or story with the images?

- Follow up: How does this work of art create a narrative or story with the text?
- Does this narrative change when the text and image are combined?

IV. Writing Activity: Using the images you chose to discuss in Section III or other images, you can have the students practice responding to photography through writing. Show the students 1-3 images and ask them to write about it in a style that they feel suits that image while considering some of the analyzing skills learned during the discussion in Section III of this lesson. You may also give the students the following prompt(s) to help them think and write creatively:

- Put yourself in this photograph. Where are you in this photograph? Who are you? What are you thinking and feeling?
- Imagine you are someone in this photograph. Write what you would say to the viewer of this photograph.
- If you were going to include this photograph in an art exhibit, what would you include on the label that would be placed under/beside this image?
- If you took this photograph, write what its title would be and explain why you chose this title.

V. Other Discussion Methods: In order to demonstrate the effect of writing or photography on its own, you may also ask students questions about each photograph while covering text and then ask questions with the text revealed or by covering and revealing the photo. You may also lead a discussion based on Swope's artwork and its significance during the WWII time period so that you can tie this lesson in with a history lesson. Also, in order to tie this lesson into a writing lesson, you can put an emphasis on text in your discussion and focus on the writing activity above in section IV.

VI. Allow students time to research via the internet, periodicals or at the library about a major historical/political/social/local event that either:

- has impacted the student or
- the student wants to inform others about

Students should also search for about 10 images to cut out of magazines/newspapers, to print out from the internet or photocopy from books and cut out in order to place in their books. (Once the students have gathered a sufficient amount of research, they may begin constructing their books.) **[60-120 minutes]**

VII. Questions for students to consider prior to constructing books:

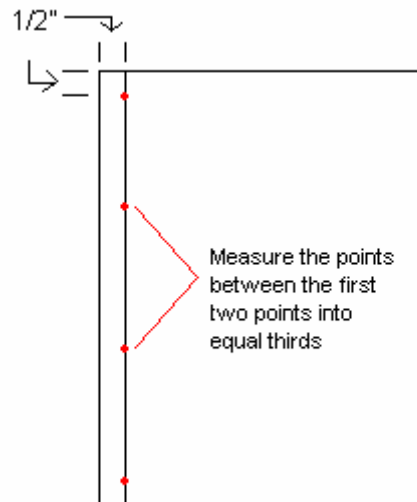
- Do you want your book to be vertical or horizontal?
- What will the title of your book be?
- What do your images say about your book?
- Do your images have a theme in common outside of the event you are depicting?
- How will you create a visual narrative with your images?
- What order will you place your images in?
- Are there any images you do not want to include?
- What style of writing would you like to use with your images?

- How much text would you like to use with each image?
- How large or small do you want your text to be?
- What do your images say that your text does not?
- What does your text say that your images cannot?
- What do you want the reader of your book to get out of it?
- **Note:** Perhaps these questions along with your guidelines for assessment can be give to the students in the form of a handout prior to starting the construction of the book.

VIII. Cutting pages: Fold the 18"x24" paper perfectly in half and go over the entire crease with a bone folder. Turn the folded paper in front of you so that the crease is facing you. Use the fettling knife to cut along the crease. Keep folding, scoring, and cutting the sheets of paper until you are left with 8 sheets that are 6"x9". [15 minutes]

IX. Cover Pages: Pour glue into a bowl and apply it using a brush to a sheet of 6"x9" paper you just cut. Make sure the glue is applied in a thin even layer all over the page. Then, place the 6"x9" decorative paper on top of the page with glue on it. Repeat this process once again to create another cover page. **Note:** You can use card stock or thicker paper to use for the 2 cover pages if you choose. [5 minutes]

X. Measuring Binding Template: Place the 6"x9" white template paper horizontally in front of you. The book will be bound on the left edge. Using a ruler, draw a line from top to bottom of the front cover, about 1/2" from the left edge. Make two dots on this line: one 1/2" down from the top of the book, the other 1/2" up from the bottom. Now divide the distance between these 2 dots into thirds and mark the two middle points with dots. (Refer to diagram to the right.) [5 minutes]



XI. Before Punching Holes: Before punching the holes, arrange the paper into the following order:

- 6 of the 6"x9" pages should be sandwiched between the 2 sheets of 6"x9" decorative cover paper.
- Then, the template page should be on top of the entire stack.

Once you have arranged all the paper into a neat stack, use the clothespins to clamp the stack of paper on top and bottom so that the sheets do not move when you punch the holes. **Tip:** You may want to protect the work surface with a stack of newspaper prior to punching the holes. [2 minutes]

XII. Creating Holes: Use the awl to poke holes through the 4 dots you marked on the template. Make sure the awl goes completely through each sheet of paper. Once all the holes are punched, remove the template page carefully so it does not get sewn as part of

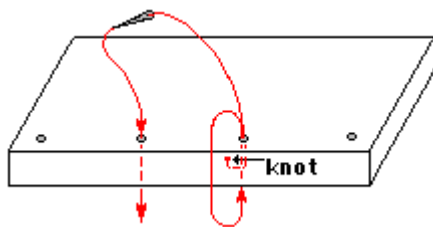
the book. Place the clothespins back to keep the book together while you sew the binding. [5 minutes]

XIII. Measuring and Preparing the Thread: The thread must be 8 times the height of the book. Use a knife to cut a small slit in the wax. Prior to putting the thread through the needle, run the thread through the small slit in the wax. (This step helps hold the thread together and keep it from fraying.) Then, you can secure the thread through the needle and tie it to make sure it does not slip out of the needle. Also tie the end of the thread in a knot as well. [2 minutes]

XIV. Sewing and Binding: [Total Process: 15 minutes] Look at the very first diagram above and start at the hole indicated by “Start Here” on the picture.



1. Open the book a few pages and, next to the lower middle hole, push the needle through about twenty pages. Pull the thread through until the knot is snug against the pages. Go back out to the front cover by pushing the needle up through the awl hole. This step anchors the thread.

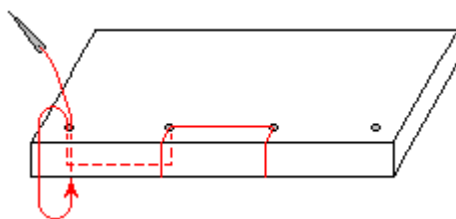
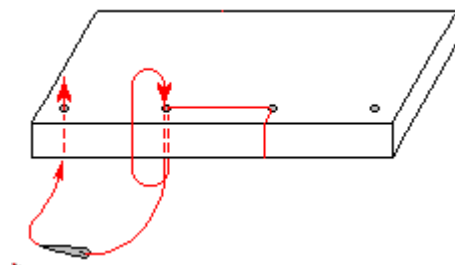


2. Now sew through the back of the same hole by going around the spine of the book.

3. Then, sew through the hole to the left. **Tip:** Make sure to pull the thread tight with *each* sewing step while holding the loose end of the thread with the other hand so that the thread does not go through.

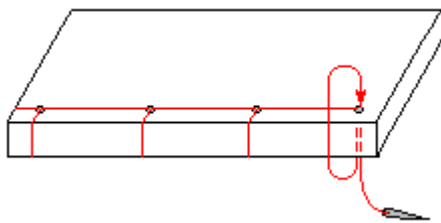
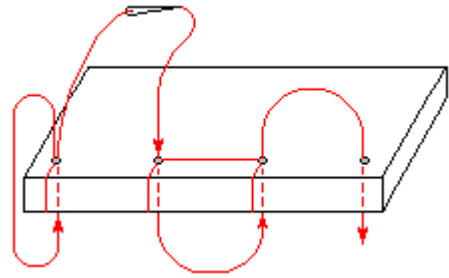
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4. Again, go around the spine and sew through that same hole.

5. From the back of the book, proceed to the hole on the very left (top of the book.)



6. Again, go around the spine and sew through the very same hole.

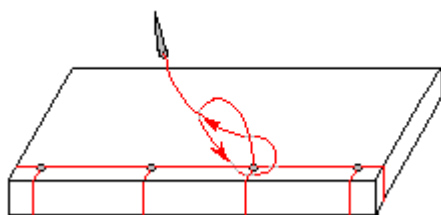
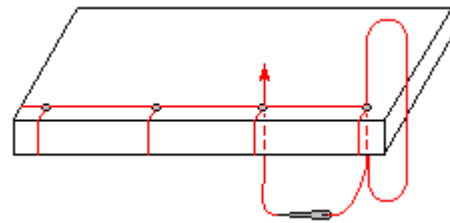
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7. Sew around the top of the spine and go back up through the top hole again. Keep sewing down through one middle hole, back up through the next, and down through the bottom hole.



8. Go around the spine and back through the same hole.

9. Sew around the bottom of the spine and back through the same hole.

10. Sew up through the starting hole again.



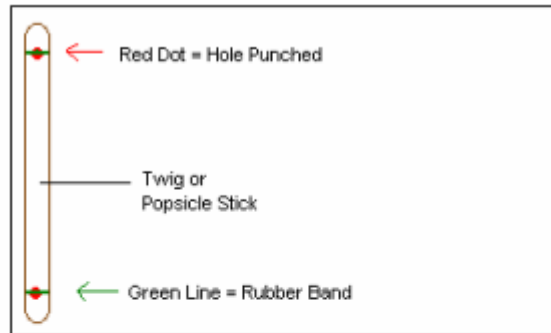
11. Now that the sewing process is complete, you must secure the thread with a knot by slipping the needle under two of the top threads coming out of starting hole and back through the loop to form a tight knot.

12. Sew through the starting hole once again and cut the leftover thread flush with the back of the book.
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XV. Alternative Bookbinding Method:
The book can also be bound using a twig/popsicle stick on the shorter side of the paper. The stick should be about 5" – 6" long. (Follow the diagram to the right.) [2 minutes]

- Arrange the papers into a neat stack by sandwiching the pages of the book between the front and back covers of the book.
- Place clips on the top and bottom of the book to keep the pages from moving.
- On the shorter side of the paper, use a single hole puncher to punch 1 hole that is ½" away from the top and side edges.
 - If your stick is shorter, punch holes further down from the top and bottom edges of the book, but keep the distance from the side of the binding ½" away from the edge.

FRONT OF THE BOOK



BACK OF THE BOOK



- Punch another hole that is ½" away from the bottom and side edges.
- Place a rubber band around the top of the stick and pull the remaining end of the rubber band through the top hole of the book.
- Turn the book around so that the back cover is facing you.
- Pull the rubber band down to the bottom hole, push it through the bottom hole of the book, and then pull the rubber band around the bottom part of the stick to complete the binding.

XVI. Now that the book is constructed, students may glue the images they have collected about their research topic into their books and write about these images. Make sure the students plan their layouts in order to leave room for comments for each image in the book. For example: One page can be used for an image and the page next to it can be used for a description or thoughts about that same image.¹ [60 minutes]

Resources

¹ The images used to illustrate sewing directions were obtained from a book binding lesson plan by R.M. Miller.

Lewis Hine:

<http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/childlabor/>

This site shows original photos and captions of some of Hine's work with child labor. Hine's photographs expose the issue of child labor in the United States.

<http://www.leegallery.com/hine.html>

This website shows artwork with captions from the *Men at Work* collection.

Margaret Bourke-White & Erskine Caldwell

http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CLASS/am485_98/coe/whitefolk.html

This site gives information about the work *You Have Seen Their Faces*, the artist and writer, and shows photographs with captions. This body of work shows people during the time of the Depression in the Deep South.

Wendy Ewald:

<http://www.steidlville.com/books/437-Towards-a-Promised-Land.html>

This website gives you information about her photography/text combination done with refugee children from various countries to the town of Margate. It also shows previews of some photography included in the book.

Jim Goldberg:

http://www.magnumphotos.com/Archive/c.aspx?VP=XSpecific_MAG.BookDetail_VPage&pid=2K7O3R151ZH9

This website shows you information about his series of photographs with text in the book Rich and Poor which includes a few preview pictures from the book, as well.

Aesthetics and Criticism:

Book – Why is That Art? Aesthetics and Criticism of Contemporary Art by Terry Barrett. This book can help you with discussing works of art with students.

Japanese Bookbinding:

Book – Japanese Bookbinding: Instructions from a Master Craftsman by Kojiro Ikegami.

This book gives a little history about Japanese bookbinding and the tools and methods involved in the bookmaking process. The author also includes various methods of Japanese binding techniques and other alternatives to the traditional tools for this type of binding and bookmaking.

History - http://homepages.nildram.co.uk/~dawe5/bookbinding_pages/BB_history2.html

Lesson Glossary*

This glossary contains vocabulary about photography and art in general. These terms may be used when discussing images and works from photographers.

Aperture: A small, circular opening inside the lens that can change in diameter to control the amount of light reaching the camera's sensor as a picture is taken. The aperture diameter is expressed in f-stops; the lower the number, the larger the aperture. For instance, the aperture opening when set to f/2.8 is larger than at f/8. The aperture and shutter speed together control the total amount of light reaching the sensor. A larger aperture passes more light through to the sensor. Many cameras have an aperture priority mode that allows you to adjust the aperture to your own liking. See also *shutter speed*.

Composition: The plan, placement or arrangement of the elements of art in a work.

Contrast: The difference between light and dark values. An image that is only pure black and white with no shades of gray is said to have high contrast. Images with many shades of gray and no black or white are low contrast.

Cropping: To cut off or mask the unwanted parts of a print or negative.

Focal Point: The central or principal point of focus in a work of art.

Negative: A negative image, as on a film, used chiefly for making positives

Photography: The art, craft, and science of producing permanent images of objects on light-sensitive surfaces.

Positive: a positive image, as on a print or transparency.

Shutter Speed: The camera's shutter speed is a measurement of how long its shutter remains open as the picture is taken. The slower the shutter speed, the longer the exposure time. When the shutter speed is set to 1/125 or simply 125, this means that the shutter will be open for exactly 1/125th of one second. The shutter speed and aperture together control the total amount of light reaching the sensor. Some digital cameras have a shutter priority mode that allows you to set the shutter speed to your liking. See also *aperture*.

Zoom: In photography, to zoom is to move an adjustable camera lens toward or away from a subject in order to see it close-up (*zooming-in*) or further away (*zooming-out*).

* Definitions of terms obtained from various online dictionaries.