



NATIONAL
WWI
MUSEUM
AT LIBERTY MEMORIAL

LETTERS HOME

Letters inspired by investigating World War I photos.

Authored by: Fran Knechel for the National World War I Museum and AncestryK12

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- What can we learn about World War I from photographs?
- How can research into a soldier's family history help us understand the wider impact of World War I?
- How can close examination of a photo help us understand a different time period?

SUMMARY: Students will use one photograph and closely analyze that photo to inspire research into available details from the provenance to any names associated with the photo to any places or objects that can be investigated. Students will generate questions about their photograph and then use AncestryK12, Fold 3, and other websites or books to search for answers to their photo-related questions. Ultimately, students will use their photo analysis and research to craft a letter home, imagining they were one of the subjects of the photo or the photographer and sending the photo in a letter and telling a relation (like a parent, spouse, sibling) about an experience they were having or witnessing during World War I.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT: US History Content Standards
Era 7 – The Emergence of Modern America (1890-1930)

- Standard 2A: The student understands how the American role in the world changed in the early 20th century.
- Standard 2B: The student understands the causes of World War I and why the United States intervened.
- Standard 2C: The student understands the impact at home and abroad of the United States involvement in World War I.

Historical Thinking Standards

- Standard 2: The student comprehends a variety of historical sources.
- Standard 3: The student engages in historical analysis and interpretation.
- Standard 4: The student conducts historical research.

TIME NEEDED: Two 50-minute class periods

OBJECTIVES: *Students will:*

- Analyze a photo taken during World War I to learn more about individual experiences during the war.
- Develop questions about the photo they are analyzing that will lead them to further research.
- Research answers to their questions based on details from their photo.
- Write a letter that develops a broader context for their photo and imagines how people related to either the photographed individual or the photographer were affected by the war.

INTERDISCIPLINARY: History, Language Arts

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Photos for students to analyze (see Appendix A).
- Photo analysis guide (see Appendix B).
- Access to computers with internet connection.
- Letter-writing materials.

LESSON

DIRECTIONS:

1. Determine if you would like students to work alone, in pairs, or in small groups of up to four students. Small groups are recommended for younger grades so they can share the research.
2. Explain the ultimate goal of writing a letter based on the photo they will analyze. This will help students begin to think about their letter's recipient and consider what the individual photographed or the photographer may have been experiencing that he/she could have shared to a relation.
3. Assign each student or group of students a photo to analyze or allow them to select their own, making sure that there is some variety in the photos selected.
4. Distribute the photo analysis guides to each student and have all students work independently to analyze their photo. If students are ultimately paired or grouped, have them work together once they have had about 15 minutes to analyze their photo.
5. Assist students with keywords and other useful research support when they look at AncestryK12, Fold3, Newspapers.com, and other relevant websites to find answers to the questions they created based on their photo. (The research stage should be allowed 30 minutes minimum.)
6. Ask students to write and share their letters either individually or with their partner(s). This process will take the second class period.

POST-ASSESSMENT:

Students can evaluate how photos and letters help us remember the sacrifices our ancestors made, giving truth to the common World War I remembrance phrase of *Lest We Forget*. This can be part of a broader discussion or a written response. Questions for consideration or discussion:

- What stories can photos tell?
- What remains unknown about the photo you analyzed?
- How does this photo help you understand broader effects of World War I – not just on the individual photographed or the photographer but on his/her family?
- How do photos help us relate to our predecessors?
- How do photos show us how society has changed since the time they were taken?

Appendix A:

Photos from the National World War I Museum Collection





Film still. On verso is typed: "Charles Ray / in / A Liberty Loan Film / Courtesy Famous Players-Lasky Corps. & Thomas H. Ince / Distributed by the National Association of the Motion Picture Industry."

Film title: "A Liberty Bond Plea"

A fund-raising short for the United States Fourth Liberty Loan Drive in World War I.

October 1918



Black and white photograph of Salvation Army 'doughnut girls' serving and cooking doughnuts. Women are wearing steel helmets and gas mask bags. On man in image, front left. Caption along bottom edge of image: "Salvation Army making Doughnuts under Bombardment of German Guns, Front Line - France."

Image is 1 of 20 images in a photo booklet entitled "World War Photographs "That Talk" From Battlefields of France by War Correspondents" that was printed by the Chicago Daily News.

From the service of Robert Merrman, Army Field Clerk, Langres, France, AEF.



Black and white photograph of a Red Cross parade in Houston, TX.

From the service of Rose Baker (?), American Red Cross Nurse - Army Nurses Corps.

December 16, 1918



Black and white photograph. Signal Corps #30877.

From the Catalogue of Official A.E.F. Photographs taken by the Signal Corps: "Belgian refugees returning to their homes with the few personal belongings which they were able to remove from their homes before the German occupation in 1914. On road between Desselghem and Waereghem, Belgium, November 2, 1918."

From the service of Mess Sergeant William M. Nevin, Battery A, 108th Field Artillery, 28th Division, AEF.

November 2, 1918



Black and white photograph of a female Salvation Army volunteer writing in a small notebook. Volunteer is wearing a wristwatch and is standing next to an injured prisoner.

From the service of Sgt. 1st Class Max Kennedy, Jr., Headquarters Detachment, 305th Engineers, 80th Division, AEF.





Black and white photograph of Dr. Arthur N. Altringer with a wheelbarrow loaded with wooden boxes with "Duke's Mixture" printed on exterior at Base Hospital Number 28.

Limoges, France.

Appendix B:

Photo Analysis Guide

Observe

Examine the photograph. Note everything you can about the photo. Is there a studio name? How many people are in the photo? What are the people doing? What objects are in the photo? Is this photo a portrait? What is in the background? What expressions are in the photo? Is there any text that gives you clues such as where the photo was taken?

Look closely and record all the people, objects, activities, and other noteworthy details from the photograph.

Hypothesize

Why do you think this photo was taken? Who was the intended audience? What was happening in the image? What was happening around the person at that place and time?

Based on your above previous observations, what do you hypothesize about this photo?

Question

What questions does this photo raise? What are you curious to explore further about who, what, where, when, why, and how?

Investigate

Research answers to your questions using AncestryK12, Fold3, Newspapers.com, and other relevant websites, books, or publications.

Create

Imagining you are a named individual pictured in the photograph, research that person to try to find the name of a relation (like a parent, sibling, or spouse) to whom this person may have written. Write a letter describing what you are experiencing, basing your letter on the details of the photograph and the related research you have done.