

Mondays with MoMA



MoMA

Step 1 Learn

According to the [CASEL framework](#), Social Awareness refers to the ability to understand the perspectives of and to empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts. This includes the capacity to feel compassion for others and identify broader historical and social norms, including unjust ones.

From 1935 to 1939, Dorothea Lange worked with US government agencies to draw the public's attention to the effects of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl drought. She was interested in the everyday experience of people she encountered, and she aimed to raise public awareness of working conditions and circumstances of people at the time.

Step 2 Look Closely

Questions

1. How would you describe the poses of the figures in the photograph?
2. This photograph shows a group of farmers working in a lettuce farm in California. What do you imagine their movements might be like as they gather their crops?
3. Choose a figure and position your body into a pose similar to theirs. Hold that pose for five seconds, and pay attention to the sensations you feel. Do you feel discomfort in a specific part or parts of your body?

Step 3 Learn More

When this photograph was taken, California farms produced the majority of fruits and vegetables grown in the US, and the industry required cheap labor in order to be profitable. Lange took extensive notes about the subjects of her photographs. In her field notes on this photograph, she wrote about how California agriculture relied on various groups of immigrant farmers from Japan, China, India, Philippines, and Mexico, as well as Black Americans to perform “[stoop labor](#).”

The physical labor required to do stoop labor was grueling. The following quote is from the testimony of a farm worker who performed this labor: "I was a crew pusher for 10 years. I became disabled, and now I can no longer bend over. During my working years my friends used to make fun of me because of the way I walked, bent forward like a gorilla, which is caused by working with [short-handled farming tools]. ... Being a crew pusher I found out that the growers believe that they can get more work out of the people by only allowing hoes with a short handle. The grower has more control over the workers when he has them working with a short-handled hoe, because he can see they are resting when they stand up."¹

Immigrant contract farmers faced intense discrimination. This quote from an American farmer exemplifies a common sentiment during this period: "That is where a lot of our trouble is, the country is too heavily populated with foreigners. The farmers ain't got no business hirin' them fer low wages when we native white American citizens are starvin'."²

How does this information change your understanding of this photograph?

Step 4

Activity: Write a message with empathy and compassion

Materials: pencil and paper

1. Consider how it might feel to be in the pose of one of the figures and to be living in the historical context of the photograph (i.e., the conditions in which the farmers lived and the prejudice that they faced).
2. Imagine that you were transported to the time this photograph was taken and could write an empathetic note or message to the farmers at the end of their work day.
 - a. What would your message say?
 - b. How would you show kindness and compassion through your note?
 - c. How might you translate these feelings into actions that could help these farmers?

Step 5

Share!

Talk to a friend or family member about what you learned from this lesson, and share your message with them. Or you can email a photo of your note to us at MoMA: schoolprograms@moma.org.



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Image: Dorothea Lange. *Filipinos Cutting Lettuce, Salinas Valley, California*. June 1935. Gelatin silver print, printed 1953

1. <https://objectofhistory.org/objects/extendedtour/short-handledhoe/index.html%3Forder=10.html>
2. Gregory, James N. 1991 (1989). *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California*. Oxford University Press, USA. (165)