



SEARCHLIGHTS AND SUNGLASSES

# LEARNING LAYER

## Photojournalism: Is seeing believing?

“The one look, the perfect moment, the serendipitous split-second confluence of subject, light, shadow; camera, shooter, history; the right place, the right time — this is a photojournalist’s quest. ... The elusive goal of the photojournalist: proving the unthinkable true.” — **From the book “Crusaders, Scoundrels, Journalists”**

Is seeing believing? When Oliver Wendell Holmes looked at Civil War photographs in [Mathew Brady’s](#) New York gallery, he said yes: “Let him who wishes to know what war is, look at these.” Yet many of Brady’s pictures were staged; corpses posed for dramatic effect. Early cameras could capture only subjects that remained perfectly still. Brady’s pictures of the dead could not yet appear in print. For newspapers and magazines, sketch artists drew battle scenes.

Regardless of medium, for journalists, truth is the goal. Said World War II [photographer Margaret Bourke-White](#): “Utter truth is essential.” Though a camera never blinks, we can. Photographs can lie — a warning to all in an age when smart phones and the cameras they contain are becoming universal.

### Activities at three levels for students:

**Flashlight:** Explore the following photojournalism websites: [TIME LightBox](#), [Noor](#), [Kashi](#), [The New York Times LENS](#) and [World Press Photo](#). Identify common elements that make great images and select your favorite photo. How does this picture tell a story that words alone cannot describe?

**Spotlight:** Enroll in the free [Language of the Image](#) module at Poynter News University. See how the elements of emotion, juxtaposition, point of entry and many others combine to create amazing pictures. Take the quiz at the end of the module. How did you do? Blog your thoughts about the class (is it dated or still relevant?) as well as your opinion about this quote: “When photographers and editors don’t articulate the journalistic value of an image, an important voice of the publication is muted or rendered ineffective.”

**Searchlight** Go out and take a picture that tells a story. Upload it to Tumblr with an explanation of why it is a good photo. Describe the elements from the

Language of the Image course that are part of your photo. Now find a picture that isn't real from the fact-checkers at Snopes.com. Blog both, explaining why the good picture was good and how people knew the bad one was false.

**Extra credit:** Find a site like CNN's iReport. Look at the assignments page. Take a photo or video and submit it to the news organization you've selected. Wait until the newsroom selects the citizen journalism it wants to use. Did you make the cut? Explain why or why not.