

Activity 7: Top Down, or Bottom Up?

Consider whose story different images tell



This activity builds really well on the “Behind the Lens” activity. The students have already considered who might have been taking the photograph and what story they were trying to tell. Now they should try to figure out whether the images are an example of “Top Down” or “Bottom Up” history.

- “Top Down” history tends to focus on the actions of the rich, powerful and wealthy, placing the historical significance on the actions of leaders. Ordinary people are not key players, but rather like “extras” – maybe passive, or for example perhaps a violent mob.
- “Bottom Up” history focusses on ordinary every day people as the key players in history – they are not passive, powerless or pawns, but instrumental in the narrative. They exist as significant historical actors, history is not merely happening to them.

This activity is a good further opportunity for the students to consider the intention in the creation and use of these images. It is also a good opportunity to discuss “Top Down” and “Bottom Up” as historical categorisations – do the students think they are a useful method? Does such a binary approach paint the ordinary person as unintelligent, or conversely might it demonise those in powerful positions?