

# *Self-Guided Activities*

## **DOROTHEA LANGE**



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### **SELF-GUIDED ACTIVITIES FOR GRADES 6–12**

The photographs of Dorothea Lange reflect her intense compassion for people. She showed their joys as well as their sorrows. Her images depict some of the hardest times in twentieth-century American history. Use the following activities to help you look more closely at her pictures and to discover for yourself what she was trying to express with her camera.

This guide is designed to be used at the Getty Center, in conjunction with the exhibition *About Life: The Photographs of Dorothea Lange*.



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## Go to Gallery W105

### Activity 1: Identifying Themes in Lange's Work

Walk all the way around the gallery (room), looking at each photograph one time. Then, walk around the gallery again and pay attention to all the photographs on any one wall of your choice. Look carefully at all the photographs on that wall and answer the following questions:

1. What might be a unifying theme of all the photographs on your chosen wall?
2. What title would you give this particular group of photographs?
3. Is there one image out of all the photographs on this wall that epitomizes the theme? Which one, and why?

Pick another wall in this gallery and answer the same questions looking at this new group of photographs:

1. What might be a unifying theme of all the photographs on your chosen wall?
2. What title would you give this particular group of photographs?
3. Is there one image out of all the photographs on this wall that epitomizes the theme? Which one, and why?

Based on what you have seen in exploring this particular gallery, answer the following questions:

1. What historical time period and place are depicted in Lange's photographs in this gallery?
2. How do you think Lange felt about her subjects? What did she want the viewer to know about her subjects?

## Go to Gallery W105

### Activity 2: Exploring One Photograph

Look around the gallery and pick one photograph that you especially like. Write the title below and answer the following questions:

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What do you first notice in this picture?
2. What is going on in this picture?
3. Who, if anyone, is in this picture? If there are no people, skip to question 6.
4. If there is more than one person, how do you think they are related? How can you tell?
5. Look at each person's expression, posture, and gesture. How do you think each person feels?
6. Where did Lange stand to take the photograph? Circle all that apply:  

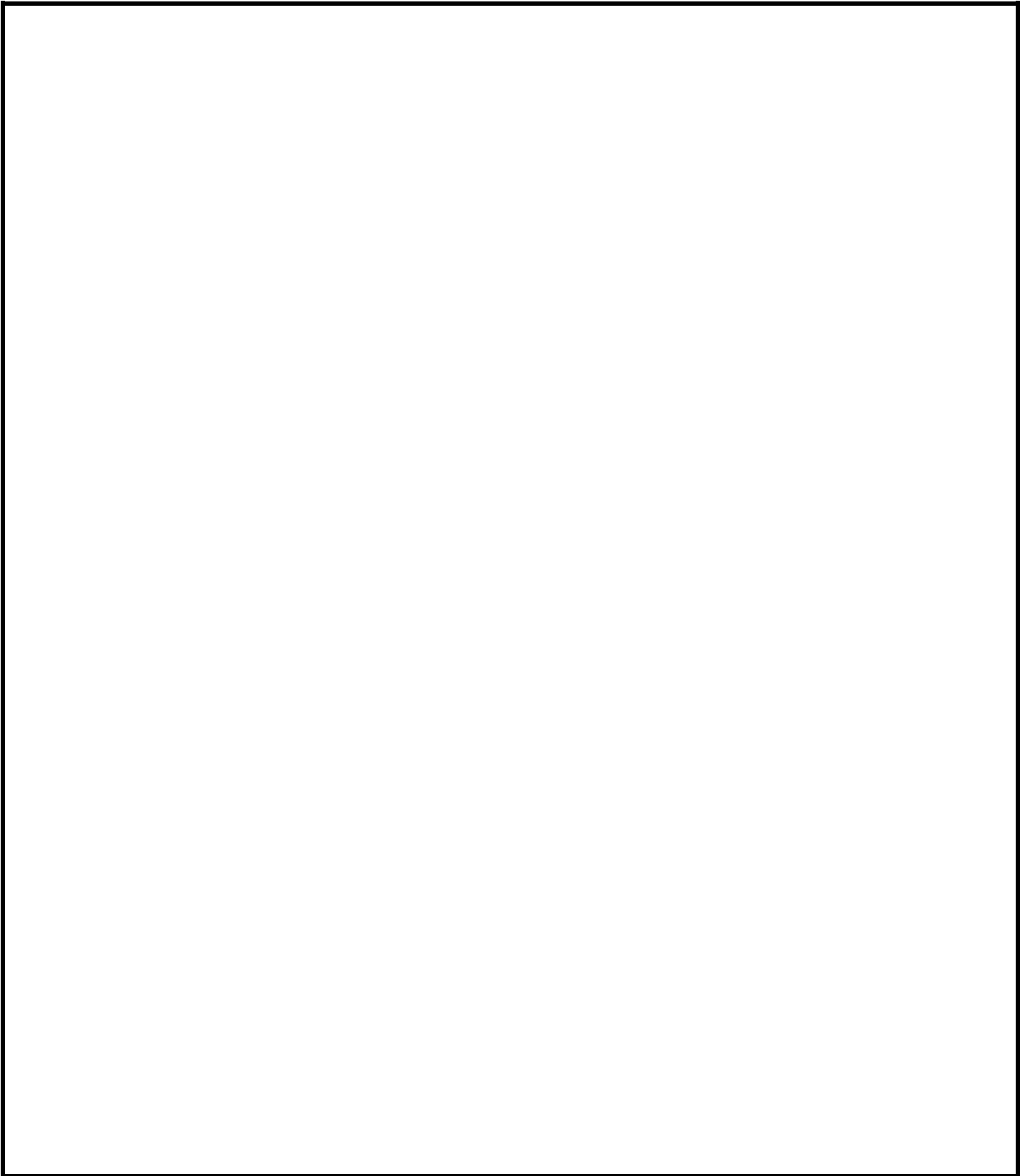
close	far	above	below	directly in front of
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her subject  
  
How does this viewing angle affect your impression of the subject?
7. Consider everything you described above and write what you think Lange wanted us to think or feel when looking at this picture.
8. What do you think or feel?
9. Remember back to the first moment you saw this photograph. What new thoughts do you have about the picture now that you've been looking at it for several minutes?

Go to Gallery W105

Activity 2: Exploring One Photograph (continued)

In the space provided, sketch the image.






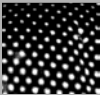
A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for sketching the image described in the text above.

Go to Gallery W106

Activity 3: Noticing Shapes and Patterns

While Lange’s photographs often have a strong social message, her images also display her interest in formal elements of art such as line, shape, and pattern.

Examples:

		
<div><p>Line</p></div>	<div><p>Shape</p></div>	<div><p>Pattern</p></div>
<p><i>Highway to the West/U.S. 54 in Southern New Mexico</i></p>	<p><i>Pot-Bellied Stove, Southwestern Utah</i></p>	<p><i>Bessie, Daughter of Zion, Toquerville, Utah</i></p>

Find two more works of art in which one of the elements—line, shape, or pattern—is emphasized.

Write their titles in the spaces provided and sketch the image in the appropriate box on the back of this page.

[illegible]

## Go to Gallery W105 or W106

### Activity 4: Comparing Two Photographs

Comparing two photographs can tell you a lot about the different choices that Lange made to convey different messages. To make a comparison, find two photographs that you feel have something in common. For example, you might find two pictures that show a woman's face, or two that show a group of people doing something.

Note: It will be helpful if the two photographs you select are somewhat near each other, so that you can see both while you are standing in one place.

Write down the titles and dates of the two photographs that you plan to compare:

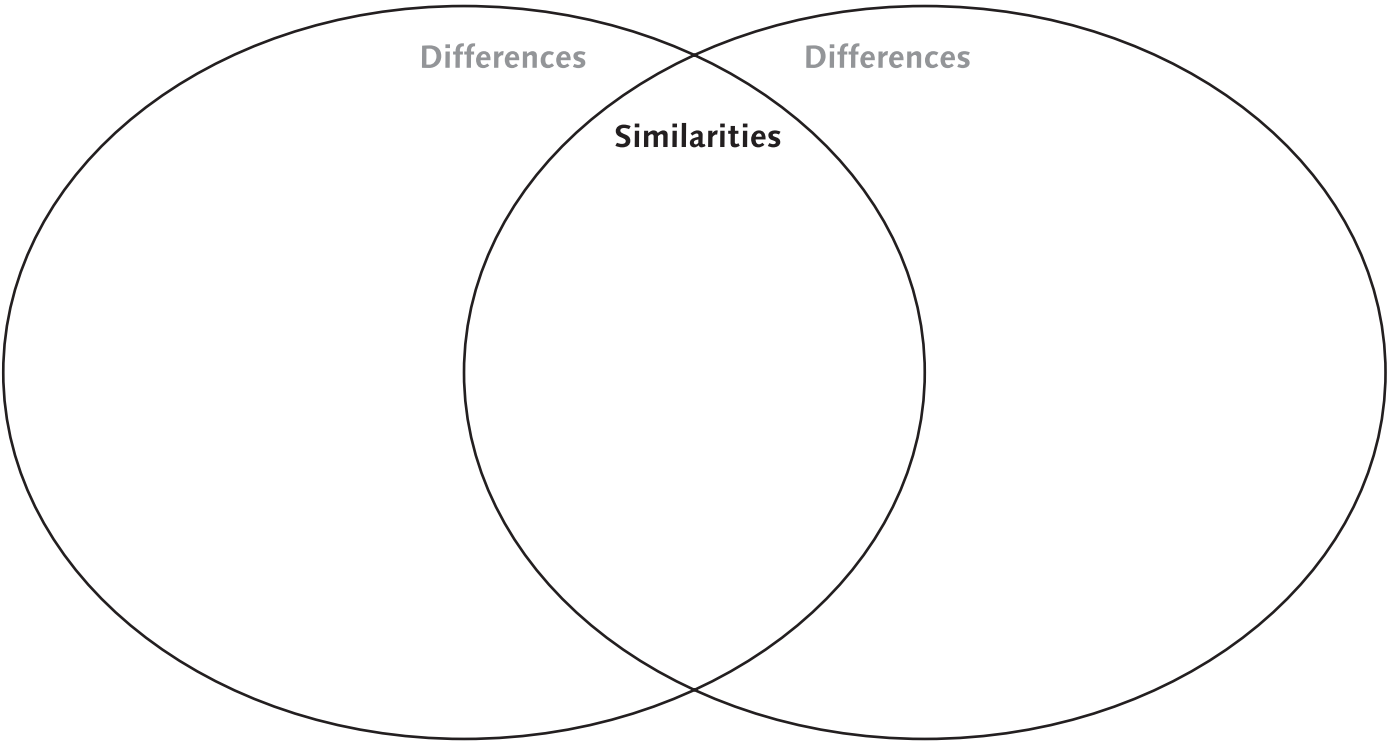
Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Here is a list of the kinds of elements you might compare in the two photographs:

- subject matter
- facial expression
- clothing
- activity
- point of view (where the photographer was standing in relation to the subject)
- composition (the arrangement of things in the photograph)
- lighting (can you identify the light source?)
- overall mood of the photograph

Study your two chosen photographs carefully, and read their labels. Then fill in the diagram.





**Go to Gallery W105 or W106**

**Activity 4: Comparing Two Photographs (continued)**

Look at the dates of the two works. Were the images made close in time or several years apart? Based on what you know about American history, how do the photographs reflect the times in which they were made?

Briefly summarize what you learned by making this comparison.

## Go to Gallery W105 or W106

### Activity 5: Thinking about Personal Histories

Find an image of a person in which you get a strong sense about who that person is.

Some examples are:

- *Human Erosion in California/Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California*
- *Pledge of Allegiance, Rafael Weill Elementary School, San Francisco*
- *Richmond, California/It Was Never Like This Back Home*
- *Young Mother and Son, Gunlock, Utah*
- *A Man's Beginnings Stay with Him, Toquerville, Utah*
- *Bessie, Daughter of Zion, Toquerville, Utah*

Or you can pick any other image in gallery W106 or W105 in which you get a strong sense of the person.

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe this person. What does he or she look like? What might the person be feeling?

In the space below, write an internal monologue of what you think the person would be saying to himself or herself.

**Go to Gallery W105 or W106**

**Activity 5: Thinking about Personal Histories (continued)**

If you could ask this person three questions, what would those questions be? And what would the person say?

1: Question:

Answer:

2. Question:

Answer:

3. Question:

Answer:

## Go to Galleries W104, W105, or W106

### Activity 6: Writing a Poem

Very often, writers find inspiration in works of art. Look around in galleries W104, W105, or W106 for a photograph that you find particularly interesting or moving. It could be one you've already thought a lot about using this set of activities or it could be a completely new image for you. Write a poem based upon the photograph. Follow the instructions below for each line.

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Choose a one-word title based upon the work of art

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Write an action phrase

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Write a simile (a phrase that uses "like" or "as")

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Write something you would hear (either words or a sound)

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Give the artwork another, longer title

Example:



*Highway to the West/  
U.S. 54 in Southern  
New Mexico*

Highway  
Pointing like an arrow toward  
a better place  
Like a knife slicing through  
burlap.  
The whir of cicadas fills the  
still, dusty air.  
Carry us west where we can  
begin again.

Title of photograph you were inspired by:

---

Stand and read your poem to your classmates.  
Does hearing someone else's poem change the way you see the photograph that served as the inspiration? How? Why?

## After You Leave the Museum

### Activity 7: Thinking Back on Lange

What are three things you learned today about Dorothea Lange or her photography?

1.

2.

3.

If you had the chance to take home one Dorothea Lange photograph, which one would it be, and why?

Title:

Reason for your preference:

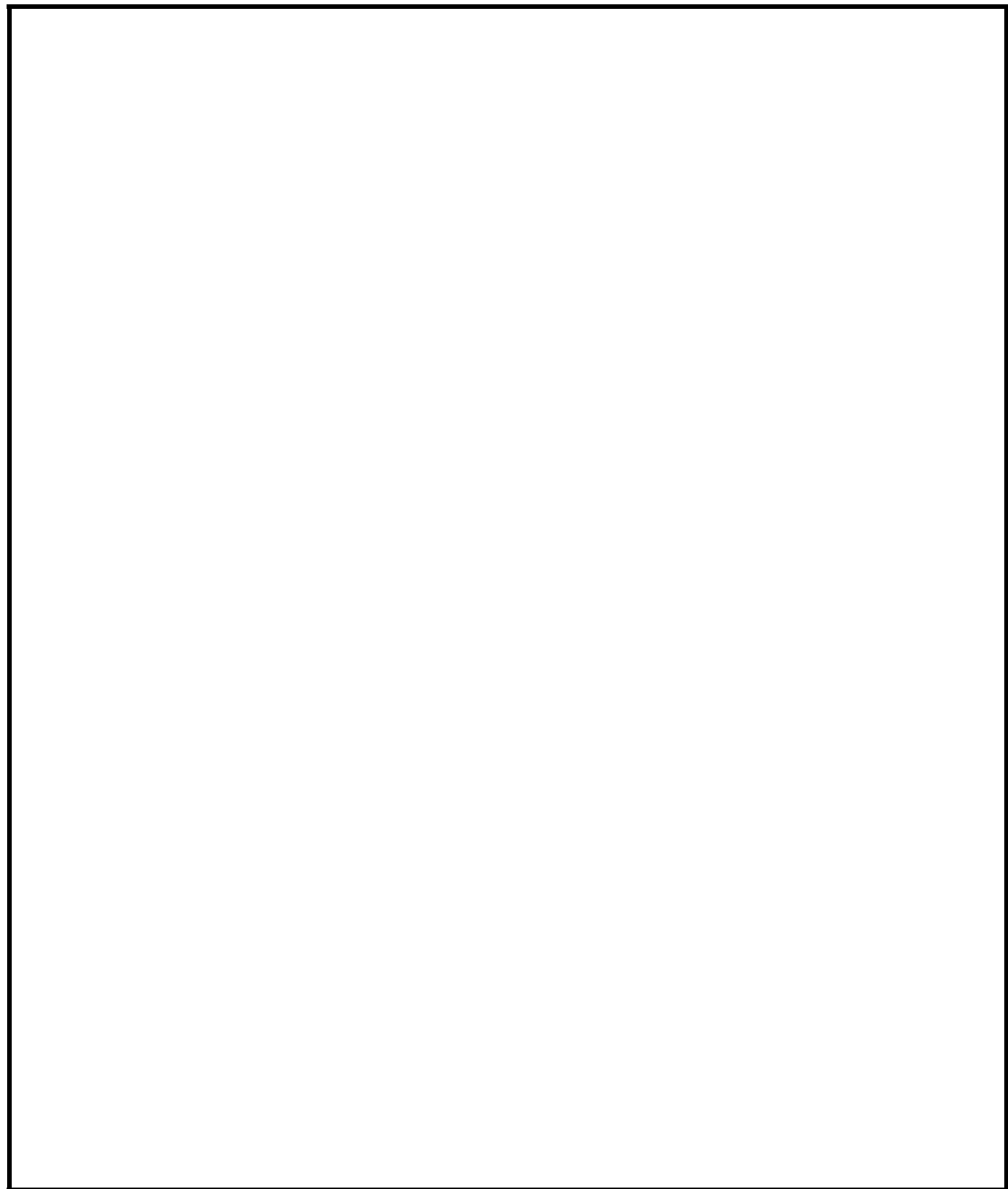
When you return to school or home, imagine you are going to be photographed and that the purpose of the photograph is to describe who you are and the times you live in. In the space below, write out the instructions to the photographer. Include the following information:

- the location or setting for the picture
- any objects or people the photographer should include
- where objects and people should be placed
- whether the photograph should be a close-up or not
- how the subjects should be lit
- whether the photograph should be in color or black and white
- whether any predominant shapes or patterns should appear
- the overall mood that should be conveyed

You can also do a sketch in the box on the reverse to express your idea for the photograph.

**After You Leave the Museum**  
**Activity 7: Thinking Back on Lange (continued)**

In the space provided, sketch the image.

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for a student to sketch an image. The box occupies the majority of the lower half of the page.