

Beyond the Grave: A Brief History of Spirit Photography

Guiding Questions

- How did spirit photography begin?
 - How did it grow in popularity?
- Who profited off of spirit photography? Was it the photographers or customers?
- How was Mumler accused of fraud?
- What is spiritualism?
- Who were the Fox sisters?
 - What was their role in the Spiritualist movement? Do you believe them?
- How was Buguet accused of fraud?
 - What proof did they find against him?
- Why are people interested in spirit photography of their loved ones?
 - How did events like the Civil War or Influenza epidemic affect this?
- Do you think charging people for spirit photography is moral or immoral?
 - Why or why not?
- In what ways do people participate in the same idea of spirit photography today?
 - What cultural practices and ideas emphasize keeping our deceased loved ones close?
- How exactly did these photographers incorporate these “spirits” into the photographs?
 - What photography methods did they use?

Classroom Activities

- Mumler tricked many into believing his spirit photography was legitimate and was even acquitted of fraud during a trial, despite evidence demonstrating his tricks.
 - Find other prominent examples of fraud throughout history, especially where the accused were acquitted.
- Capturing spirits on film and video is more common today, but debunking this evidence is just as common.
 - Try to create your own spirit photography or video! See how easy it is to make it believable.
 - Find examples online of spirit photographs or videos. Examine them and see if you can debunk them and discover how they’ve been doctored.
- Create a marketing campaign to get the word out about Mumler’s spirit photography.
 - The campaign can either be set in the 1860’s (the peak of Mumler’s career) or it can be set in modern times!