

Learn with MoMA



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Step 1

Look closely

1. What do you notice about the figures in the image?
2. Read the words on the billboard. How does the message on the billboard relate to the figures?
3. How would your interpretation of the photograph be different if the billboard were excluded from the frame?

Step 2

Learn more

Dorothea Lange was an American photographer best known for documenting the effects of the Great Depression on people in the 1930s. She was most interested in taking photos of places and their inhabitants in order to make the public aware of social issues and to bring about social change. She reflected, “All photographs—not only those that are so-called ‘documentary’ ... can be fortified by words.” In her photos, Lange often included signs, such as billboards and hand-painted notices, to help convey the story of a place, time, and people.

In this photograph, which is called *On the Road to Los Angeles, California* March 1937, two migrants looking for work walk down a road carrying their belongings in bags. They pass a billboard advertisement for Southern Pacific Railroad that reads, “NEXT TIME TRY THE TRAIN—RELAX”

Step 3

Activity: Take a photo that juxtaposes words and images

Materials: camera or phone camera

1. Take a walk around your home or neighborhood looking for signs, such as billboards, advertisements, and flyers. Pay attention to the messages they are trying to convey and consider how they relate to the people and places around them.
2. Take a photo that includes one of these signs as well as the surrounding scene. Consider how you frame the photograph: What will you include and what will you leave out?
3. What story does the photograph tell?

Step 4

Share!

Share your photo with a friend or family member and ask them how they would interpret the image. Or you can email it to us at MoMA: schoolprograms@moma.org.



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Image: Dorothea Lange. *On the Road to Los Angeles, California*. March 1937. Gift of the Farm Security Administration.