

“ทีมนักสืบอดีต ถอดรหัสบางกอก”

Xplorer Squad: Unlock the Past



Approach to Learning History through Photographs

Why is photograph reading important?

It is a key learning skill in effective historical study, enabling learners to clearly understand the past and the changes that have taken place over different periods. Through activities that train students to observe details and interpret images, they uncover the meanings and significance embedded in photographs.

This process is complemented by research using other related sources such as online archives, maps, books, articles, and interviews. Learners then engage in comparative study, develop analytical perspectives, and synthesise information to create new knowledge based on their own understanding, following the principles of constructionism.

Activity Steps Before Introducing the Main Content

The facilitator begins with a “*Mystery Image*” game to spark learners’ interest and practise observation skills. Prepare 3–5 mystery photographs (depending on the available time), such as images of important places or contemporary events rich in detail, connected to or illustrating change.

Choose images that are relatable to students’ experiences or familiar to them, ensuring they are neither too easy nor too difficult to guess.

Divide each image into 8 numbered sections and conceal them. Gradually reveal the sections one by one, inviting learners to guess what the photograph depicts and to point out any details they observe. (See the *03_PhotoReading_Game_MysteryImages_XplorerSquad* file for reference.)

Decoding the Past from "Photographs"

📷 Photographs are a form of primary source evidence.

📷 Many people believe that photographs are unbiased records of reality.

📷 A photograph captures a fraction of a second in time, freezing a moment before the invention of video cameras.

📷 In the past, before pressing the shutter, photographers carefully considered what they wanted viewers to see.

📷 In many cases, photographs do not record historical events with complete accuracy or straightforward objectivity.



What is the
value of
photographs?

What is Photo Reading?

“Reading” a photograph means analysing or interpreting what details and key messages are embedded in the image, what the photographer intended to communicate.

A photo reader needs the skill to evaluate information from what is visible, including its form and composition, while setting aside personal bias.

Three Steps to Reading and Interpreting a Photograph

- Read from the main elements of the image – Observe and analyse the most prominent features, such as people, places, or objects.
- Read from the surrounding context – Examine the background, sides, and surrounding details to gather supporting information that helps interpret the main elements and reach a conclusion.
- Explain the composition of the image – For example, a close-up shot can create a sense of being part of the event, while a long shot or high-angle view can convey detachment from the scene and provide an overall perspective.

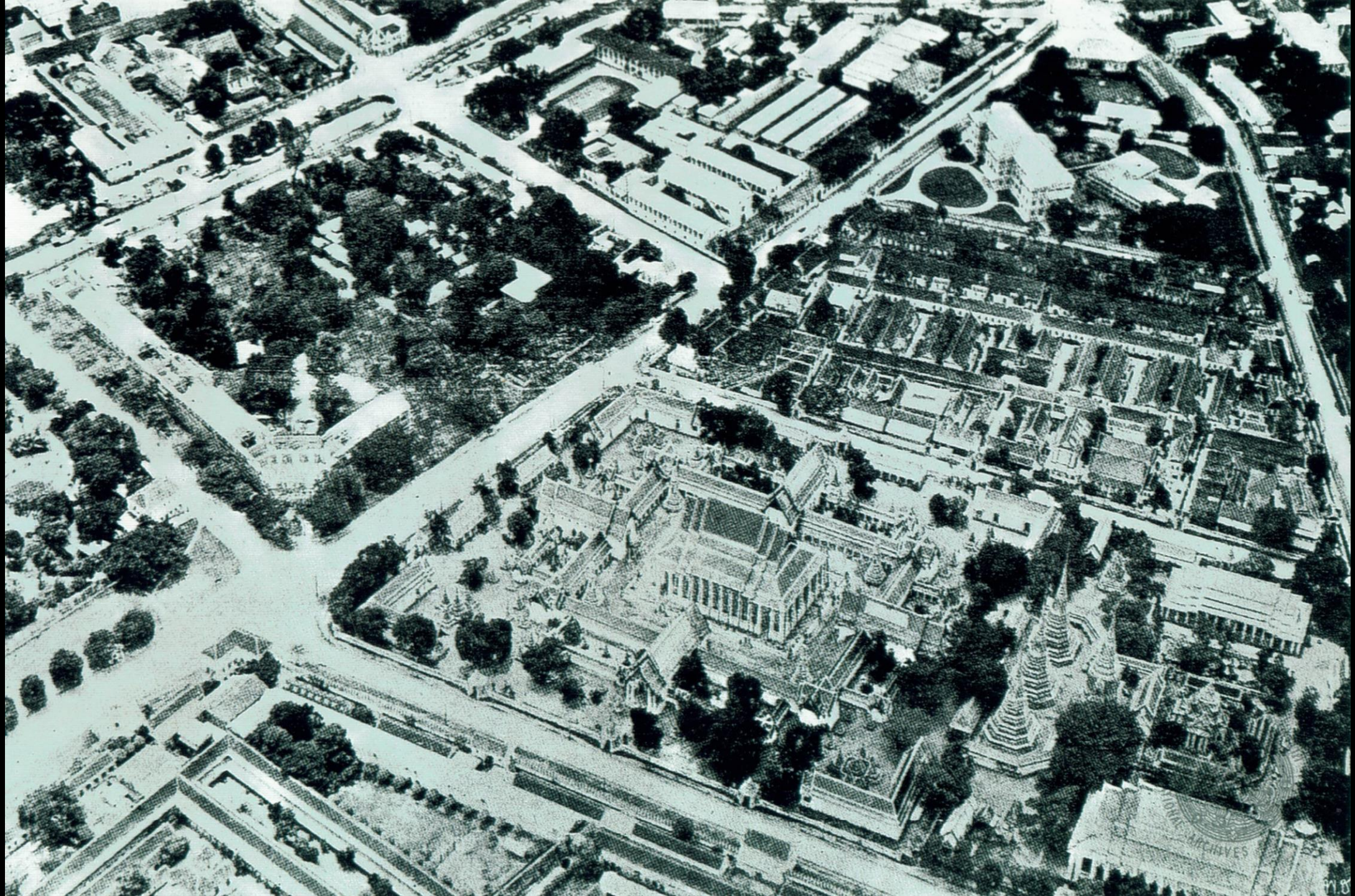


Example of Photo Reading

1. Main elements of the image – The river, boats of various sizes, the state of water transportation, and the lifestyle of people living along the river.
2. Surrounding context of the image – A Buddhist temple by the river, a Christian church, a pagoda, large motorboats, small rowing boats, traditional-style houses, and the absence of high-rise buildings.
3. High-angle, long-distance shot – Shows the overall view of the riverside settlement on both banks.

Example of Reading and Interpretation

The photographer captured a high-angle, long-distance shot, offering a wide view of riverside life where boats of various sizes served as the primary mode of transport. The surrounding context reveals a Buddhist temple by the river (*Wat Kalayanamit*), a Christian church (*Santa Cruz Church*), and a pagoda (*Wat Prayurawongsawas*) located along the western bank of the Chao Phraya River. These landmarks clearly identify the photo as having been taken from the Tha Tian pier area in Bangkok, on the opposite bank—a central hub for river transport. This is further evidenced by the presence of a large double-deck motorboat (bottom right), used both for passenger travel and goods transport, a vessel type common for long-distance journeys before the construction of modern roads. Based on these observations, the photograph can be roughly dated to between 1934 and 1974.



Steps for Reading an Aerial Photograph

1. Analyse the main elements of the image – Identify key features such as urban areas, rural areas, and agricultural zones.
2. Divide the image into sections – For easier, detailed study, divide it into a grid (e.g., 8 sections).
3. Observe each section closely – Record detailed observations for each part of the image to support further research and study.



A picture is worth a thousand words.

Analyse the following photograph using these steps:

1. Main elements of the image – The most prominent subjects, such as people, places, or objects.
2. Context of the image – Surrounding details that support interpretation.
3. Viewpoint and shooting distance – For example, close-up, long shot, high angle, or low angle, and the effect it has on the viewer.



Example of a photograph used as a photo-reading exercise