Photographer: Joe Rosenthal
Born 1911

Reflections

What elements make this photograph ‘iconic’?

What values and virtues are being symbolized within this image?

What impact do you think this image would have had on the American public?

Was the photographer affected by patriotism when taking the shot?

Does it make the photographer change the way he documents the war?

Photograph: US Marines
Iwo Jima
1945

Contextual information

Joe Rosenthal was another photographer who, for better or worse, despite taking thousands of photographs throughout a long and distinguished career, was known essentially for one picture he took in the Far East in 1945.

The shot he took was the iconic vision of a group of US marines standing on the top of a mountain in Iwo Jima raising the flag of the United States of America.

The shot has since had many uses, all relating in some way to the concept of victory. It is also the image that was used to shape the sculpture at the United States Marine Corps War Memorial in Arlington, and it was featured in a special series of stamps by the US Postal Service.

The picture itself was taken by the diminutive Rosenthal shortly after the US Marines landed on the volcanic island of Iwo Jima. He took a number of shots, and in fact there were two flags raised on the day – this was the larger of the two.

The photograph won Rosenthal the Pulitzer Prize in 1945 and the picture was later described as ‘depicting one of the war’s great moments’ and capturing a frozen flash of history.