Interpreting the Past: Young Historians

Grade Level: For grades K-3
Standards and curriculum connections are available at the end of the document.

Background: During their visit to the museum, students will learn how they can investigate historical objects to learn about the past. With this lesson, teachers use visual thinking strategies to help students learn to analyze primary sources and develop critical thinking skills.

Primary Sources:
- c. 1859 Milwaukee & Mississippi Railroad Co. Lithograph
- c. 1915 Traffic, Detroit, Michigan
- c. 1909 Alice Ramsey Changing a Tire

Lesson
1. Project the primary source in the classroom so that everybody can see it.
2. Ask students to look closely at the image for a minute or two. Encourage quiet looking. For this initial exercise do not tell them specific things to focus on.
3. Ask questions of the students:
   a. What is happening in this image? Allow multiple students to answers with their ideas.
   b. Have students clarify & justify their answers: What do you see in the image that makes you think that?
   c. What else can we find?

Take it a Step Further: Creative Writing

Use primary sources to encourage creative writing and personal narratives.

Lesson
Have students imagine that they are inside the image. Have them write a story describing what they see. They can consider these questions:
- What is happening?
- What do they hear?
- What do they smell?
- How do they feel?
c. 1909 Alice Ramsey Changing a Tire
Smithsonian Magazine “Alice Ramsey’s Historic Cross-Country Drive”
Title: Milwaukee & Mississippi Railroad Co. Lithograph
Date: c. 1859
The Milwaukee & Mississippi Railroad Company was founded in 1847 to help link Milwaukee’s railroads to the Mississippi River. This lithograph was issued by the Milwaukee & Mississippi Railroad Co. between 1859-1860 to commemorate the rebuilding of one of its locomotives, Milwaukee.  
Source: Milwaukee Company Historical Society [http://www.milwaukeehistory.net/mmlitho/]

Extensions
1. Is this an image of something you might see today or something from a long time ago? Circle the things (evidence) in the image that help support your answer.
2. Circle the different types of transportation in this image. Do these types of transportation exist today? Are these types of transportation different from types of transportation today? How do you know?

Title: Traffic, Detroit, Michigan
Date: c. 1915
The United States started to use traffic control towers in the 1910s and 1920s to help manage increasing automobile traffic. The idea for traffic lights began in the 1800s to help combat horse-drawn traffic. The earliest included semaphores, which involved a tall post with movable arms that were operated by hand. When the arms were positioned sideways it meant stop; after dark gas light lit tinted lenses. Traffic control towers allowed traffic officers to have a higher view of traffic. Eventually electricity replaced gas.  

Extensions
1. Find the tower in the center of the picture. What do you think it is? Circle the parts of the picture that support your answer.
2. What can this picture tell us about what it was like driving in 1915?

Title: Alice Ramsey Changing a Tire
Date: c. 1909
In 1909, Alice Ramsey was the first woman to successfully drive cross country in an automobile traveling from New York City, New York to San Francisco, California. The trip took her 59 days to cover approximately 3800 miles, of which only 152 miles were paved. Her travel companions included her two sisters-in-law Nettie Powell and Margaret Atwood and a friend Hermine Jahn, none-of-whom knew how to drive. During her trip Alice changed eleven tires, cleaned the spark plugs, repaired a broken brake pedal, and suffered from a case of bedbugs.  

Extensions:
1. What can this picture tell us about what it was like driving in 1909?
Delaware Standards

- **Civics 4, K-3a**: Students will acquire the skills necessary for participating in a group, including defining an objective, dividing responsibilities, and working cooperatively.
- **History 2, K-3a**: Students will use artifacts and documents to gather information about the past.

Common Core: English and Language Arts

**Grade K**

- **W.K.2**: Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts in which they name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic.
- **SL.K.1A-B**: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
- **SL.K.2**: Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.
- **SL.K.3**: Ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.
- **SL.K.4**: Describe familiar people, places, things, and events and, with prompting and support, provide additional detail.
- **SL.K.5**: Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions as desired to provide additional detail.
- **SL.K.6**: Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.

**Grade 1**

- **W.1.2**: Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic, and provide some sense of closure.
- **SL.1.1A-C**: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
- **SL.1.2**: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.
- **SL.1.3**: Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to gather additional information or clarify something that is not understood.
- **SL.1.4**: Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.
- **SL.1.5**: Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.
Grade 2

- **W.2.2**: Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section.
- **W.2.8**: Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.
- **SL.2.1A-C**: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
- **SL.2.2**: Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.
- **SL.2.5**: Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.
- **SL.2.4**: Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences.

Grade 3

- **W.3.2**: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.
- **SL.3.1A-D**: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- **SL.3.2**: Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- **SL.3.3**: Ask and answer questions about information from a speaker, offering appropriate elaboration and detail.