

Goldie at Home Activity: Snapshots of Montauk

Activity Overview: You can read a book, but did you know you can read a photo as well? Photographs are a great way to see a snapshot of the past. This Goldie at Home activity addresses how to look beyond the surface of an image and become detectives searching for clues to better understand a historic photo. The State Historical Society of Iowa not only cares for thousands of historic objects, but also is home to many photographs from Iowa's past.

Connection to Iowa History

The photos used for this activity come from the Larrabee family of Clermont, Iowa. The State Historical Society of Iowa has over a 1,000 photographs of the Larrabee family and their life at Montauk. The family was considered one of the most powerful and wealthiest families in Iowa during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Their former home, [Montauk](#), is now a state historic site open to the public for tours from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

How to Understand Historic Photography (Visual Literacy)

Photographs only capture a moment in time. Viewers of historical photos don't know what happened before or after a photo was taken, and it is important to recognize that viewers only see a segment of time. To more fully understand a historic time period portrayed in photos, look at newspapers or other research materials and compare historic photos from different sources for the same time period.



Instructions

- 1 Begin this activity by showing "Montauk Photograph #1" without context to your young historian.
- 2 Quickly and quietly look the image over, and then use the worksheet to record first impressions in the "First Look" section for this image.
- 3 Next, take a few minutes to more closely examine the image. Continue to answer the questions while looking at the image in the "Looking Closer for Clues" section. It is helpful to have the image available while looking for clues.
- 4 In the "Final Thoughts" section of the worksheet, write what you think the image depicts. Also, list what else you would like to know about the image.
- 5 Repeat the same steps, 1-4, for "Montauk Photograph #2."

Materials

- Montauk photograph #1
- Montauk photograph #2
- Montauk worksheet

Instructions continued on the next page

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Instructions continued

6 Questions to Spark Learning

- Why do you think people take photographs?
- Looking at the images, is there anything in the space the photo was taken that looks like something in your own house? What are the objects?
- Do you have photos from the past? What can be learned by studying photos from your family's past?

7 Additional Resources

If you want to explore more historic photos from Iowa or learn more about the Larrabee family at Montauk, use the additional resources below.

- The State Historical Society of Iowa has many more historic images available online. Spend some time checking out our [Flickr webpage](#) to see more images of Iowa's past.
- See Montauk from new heights with this [drone footage](#) of the historic mansion.
- Check out this [short Facebook video](#) of the Montauk music room where these photographs were originally taken.

8 More Background Information about the Montauk Photographs

Disclaimer: Use this information for reflection after completing the analysis worksheet.

- **Photograph #1:** This photograph was taken of the Larrabee family at their home, Montauk, in 1883. The Larrabees had seven children. In the photo (from left to right) are: William Jr., Augusta, Frederic, Anna (named after her mother), Julia, Helen, Anna (mother) and Charles. William Larrabee (father), not photographed, would become governor of Iowa in 1886 and serve until 1890. The family loved music and art, and they collected pieces as they traveled around the world which can be seen in the photograph.
- **Photograph #2:** This photograph was taken of Frederic Larrabee and three friends while they sang in his family's music room located at Montauk. Although an exact date is not provided, through documentation, it was prior to 1916. In 1916, one of the two upright pianos in the background of the photograph was moved to a different room within the house. Frederic attended Columbia Law school and graduated from Iowa State College in 1898. He practiced law and served in the Iowa Senate from 1909-1997. He also was well traveled, and visited Europe and the Middle East in 1900. He also embarked on a world tour in 1914. He died in 1957.

Montauk Photograph #1



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City

Montauk Photograph #2



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City

Goldie at Home: Montauk Worksheet

First Look

Quickly write down what you see, think and wonder about these photos.

	What do you see?	What do you think?	What do you wonder?
Photo #1			
Photo #2			

Looking Closer for Clues

Take your time examining the photos. Write down what you discover below based on the following questions.

The Location

- Where do you think this photo was taken? What clues make you think that?
- What types of objects do you see in the room? What do these types of objects and art tell you about the people in the photo?
- Does this space look fancy or plain? What makes you say that?

Photo #1	Photo #2

The People

- Are the people young or old? How can you tell?
- Are the people staged? Or is it a spontaneous pose? How can you tell?

Photo #1	Photo #2

The Clothing

- Describe their clothing. Does their clothing look like your clothing? Why or why not?

Photo #1	Photo #2

Looking Closer for Clues

The Time

- Based on the clothing and objects in the space, what year or era do you think this photo was taken?
- Is this an old photo or more recent? Why do you think this?

Photo #1	Photo #2

Final Thoughts

- Based on your observations of the photo, what do you think the photo is showing? Who are the people and why was the photo taken?
- What would you like to know more about the image?

Photo #1	Photo #2

Closing Observations

Compare and contrast these two photos.

- What is similar between the photos? What is different? What could account for those differences?
- Compare the room in which each photo is taken. What changes do you notice between the two photos? What does that tell you about how they lived in the house?
- How do these two photos help you learn more about the Larrabee family? What more would you like to know?

Photo #1	Photo #2

