Lesson Plan for Chapter 4

*Instant: The Story of Polaroid* by Christopher Bonanos
First Year Book 2014-15

Prior to Class:
Have students read Chapter 4 of *Instant* in preparation for this class activity and discussion. The chapter guide online (fyb.umd.edu) will also help them prepare for the class.

**Chapter 4: Meet the Swinger (And Everything Else)**

‘Meet the Swinger (And Everything Else)’ takes you through Polaroid in its heyday. This chapter chronicles the growth of the company as well as Land’s vision for his employees. You see Howard Rogers sit down for two years to think before setting out to successfully develop color film. You see the advertising genius behind Polaroid and its iconic design, and the lengthy list of artists who used it in their work. You hear about the impact of instant film and cameras, from the Automatic 100 to the Swinger to the incredible 20x24 camera, on photography and the way people used it in their daily lives.

When you mention Polaroid to anyone who grew up during this time, you almost always find you’ll hear a story about their first Polaroid camera, or a memory of their parents taking instant photos – how it had had an impact of their life. They also might remember its decline – what caused them to stop using it?

**Pre-Class Assignment: Polaroid Interview**

Interview a friend or family member about their experience with Polaroid. Do they have any memories or stories about Polaroid in their daily life? Did they have a camera, and if so, what kind? What did they use it for? What was their impression of Polaroid at the time? What do they think of it now, looking back?

Feel free to come up with additional questions – these are just meant to be a way to start conversation. Have each student do a short write up of their interview and come in ready to discuss what they found.

**Class Activity**

- In small groups, have the students share their interviews. Provide each group with a stack of post-it notes. Each student, while they listen to what their fellow student found, should write down a key word or phrase that conveys the themes within each interview. As they do this, have them put their post-it notes on the board.
• As a class, look for patterns in the words on the board. Do certain words show up more frequently than others? Are there any themes that are stronger than others? Group together similar post-it notes one the board to create a visual.

• Are there negative as well as positive experiences? As a class, separate the post-it notes into ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ categories.

Discussion

1. Have you learned anything about how Polaroid was perceived and experienced during a different time? What were your own perceptions of Polaroid, before you read the chapter and conducted the interview? Have they changed, and if so, how?

2. As a class, come up with a few things that might hold a similar place in life today as Polaroid did during its heyday. Did anything you heard in your interview remind you of an experience you’ve had with a particular product in your own life?

3. What were the similarities and differences you encountered when sharing interviews? Are there similarities and differences with how each student experiences a product today (take Apple and the IPhone, for instance)?

4. How did what you heard in your interview fit with what you read in your book?

5. With the decline of instant photography, do you think we’ve lost something or have the gains of digital photography adequately replaced it?

6. Pick a technology that you think needs major improvement. How would you improve it? What would be the cost of changing it? What would be gained by your improvement? What would be lost?

Ex. When people wrote letters, it created an easy way to document a family history. Now that everything is online, we can communicate faster but we also save less physical documentation. The gains of this switch in communication are that we have nearly unlimited storage, we can communicate instantly across large distances, and it is easy to speak face to face with the people we love. The losses are that we no longer have the same kind of written records that we did before, and this type of information won’t likely be passed down to future generations. It’s important to remember that every innovation has its gains but also its losses.