

LESSON PLAN



GREY AREA

DESCRIPTION

This photography lesson will get students to search for the “grey areas” in black & white photography, such as narrative, mood, and social/cultural contexts.

STUDENT AGE/GRADE LEVEL

Grades 9-12

OBJECTIVE

Upon completion of the lesson, students will be able to take and develop photographs that express personal meaning and social/cultural contexts. A strong focus will be put on formal and compositional quality. Students will develop a critical mindset toward photography, gaining the ability to dissect visual imagery and develop meaning of their own.

RELATED EXHIBITION/TOUR/ARTIST

- Exhibition: *Danny Lyon’s “Bikeriders”*
- Photography from the Akron Art Museum Collection

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RELATED WORKS



Danny Lyon, *Crossing the Ohio, Louisville, 1966.*

Gelatin silver print

NOTES: This photo presents a dramatic inside look at 1960s biker counterculture. From 1963 – 1967 Danny Lyon not only captured the bikers in photographs, but immersed himself in the lifestyle. Lyon joined the Chicago Outlaw Motorcycle Club, making him a pioneer of the new form of photojournalism where the artist was personally involved with the subject. This series was featured in Lyon's defining first photography book and became one of the most important and influential documentary series of the late 20th century.

Discussion questions:

- The rider is shown looking back behind him. What/ who do you think he is looking at?
- Where do you think this rider is coming from and going to?
- Who do you believe took the photograph?

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Diane Arbus, *Child With Toy Hand Grenade In Central Park*, 1962 (printed later).

Gelatin silver print

NOTES: Arbus sought subjects for her unconventional portraits in New York City's streets, tenements, nightclubs, and parks. Rather than present this young boy as playful and cherubic, she photographed him in a moment of extreme frustration. His wiry limbs, clenched fists, and frantic expression, coupled with the very real-looking grenade in his hand, give the image a surreal, unsettling quality.

Discussion questions:

- Let's say this photo is part of a five image sequence and this is image number three. What happened before and what happens after this photo?
- What does boy's body language and facial expression tell us about his intentions?
- What does the grenade in the boy's hand symbolize? Does it symbolize anything?
- How does the scenery play a role in our interpretation of the picture?



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Mary Ellen Mark, *Tiny holding her dog, Seattle, 1983.*

Selenium toned gelatin silver print

NOTES: In 1983, Mary Ellen Mark was sent by LIFE magazine to photograph street kids in Seattle. There, she met thirteen-year-old prostitute Erin “Tiny” Blackwell. Tiny became one of the central subjects not only of Mark’s photographs, but also of the documentary film *Streetwise* which followed in 1984. Mark has unflinchingly documented Tiny’s life for nearly three decades, illustrating her struggles with poverty, substance abuse, and abusive partners and family, but also capturing moments of joy and intimacy.

Tiny clutches her dog, displaying an obvious maternal instinct. In 1983, Tiny said that she would like, ideally, to have ten children. Her first five, Daylon, La Shawndrea, Keanna Rose, Mikka, and Rayshon, are all by different fathers, two of whom are unknown. She also has five children by her current husband, Will.

Discussion questions:

- What are the elements of the photograph and what do they tell us about what is going on?
- Who is this person and what is she doing?
- When do you think this photograph was taken? What clues do you find in the photo that tell you so?

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MATERIALS

- Digital cameras, iPhones, and/or iPads.
- Computers (one per student)
- iPhoto and/or photo editing software
- Photo printer
- Photo paper (5 sheets per student)
- Variety of physical props for photos

PROCEDURE

DISCUSSION:

- Present students with art objects (or reproductions) and lead a discussion about what the students observe. Use [Visual Thinking Strategies](#) technique if desired. Visit www.akronartmuseum.org/collection for more artworks and information
- Hold a discussion about the photos within this lesson plan and seen at the museum. Allow students enough time to look at the object before beginning discussion.
- Ask students about their interpretations of the photographs presented. Instruct students to explain their interpretations using the content seen within the photos.
- As discussion progresses and students have expressed their interpretations of the photographs, begin to give clues of context, subject matter and meaning within the photos.
- Question how students' interpretations change/stay the same before and after knowing the artist's intention of the photographs. "Do you feel differently about the photo now? Do you like or dislike the work more? Why?"

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STUDIO:

- Instruct students to split into groups of two or three.
- Every student in each group will select combinations of poses, props and backgrounds to develop a narrative for a series of photographs that will be taken of him/her (by a student in their group).
- Every student should have a chance to both be model and photographer.
- Emphasize the importance of the roles facial expression, pose, body language, props and background/setting play in communicating a story to an audience.
- After each student has played the role of photographer and model, they should upload their images and edit them as desired using photo editing software. Finally, they'll print the images for critique and discuss them as they discussed the photos from the Danny Lyon exhibition and Akron Art Museum Collection.

STANDARDS

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION VISUAL ARTS STANDARDS

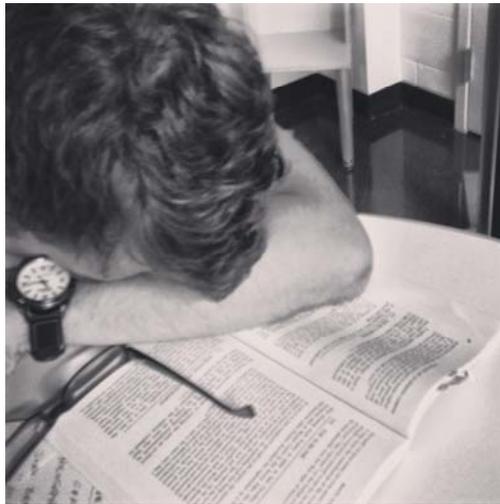
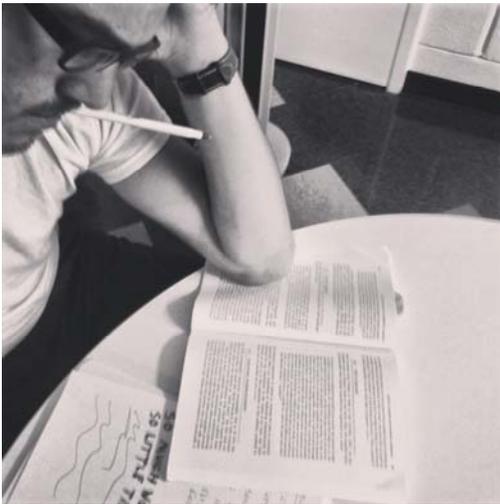
	Perceiving/Knowing	Producing/Performing	Responding/Reflecting
HS Beginning	1PE	5PR	1RE
HS Intermediate	1PE	5PR	1RE
HS Accelerated	1PE	5PR	1RE
HS Advanced	1PE	5PR	1RE

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EXAMPLE



Education Dept, *Late Nights at the Library*. 2013

iPhone photograph manipulated with Instagram App filters.

This scene depicts the struggle to stay attentive, productive, and awake during a late night study in a college library.

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FOLLOW-UP LESSON SUGGESTIONS

Photographs can be manipulated in many ways. A follow up lesson could ask students to manipulate their photographs either physically (through collage or as reference for a painting) or through the use of technology. A compare/contrast critique/lesson could then be given, further emphasizing similarities and differences of processes while using various media.

RESOURCES

Akron Art Museum Collection <http://akronartmuseum.org/collection/>

Bradley, R. (2013). 6 easy ways to give your photographs a compelling narrative. *Photodoto*.

Retrieved from: <http://photodoto.com/6-easy-ways-to-give-your-photographs-a-compelling-narrative/>

2012 ODE Visual Arts Standards

Diane Arbus – The Photographic Work. (2013). <http://diane-arbus-photography.com/>

Mary Ellen Mark Home Page. (2013). <http://www.maryellenmark.com/index.html>

Patton, P. (2013). Two looks at Danny Lyon’s ‘Bikeriders’ photos. *The New York Times*.

Retrieved from: http://wheels.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/03/07/two-looks-at-danny-lyons-bikeriders-photos/?_r=0

Visual Thinking Strategies: <http://vtshome.org>