

The Work of Mathew Brady

Birth of an Artist—and an Art Form

Part 1

Mathew Brady was born in 1823 near Saratoga Springs, New York. The son of Irish immigrants, he left home at age 16 to study painting with William Page, a famous artist. Late in 1839, they traveled to New York City where Page introduced Brady to Samuel Morse, a professor of painting at New York University. Morse had met Louis Daguerre in Paris earlier that year. He brought the French artist's new "daguerreotype" invention back to New York with him. The daguerreotype was the earliest form of photography.

Brady had a good artistic eye, and he immediately became interested in this new art form. Unlike many other artists, he was not afraid to experiment with new ways of taking and printing pictures. He constantly worked to make his photography better.

He became one of the first and greatest photographers. Some people found him proud and overly conceited, but by the 1840s, he had become very successful.

Pictures of History

Part 2

In 1844, Brady set up his own gallery. He hired assistants to work for him, and began his "Illustrious Americans" project. This involved taking pictures of the most famous people of his day. Over 150 years later, many Americans still think of the mid-19th century in terms of Brady's pictures. He took photographs of the poet Walt Whitman, the writer Edgar Allen Poe, and several U.S. presidents. Brady's assistant Anthony Berger made many famous pictures of Abraham Lincoln. One of these pictures was later used as a model for Lincoln's head on the penny.

Brady believed that photographs could be used to preserve history, and the beginning of the Civil War changed his career. In 1861, he decided to make a photographic record of the people and events of the war. He hired a number of cameramen and loaded wagons with supplies. Then he sent his people out to record events all over the country.

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The Work of Mathew Brady *(Continued)*

Brady's pictures were the first real images Americans had ever seen of the horrors of war, and they forever changed the way Americans thought about the "glory" of battle. He showed the human suffering that war caused. His photos of battlefields after the battle were particularly disturbing. In the end, Brady's photographs showed Americans that war was grim, not glorious.

Not all of Brady's pictures, however, showed the horrors of battle. His photographs of soldiers in camp give us a sense of what life must have been like for troops on both sides of the conflict. Brady also photographed many military leaders. The pictures help us imagine these officers in the field, giving orders and leading their men into battle. More than anyone else, Mathew Brady gave the Civil War a human face.

His Greatest Success—and His Biggest Failure



The photographs Brady and his assistants made of the Civil War include some of his most important work. Sadly, they also ruined his career. Brady spent most of his own money for supplies and equipment to photograph the war. He thought that the government would later buy his prints, but the government refused.

It is not clear why Brady's career went so badly after he had done such great work. Maybe people simply did not want to be reminded of the war that had torn the country apart.

Brady eventually went bankrupt and had to sell his New York gallery and studio. Later the government paid him \$25,000 for the rights to his prints, but it was not enough to save his studio. Brady died in 1896, a very poor and broken man.

Today, it is hard to imagine a world in which every event and every person is not photographed many times—in family albums, in newspapers, and so on. We will leave many records of our history for those who come after us, but this was not the case for many of the people who lived in the 19th century and before. For most of these people, we have only our imaginations—and the work of Mathew Brady.

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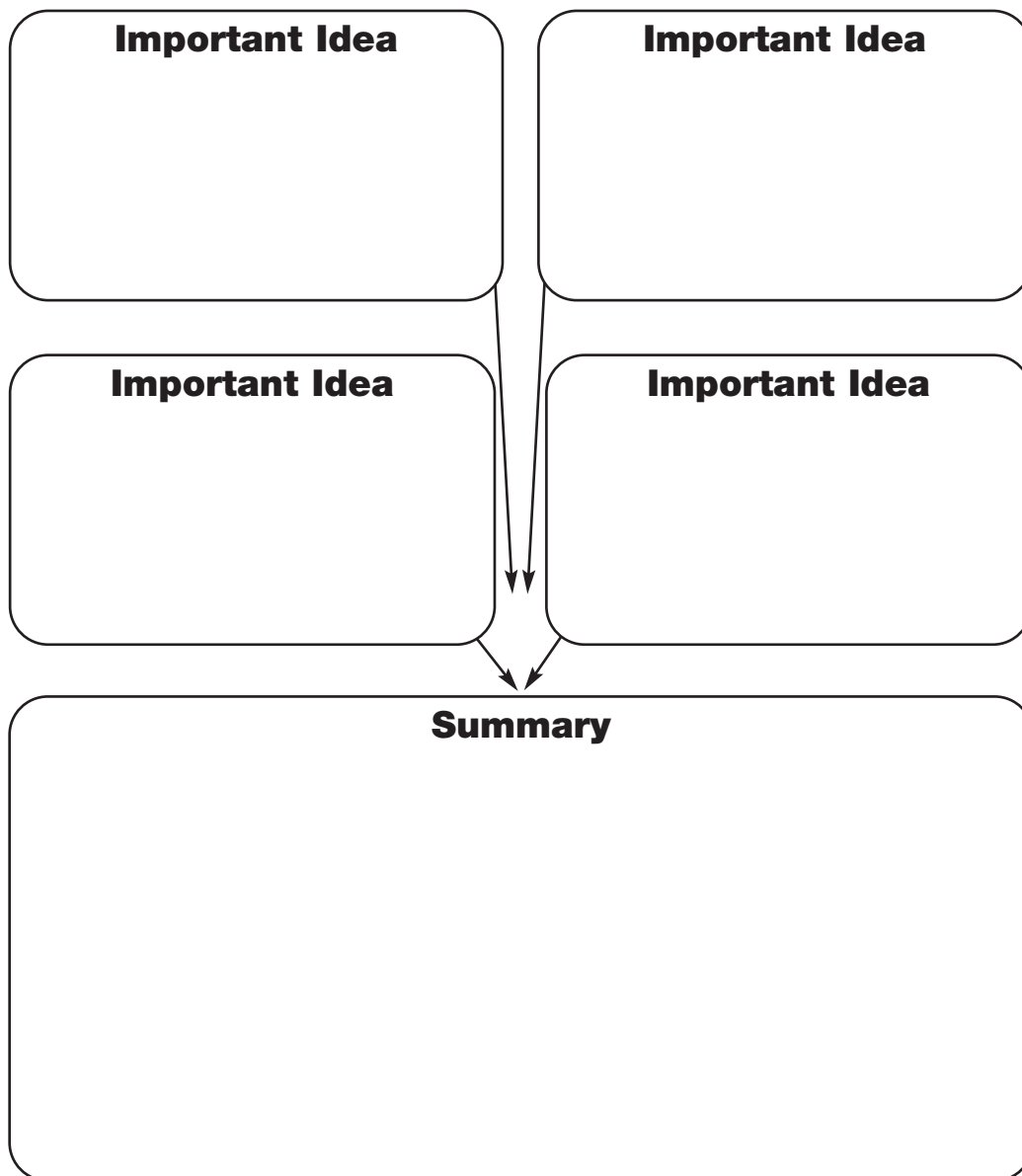
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Summarize

When you tell a friend about the plot of a book or an article you've read, you are giving a **summary**. A summary is a short statement that tells the most important ideas about a topic in your own words.

Use this chart to help you identify important ideas or details. Then put them together into a summary.

Passage: _____



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