

# Flood, Framed Differently

Compare a photograph's public scene with a poem's imagined private voice.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.7** "Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Breughel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*)."

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## Two Treatments of the 1937 Flood

The photograph below was made by Russell Lee in Cairo, Illinois, in February 1937. Its archival caption identifies people piling sandbags along the levee during the height of the flood.

The poem on the next page is a contemporary classroom poem written in response to this photograph. It imagines a person waiting at home during the same flood; it is not a historical account or the testimony of anyone pictured.

Analyze each work directly. A caption supplies context, but a photograph cannot establish a person's thoughts or what happened outside its frame. The poem's invented scene is an artistic treatment, not evidence that a particular home or family experienced these events.



### Piling sandbags along the levee during the height of the flood. Cairo, Illinois

Russell Lee, February 1937. Library of Congress, FSA/OWI Collection. LC-DIG-fsa-8b30120.

<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2017763520/>

Library of Congress: no known restrictions. Full supplied image, including negative border, reproduced without cropping.

### Read and mark

Inspect the photograph and read the whole poem. Mark two visible details on the photograph. Underline two poetic choices, including an image or a line break. In the notes area, distinguish what you observe from what you infer.

## At the Doorframe

Original classroom poem, Lesson Maker Pro. An imagined response to Lee's photograph, not a historical testimony.

- 1 Against the door I press my palm.
- 2 The wood is cool.
- 3 Outside, the river keeps its own time.
- 4 Mother lifts the family photographs
- 5 to the highest shelf.
- 6 I cannot lift the river.
- 7 The clock repeats its small instruction:
- 8 wait.
- 9 Outside, hands make a wall of bags.
- 10 I grip the doorframe
- 11 as if my hand could teach the house
- 12 to stay.

### Notice before interpreting

Record one visible photographic detail and one exact poetic phrase. For each, add an inference and explain what the evidence does not prove.

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## Compare with evidence

### Question 1

How does the photograph's wide view connect workers, the barrier, and the river? Use two visible details to explain what this framing emphasizes.

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### Question 2

Compare 'I cannot lift the river' with the final phrase 'to stay.' How do imagery and the line breaks shape the speaker's perspective? Quote one phrase and explain its effect.

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### Question 3

Name something visible in the photograph that the poem leaves outside its main focus, and something the poem expresses that the photograph cannot directly reveal. Explain how these differences guide the audience's attention.

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### Question 4

Both works treat the same flood, but they are different kinds of evidence. Explain why the poem can enrich a comparison without proving the actual feelings or home life of the people in the photograph.

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**Your turn**

Choose a school or community event. In exactly four sentences, describe a photograph and a poem that represent the event differently. Identify what each medium emphasizes, name one detail absent from each, and explain how those choices shape the audience's understanding.

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**QUESTION 1**

The frame shows workers near piles of sandbags and a long barrier, with a broad river behind it. These visible relationships emphasize the scale of a shared defense effort. The image shows actions and surroundings, but does not establish how any worker feels.

**QUESTION 2**

'I cannot lift the river' contrasts the small act of moving family photographs with a force the speaker cannot control. Isolating 'to stay' gives weight to the wish that the house will remain secure. These choices suggest anxiety and a desire for control, without stating what ultimately happens.

**QUESTION 3**

The photograph makes the broad river, vessel, barrier and several workers visible; the poem keeps these public surroundings largely outside its domestic focus, although it briefly mentions hands and bags. The poem gives a first-person wish for the house to stay, which the photograph cannot directly reveal. The different selections direct attention toward a public effort or a private uncertainty.

**QUESTION 4**

The poem is explicitly a later, invented response. Its voice and imagery offer a possible private perspective to compare with visible public work, but do not document a photographed person's thoughts or a real family's experience.

**YOUR TURN: SAMPLE**

A photograph of the school robotics competition would show students huddled around a table as the robot crosses the finish line. It would emphasize teamwork and the excitement of the final seconds, but it would leave out the weeks of failed tests. A poem about the same event would focus on one student's shaking hands before the contest begins. It would emphasize private doubt and persistence, but it would omit the crowd's celebration, making readers see the victory as personal before they see it as public.

**TEACHER NOTES**

Accept other interpretations supported by visible photographic details and exact poem language. Distinguish observation from inference; do not require a fixed emotion or claim that an absence is deliberate. The photograph's caption supplies its location/date/event, not the speaker's identity. The complete 12-line poem is fictional and must not be attributed to Lee or treated as historical testimony. For the transfer, require exactly four sentences, two artistic treatments of one event, an emphasis and absence for each, and an explanation of audience understanding.