

A Teacher's Guide to

Dorothea Lange

**The Photographer Who Found
the Faces of the Depression**

CAROLE BOSTON WEATHERFORD

pictures by SARAH GREEN



With a Focus on Writer's & Illustrator's Craft

guide prepared by

Frank Murphy

Ages 4-8 // Grades PreK-3

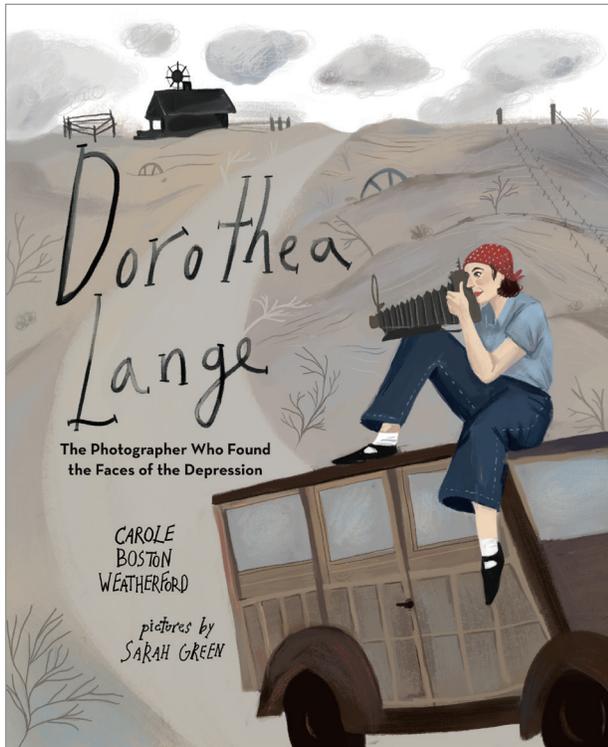
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ABOUT DOROTHEA LANGE:

THE PHOTOGRAPHER WHO FOUND THE FACES OF THE DEPRESSION



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Before she raised her lens to take her most iconic photo, Dorothea Lange took photos of the downtrodden from bankers in once-fine suits waiting in breadlines, to former slaves, to the homeless sleeping on sidewalks. A case of polio had left her with a limp and sympathetic to those less fortunate. Traveling across the United States, documenting with her camera and her fieldbook those most affected by the stock market crash, she found the face of the Great Depression. In this picture book biography, Carole Boston Weatherford with her lyrical prose captures the spirit of the influential photographer.

ABOUT CAROLE BOSTON WEATHERFORD

Carole Boston Weatherford is the author of several acclaimed poetry collections and poetic biographies. She teaches at Fayetteville State University in North Carolina.

ABOUT SARAH GREEN

Sarah Green is a California born-and-based illustrator. This is her first solo picture book. She studied illustration at the Rhode Island School of Design and graduated in 2014.



BEFORE READING

BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE AND SETTING A PURPOSE FOR READING

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is a biography?
- How does it differ from other “text types”?
- What other biographies have you read?
- What can we learn from reading about the lives of others?
- How can a person’s decisions and actions change his/her life?
- In what ways do people impact others and the world?
- What do you know about the story by looking at the title and cover illustration?
- Who are you going to be reading about?
- What did this person do?
- What type of person do you think Dorothea Lange is?

CREATE A CLASS “KWL” CHART

- What do you know about Dorothea Lange?
- What do you know about photographers?
- What do you want to know about Dorothea Lange and her career as a photographer?
- What do you know about the Depression?
- What do you want to know about the Depression?

Consider using these questions to spark discussions about photography:

- When in history did photography start?
- Where would a photographer’s photographs appear?
- Is photography a type of art?
- Have you taken photographs with a camera? A cell phone? A tablet?



STUDYING WRITERS' CRAFTS

By analyzing a professional writer's words we can help teach students to learn to write. Using a book like *Dorothea Lange: The Photographer Who Found the Faces of the Depression* to "mentor" writing is a best practice in the teaching of writers. Carole Boston Weatherford's text is filled with interesting crafts that will inspire writers to make thoughtful and artful decisions when writing their own texts. The following list contains just some of the crafts to study.

THE "POWER OF THREE"

This craft regularly appears in songs and poetry. It gives a text rhythm and cadence that makes the reading (or reading aloud) more pleasurable; simply put—it's catchy. It allows the reader to more easily remember the information too. It is also the smallest number that can establish a pattern. The first example in *Dorothea Lange: The Photographer Who Found the Faces of the Depression* appears on page 6: "...but [she] was a so-so student who skipped school, didn't like being told what to do, and barely graduated." Embedded in this sentence is a list of three important points about Dorothea Lange that introduce her to the reader and help set up her decisions throughout her life.

The next occurrence is on page 8: "...[she] donned bold silver jewelry, a jaunty black beret, and flowing skirts to hide her limp."

By page 14, Ms. Weatherford introduces the subjects she photographed in San Francisco: "...she photographed men sleeping on sidewalks, leaning against storefronts, and a man slumped beside an overturned wheelbarrow."

Consider introducing this craft to students with the first two examples. Then have them reread the book looking for the third example of the "power of three" on page 14.

ALLITERATION

Many students learn about alliteration as early as kindergarten. Consider sharing one of the most commonly known alliterative tongue-twisters: "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers." Explain to students that writers often use alliteration in a more subtle fashion than a long and funny tongue twister. Ms. Weatherford successfully and artfully achieves alliteration throughout her text. Early in the text, on page 4, the letter "d" is featured: "...among demonstrating dockworkers to document their bloody strike."

Additional examples follow, starting on page 6: "...was a so-so student who skipped school...". There are many more instances of alliteration in the text from more subtle examples on page 8: "black beret" to a larger alliterative example on page 11: "Some still wore suits..." to a substantial example of alliteration in a sentence using

many “s” sounds on page 12: “On San Francisco’s Skid Row, she photographed men sleeping on sidewalks, leaning against storefronts, and a man slumped beside an overturned wheelbarrow.” Consider posting this sentence on chart paper and having students discover how many “s” sounds appear. Help guide the students to discover that the “s” sounds may appear inside of a word and at the end of a word, not just at the beginning (San Francisco’s, sidewalks, against, storefronts, beside). This is still alliteration.

ARTFUL USE OF “AND”

Many of us learned that it is unacceptable to begin a sentence with “and,” or other coordinating conjunctions like “but” and “or.” Many teachers teach that it is not acceptable to begin a sentence with the word “and”; however, it is an oft-used technique by professional writers. And it is 100 percent grammatically acceptable! Doing it too much in a text, however, will render its power useless. Using it in an artful way adds voice to a text. Often writers will use it at the end of an entire text or save it for a final sentence to solidify an idea. It is almost like an exclamation point at the beginning of a sentence! Ms. Weatherford does it only once in the entire text. And she saves it for the last sentence! “And the nation could not look the other way.” This is artful!

TEXT STRUCTURE

Beginning and finishing a story in the same way, whether it be similar sentence structure or using the same lines and words is called symmetry. Some nicknames, such as “kissing the beginning” or “bookending” a story, will help students understand this craft.

Guide students to discover the way that Ms. Weatherford composes and constructs the sentences on the first page in comparison (and in contrast) to the sentences on the last page. Both begin with “Because...” On the first page Ms. Weatherford’s first sentence describes how polio did something to Dorothea: “Because childhood polio left her with a limp and a rolling gait...” In contrast, the first sentence on the last page describes how Dorothea did something to help impact others: “Because Dorothea turned her lens on hunger and poverty...” The contrast in the way these two sentences are constructed represents that Dorothea took control of her life and made decisions. She didn’t let things happen to her; instead, she became a doer—she did things to make a difference.



STUDY SOPHISTICATED PHRASES FROM THE TEXT

Ms. Weatherford uses some words and phrases that may be new to younger readers and may need more clarification than simply relying on context clues. However, challenging students to first attempt to use context clues is a great activity for developing readers. Here are some examples:

- donned a cloak of invisibility (page 4)
- “Dorothea realized she had ‘eyesight’ (page 6)
- cross-country (page 7)
- donned (page 4 and 8)
- “jaunty black beret” (page 8)
- staying put (page 25)
- awakening (page 12)
- “Skid Row” (page 14) (Suggestion: Discuss homelessness in America)
- kindred spirits (page 16)

PAST VS. PRESENT TENSE

Guide students in a discussion about how the text is written in the past tense. This makes perfect sense since Dorothea’s life story happened in the past. Challenge students to find the only sentence in the entire text that is written in the present tense: “She [Florence Owens Thomas] looks much older than her thirty-two years” (page 26). Ask students why Ms. Weatherford may have chosen to write it in the present tense. One possible

conclusion the students could make is that the photograph lives on today for all of us to see; Ms. Weatherford is describing Florence as she appears in the photo as we look at it today.

TEXT STRUCTURE

Introduce to students that some biographies are called “cradle to grave” stories. In other words, these biographies begin with when the person was born and then follow the person’s life and the person’s accomplishments all the way until they die. The “cradle” represents the person’s birth and the “grave” represents the person’s death. *Dorothea Lange: The Photographer Who Found the Faces of the Depression* is not exactly a “cradle to grave” biography. Have students study when in Dorothea’s life in the story begins and when it ends. Have students research to discover the rest of Dorothea’s story to “fill in the blanks” about her birth to her death. The backmatter can also be used to help students learn more about Dorothea Lange, the Depression, and other events in the early 1900s.

ILLUSTRATION STUDY

In the same way that writers often construct and craft with their words, illustrators often consider aspects like scenes, colors, and symbols to convey messages that help to illuminate a story. Illustrators are also very aware of how their pictures work together with an author’s words.

In *Dorothea Lange: The Photographer Who Found the Faces of the Depression*, Sarah Green was very aware of Carole Boston Weatherford's words. And she honored Dorothea Lange's great deeds with interesting choices in creating the illustrations.

Consider having students study the art on page 6 and then have them re-read the text. Guide them to consider answers to these questions: "What do you think young Dorothea is doing in this classroom scene?" and "Is there a reason that the scene outside the classroom windows is so bright and nature-filled?" Share this quote from Sarah Green discussing this classroom scene: *"The lighting and shading was deliberate. I wanted Dorothea to have sort of an 'inner light' that would allude to the way that she saw the world. Times were dark and sad but she saw past the heaviness of the external issues to the individuals. You can see that when she's day-dreaming, the world beyond is bright and lush, and Dorothea is thinking about the future."*

Illustrators have to do research too, just like writers. Ms. Green did some interesting research to help her make choices about shadows and colors that are depicted in her pictures. Consider sharing this quote from Ms. Green: *"Once I'd lined out that I wanted Dorothea to be the 'inner light' of the book, I decided to also explore shadow, which visually is a way to set a darker tone but doesn't necessarily have*

to be scary. I'd watched some films and looked at screenshots of old westerns and thought about movies like High Noon and that informed a lot of the more serious scenes of the book. So once I decided light and shadow were kind of the foundation of the tone, I started thinking about balance. Shadows can't exist without light, etc. So I wanted there to be pretty equal moments of 'breathe/inhale' wherein Dorothea has a moment in nature, experiences something wholly beyond the human experience, and equal moments of 'sigh/exhale' where she just totally gives herself to the stories of the people she's trying to tell."

Carole Boston Weatherford used the craft of symmetry to begin and end her text. Sarah Green did it with her illustrations, also mirroring Ms. Weatherford's message of Dorothea's ability to make the nation "see" that people needed help. The text ends on a positive note. Likewise, so does Ms. Green's last picture of the sunset being seen through the window.

Ms. Green adds to her discussion of Dorothea's awareness of people needing help and her love of nature with this quote: *"So the sunrise scene at the end is kind of the conclusion of that search for balance. The sun is 'nature' but she's still in the city."*

More about Ms. Green using symmetry to "bookend" the story: One of Ms. Green's first pictures shows Dorothea looking out classroom windows, seeing nature

and a “bright and lush” future. The last picture shows Dorothea looking out a window at a sunset, which represents a conclusion to Dorothea’s hard work and her accomplishments. The sun setting is symbolic of the story ending.

Consider having students study the other illustration with a window scene on pages 9 and 10. Referencing Ms. Green’s discussion points about light, shadows,

and Dorothea’s “inner light,” have students analyze Ms. Green’s choices regarding colors, light, and shadows in this picture. Ask students to consider why Dorothea is depicted bright and colored while the scene she is seeing beyond the window is darker and filled with greys and shadows. Remind students that the only photography available in the 1920s was black and white.



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