

NAME:

DATE:

Jacob Riis, Point of View and Audience

Objectives:

- Students will practice analyzing point of view and audience.
- Students will determine how Riis used photography in *How the Other Half Lives* to effect social change.
- Students will determine the degree to which Riis was attempting to advocate for the poor for their own sake, or for the sake of the middle class.

Background:

Like Upton Sinclair, Jacob Riis was a muckraker, or an investigative journalist who wanted to expose social ills in order to change them. All authors, including muckrakers, write for an audience. The audience of a source must always be taken into account when analyzing a source. Authors will usually shape the source and its message with the audience's beliefs and expectations in mind. This can sometimes lead to distortions in the historical record.

For example, consider the newspaper *Appeal to Reason*. It emphasized certain subjects knowing that its audience expected a socialist message. *The New York Times* wrote for a different audience with different beliefs and expectations, and as a result emphasized other subjects. This doesn't mean that one or both of the papers were lying (though they might have been), but it does mean that the message of the source was shaped, in part, by the audience.

Today, we'll examine Sinclair's fellow muckraker, Jacob Riis, whom you read about last night. We'll determine how the beliefs of his audience shaped the message of his photography.

Directions:

I. The Middle Class Home

Using the photograph “Victorian Homelife” (author and date unknown, but depicting a British family), identify three basic middle class assumptions about the home in the early twentieth century. Scenes like this heavily influenced how affluent Americans thought about the ideal home.

1. Role of children in the home:
2. Purpose of activities in the home:
3. Arrangement of items in the home:

In addition to what we can glean about the home, remember that white Americans were generally afraid or distrustful of New Immigrants, especially Catholics and Jews, and also disliked the idea of different races mixing.

II. The Other Half

Each group will be given a photograph. Each group should answer the following questions about the photograph. Groups will then present their findings to the class.

1. What is depicted in the photograph?
2. What is the message of the photograph?
3. Why did Riis include this in his text?
4. Explain how the beliefs and expectations of the audience shaped the message of this photograph?
5. Does this photograph appear candid? Why or why not?

Photos

“In a Sweat Shop” (slide 7) 1

Background and description: the smaller figure in the foreground is a child. They are in a small, unregulated factory (a sweatshop) making garments.

“Bohemian Cigarmakers at Work in their tenement” (slide 8) 2

Background and description: “Bohemian” in this case means “German.”

“Five Cents a Spot” (slide 9) 3

Background and description: This photo shows a scene inside an illegal hostel. The title refers to how much money a lodger would pay to spend a night.

“Ready for Sabbath Eve in a Coal Cellar” (slide 10) 4

Background and description: The Sabbath in the title refers to the Jewish sabbath. The photo was taken in a coal cellar (the basement) of a business.

“A Black and Tan Dive in Africa” (slide 11) 5

Background and description: “Africa” refers to a section of New York populated by many African-Americans. A “dive” refers to a bar. Make sure to count the hands in this image.

“In the Home of An Italian Rag Picker in Jersey Street” (slide 12) 6

Background and description: Rag picking referred to a recycling practice during the time- people would collect discarded rags which would be recycled into paper. It was an occupation for the very poor. Consider how the woman in the photo is meant to resemble a common trope in art history (if this is confusing, ask Mr. Miskinis).

Sleeping children photos (slides 13-14) 7

Background and description: Examine the facial expressions closely.

III. Synthesis

How did Riis' audience shape the message of *How the Other Half Lives*?

Explain with reference to

- Two photographs
- the reading from yesterday.

Follow the same claim structure we practiced in class the other day on the “Barred Out” photo.

Please submit over Google Classroom.