

The ABC's of Photography

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INTRODUCTION

Students today are exposed to photography on a level that has never been experienced before. Cameras of one sort or another are immediately accessible. Students take pictures with cell phones that fit in the palm of their hands and digital cameras that are slightly larger than a credit card. When they are not taking pictures, they are showing pictures to their friends, or looking at their friends' pictures. Anyone can take photographs.

But, questions arise. First, how do you get students to evaluate their images? And, do they need to? What kind of standards in photography are important and why? How can I teach photography to students and make it relevant and interesting? I don't want to turn teaching photography into a sit-and-get experience. In order for my photography curriculum to generate student enthusiasm, I have to create a curriculum unit that my students can relate to. So, my next step is to combine all these questions into a workable idea that students can learn from.

I have decided to base the curriculum unit on what I think would be an intuitive student point of view. I begin with what students already know – how to shoot pictures. The format of each part of the unit will be five steps. First, I will ask students to take pictures of something relevant to them. These assignments will be according to subject and will vary. I find that assignments help focus the student. If I say “Go take pictures of whatever you want,” students get lost trying to decide “Of what?” If I give them an assignment, then they can get creative within those boundaries. Then the class critiques these photos according to what the assignment was. Questions will be asked about why photographs are successful or why not? What could have been done differently to make the photographs more effective? The third phase is the how-to, when we discuss how to accomplish the assignment through changes in composition, lighting, value, texture, and/or color. The fourth step is to show images from photographers who are successful in this particular area and examine why. The fifth step is to reshoot the assignment making the changes indicated in the critiques, and then look at the final product again. Each assignment will follow these same steps.

I want this to be a student-centered curriculum. In order to do this, the assignments will need to be based on what students already do. I want them to take photographs, and then we will discuss what went right and wrong. I don't want to give them too much information about how to do it up front. I want them to do the assignments, and then we'll critique the work, figure out how to improve each photograph, and then repeat at least some of the original assignment and see how the “fixes” went. This way the students start off with what they know (first photos), how to fix problems (how-to of photography), and then demonstrate what they have learned (the second photos).

I am gearing this curriculum specifically to my upper level students at Lamar. I am currently teaching Art 1, 2, 3, 4, and International Baccalaureate Art at Lamar High School in Houston Independent School District. My students come from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities. The school has a broad mix of ethnicities – 26% African-American, 5% Asian, 31% Hispanic, and 38% white. At-risk students make up 44% of the student population, while

another 39% are honors students. The mix of students in my classroom seems to correlate with the overall school profile. In addition to at-risk and honors students, I also have special education students and LEP (Limited English Proficiency) students. I am planning this curriculum for upper level students (Art 2 and above) in grades 10 through 12. These students have had Art 1, so they are familiar with the elements of art and the principles of design. They are also a little more mature than the 9th graders and are more apt to work independently.

HOW TO LOOK AT PHOTOGRAPHS

Edward Weston identified some of the choices of formal elements the photographer has when exposing a negative: “By varying the position of his camera, his camera angle, or the focal length of his lens, the photographer can achieve an infinite number of varied compositions with a single stationary subject” (Barrett 26). John Szarkowski reiterates what Weston observed over fifty years ago and adds an important insight: “The simplicity of photography lies in the fact that it is very easy to make a picture. The staggering complexity of it lies in the fact that a thousand other pictures of the same subject would have been equally easy” (Barrett 26).

Process of Group Critique

Introduction

When beginning a critique, the teacher should set out some ground rules. Otherwise, especially with high school students, a group critique can turn into unmitigated chaos. The teacher needs to keep the discussion focused. The kids will tend to veer off the subject and sidetrack into other issues besides photography. You need to get them back on topic. Also, courtesy and respect for one another needs to be emphasized (including for the teacher) – no taking potshots at each other or anyone’s photographs. Try to encourage students to focus on the elements of art and principles of design in talking about photography. I try to ban the two phrases “I like” and “I don’t like.”

Describe What You See

Describing a work of art (photography or any other medium) serves several different purposes. One is to slow your eye down to really look at the work of art. Another purpose is to see what is there, including detail and possible clues to interpretation. Each person will see different things in a work of art. This selective viewing is in part due to the individual life experiences that cause us to relate to some parts of an artwork and completely ignore other parts.

I try to avoid the mood or emotional words at this point (sad, angry, happy, calm, etc.). Students want to jump right in to talking about what the artist is saying. At the descriptive stage, they need to focus on what is there.

Consider Subject Matter

What is the subject matter? When discussing subject matter, what kinds of words get used? Listening to how the subject matter is discussed can be very informative as to how the work will be interpreted. Many descriptive words used to discuss subject matter show bias on the part of the observer.

Consider How Form Relates to Subject Matter

How is the subject matter presented? The photographer made choices based on the formal elements of line, value, shape, color, texture, and space. He or she also made decisions about how to use these elements to create balance, rhythm, emphasis, contrast, movement, and unity. Talk about how the photographer used these elements of art and principles of design.

Students first learning to critique art may need to actually see a list of the elements and principles to help them along. As time goes on they will automatically start thinking in these terms. I spend a lot of time at the beginning of the year going over art criticism and “training”

my students to go through the whole process. In the end that structure and repetition pays off, and the art criticism process becomes second nature to my students.

Let Your Interpretation Be a Communal Endeavor

Listen to what each person has to say about how they see the image. Each person adds to the thoughts and ideas expressed. Each person will see the image differently. Let these ideas build on each other. Emphasize the fact that there are no right and wrong comments. Different people see different things.

The Photographer Should Be Silent

The photographer does not need to explain his or her work. Others can view the image and make of the image what they see in it. The photographer can prejudice the viewer by talking about his or her work. The photographer may also feel the need to justify or defend the image(s), which is not really necessary in a group critique.

Interpret the Photograph by the Questions It Raises

What questions are being asked by the photographs? What are the photographs asking you to see? What is excluded from the photograph? Is the photographer taking the viewer's frame of reference for granted? Which of these questions can you find the answers to in the photograph(s)?

Avoid Hasty Judgments

Try to absorb the image first. Interpret what you see, then start evaluating how the image affects you. Try to listen to what others have to say and seriously consider their opinion even if totally opposite from yours.

What Criteria Are Used to Judge the Photograph?

You need to decide what criteria should be used in judging the photograph. Also be aware of the criteria your students use to judge that they are not aware of.

Consider Assumptions

The photographer is operating under his or her assumptions about life. You are operating under your assumptions and beliefs about life. What are these assumptions? Do they need to be suspended in viewing the photograph?

Be Honest and Open

How do you see the image? Viewing images is not so much about impressing others with your knowledge as it is about the impact the image has on you. What do you see? What are your real reactions to the image (Barrett 180-182)?

HOW-TO'S OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Introduction

“Photography literally means ‘drawing with light’” (Schaub 8). Photography is governed by the same elements of art and principles of design as other art forms. Most of my students are familiar with the elements of art (line, shape, form, space, color, value, and texture) as well as the principles of design (rhythm, movement, balance, proportion, variety, emphasis, harmony, and unity). I plan to do a quick refresher summary of the elements and principles and how they apply to photography. I will follow the summary up with some general “rules” of composition, emphasizing that these rules are guidelines and are not absolute. Then, I will go over some simple lighting guidelines.

Students already know how to operate a camera, so I won't spend a lot of time talking about the technical aspects of photography except to note that students need to be aware of tripods and how to use them. Tripods are an important tool for photography. Generally they are very easy to set up – just loosen the joints and expand the legs, then screw the camera into the top plate. Many students have never used a tripod, so a quick demonstration is in order.

Using the Elements of Art and the Principles of Design in Photography

Line is the strongest of the six elements of art, and the most recognizable. Line is very expressive emotionally. Horizontal lines create a feeling of calm and peace. Vertical lines are more formal and dignified. Diagonal lines give a feeling of movement, excitement, and speed. Thicker lines are “stronger” than thinner lines (Lauer and Pentak 90). Line comes in all shapes and sizes – long, short, thick, thin, straight, curvilinear, diagonal, zigzag, vertical, and horizontal. Line is every bit as expressive and important in photography as any other visual element. Three kinds of line you will find in photography are actual line, implied lines (lines that are not really there, but they seem to be because the eye connects them – for example footprints in the sand), and psychic line (lines in image being emphasized by subjects within the image; for example eyes gazing a certain direction, fingers pointing, etc.) (Lauer and Pentak 120-139).

My students have a difficult time with seeing line when it is not actually drawn out for them. They do not always see implied line or the line created by shape, color, value, texture, etc. This is an important step, so I usually slow this part down a bit to make sure they understand that lines are not always the kind you draw with a pencil or pen.

Shape is enclosed two-dimensional space – the element of identification. When we see shape, recognition occurs – we know what the “thing” is. Shape is how we recognize subject. Shape is best defined by frontlighting (light directly in front of subject) or backlighting (light directly behind the subject). Silhouette is the purest form of shape. Form is the same as shape except three-dimensional space instead of two. Form has added depth from shape. Form is best defined from sidelighting (light source come from either side) to give it dimension (Peterson 56-58)

Space is the area around the object(s) in a picture plane. In photography, positive space (area occupied by subject matter) is just as important as negative space (area around the subject). Positive space and negative space are also referred to as figure and ground respectively and can be used to indicate mood and expressiveness in photographs (Peterson 156-161).

Color is the next element. Color is very emotional in the visual arts. Red represents passion and power and is stimulating, exciting, and motivating. Red represents rage, control, power, blood, and stop signs. Red advances more than any other color in the picture plane. The viewer usually sees red first when viewing an image. Blue is calm cool nurturing, soft, refreshing, safe, and dependable and recedes in space. Yellow is a light, playful, creative, and warm color that comes forward in space. On the flip side, yellow is considered cowardly and sickly. Orange also comes forward. Orange is fire and flames, warmth, fruity, the sun, lust, health, vigor, excitement, and adventure. Green is the dominant color found in nature and is the symbol of hope and recovery, freshness and renewal, fertility, growth, and abundance. On the down side, green is the color of aliens, envy, seasickness, and phlegm. Green is a cool color and recedes in the picture plane. Violet recedes even more than blue or green and is the symbol for royalty and Christianity. Violet commands respect, signifies wealth, implies leadership, and connotes spirituality (Peterson 76-78).

Color in photography will be one of the most difficult concepts for students to grasp. When we do color wheel projects, students have a hard time understanding how colors mix, much less understanding how colors interact with each other. I am tentatively planning to do some

photography exercises in combining colors with different color lights during the day (early morning, noon, early evening). I will have students shoot specific color schemes at different times of the day so they can see how the colors appear in warm and cool light.

Value (lightness and darkness) is a very important element in photography. When shooting photographs, you need to be able to see the lights and darks in your image. You have to pay attention to getting the detail in the lightest and darkest areas of your image. Otherwise your picture will get very flat and dull. The contrasts in value in a photograph add variety and interest (Schaub 121-127).

Value is another area that students have a difficult time seeing. Students tend to draw without using a wide range of values. I am anticipating similar issues with photography. Value issues will be addressed during the photography critiques. I think that pointing out how much more interest and visual texture that value can add will help students understand the importance of value. I think that value in photography will be an easier concept for students to master than value in drawing, so I will not spend too much time on this unless I see that it is a big issue for students.

Texture can be actual or implied. Texture adds visual interest to an image. Texture arouses our sense of touch. Like smell, texture awakens the viewers' own personal experiences – they remember the feel of plush carpet under their bare feet very vividly when faced with the texture in the image (Harvey 88). Sidelighting works better when photographing texture. The best time to shoot texture using available light is early morning or late afternoon from a low angle with the light coming from the side (Peterson 62).

To see how well your students are using the elements of art, the following exercise is helpful. Have your students write the following headings across the top of a piece of paper – line, shape/form, space, color, value, and texture. Then, number down 1 through 30. Then, have students look at 30 photographs they have taken and check off the elements emphasized in each photo. Look at the columns most often checked and least often checked. Now, make a point to shoot photos using the elements least often checked (Peterson. 49).

The principles of design are the rules for using the elements of art. The first two principles are rhythm and movement. Rhythm can be likened to the beat in music. Rhythm is how the artwork “sounds.” Movement refers to how the viewer’s eye travels through the image. Rhythm is based on repetition of shapes, patterns, and sequences. Alternating rhythm would be using lights and darks to move the eye. Progressive rhythm would be repetition that changes over the picture plane (i.e. patterns converge) (Lauer and Pentak 106-115). Patterns are repetition that creates emphasis. People are attracted to visual patterns because they are comfortable and predictable (the known in an unknown world) (Peterson 92).

Rhythm and movement are best explained while looking at photographs as a group. I will show some examples so students can clearly see what rhythm and movement are. Otherwise, students will not understand what these principles are.

Balance is the next principle of design. There are three types of visual balance – formal (symmetrical – same on both sides), informal (asymmetrical – different objects on both sides of the image, but visually balanced), and radial (emanates equally out from center of image, not used much in photography). Balance can be achieved using value (black is heavier than white), color (bright, warm colors attract more attention and therefore weigh more visually than dull, dark, and cool colors), texture (the more texture, the greater the visual weight), shape (complex shapes “weigh” more than simple shapes), and position (larger shapes weigh less as they move toward the center, smaller shapes weigh more as they move to the outside of the image – like balancing a seesaw) (Lauer and Pentak 90-99).

Balance is usually reasonably easy for students to comprehend. I cover the different kinds of balance early in the year so students can use balance in creating their artistic compositions throughout the year. I do not anticipate any issues with students understanding balance.

Proportion is another principle of design. Knowing the proportion and scale of the objects in your photographs are important unless you are leaving them deliberately. Showing proportion can be easily done by including an object such as a person where the approximate absolute size is known. As a design element, proportion can be used for emphasis – small objects can be blown up to very large scale sizes and vice versa. Exaggerated scale one way or another is a good way to draw the viewer's eye to a certain subject in your image (Lauer and Pentak 64-72).

Emphasis calls attention to what you want the viewer to focus on, or the focal point of your image. If there are too many subjects emphasized, the viewer's eye will bounce around. You need a focal point with secondary "accents" (and therefore not as much emphasis). Emphasis can be created by isolation (the object is standing alone), placement (lines in the picture radiate into the subject), contrast (in value, color, shape, etc.), and pattern (emphasis is created by the subject disrupting a pattern) (Lauer and Pentak 50-54).

Emphasis is a little difficult for students to get. The easiest way to get the idea of emphasis across is showing photographs to the students and pointing out how the photographer has used emphasis to get his or her message across to the viewer.

Variety, harmony, and unity are the other principles of design. Variety is used to stimulate visual interest within the image. If everything were the same size, color, value, etc., the image would get pretty boring. When you use variety in the components of your image, the result will be a much more interesting composition. Harmony refers to how the elements in an image work with each other and interact with each other. If one part of the image is not in sync with the rest of the image, the overall result can be very uneasy, even irritating. You do need to keep in mind that that could also be the artist's intent. Unity describes how well the image works as a whole. Sometimes the pieces work wonderfully well by themselves but do not combine successfully in the final image. This can usually be easily remedied by composition.

Rules of Thumb for Composition

There are two basic types of composition – open and closed. The artist makes choices on whether to include the whole scene, part of the scene, which parts of the scene, and how close or far off the scene will be. A closed composition contains the whole scene within the photograph, which also keeps the viewer's attention in the picture. Closed composition is more formal and structured. On the other hand, an open composition can be used to create more interest by implying what is lying outside the picture plane. Open composition is more casual and informal. An open composition can be used to create unexpected compositions (i.e. extreme close-ups of the subject) (Lauer and Pentak 204-5).

High school students tend to like closed compositions with no background. This appears to me to be a developmental issue, which can be overcome through exposure. In other words, when you make students aware of their rigid, closed compositions, and encourage them to create interest through cropping, then they consciously begin to really see new ways to frame their compositions in photography.

The rule of thirds is probably the most familiar "rule" of composition. Very simply stated, if you divide an image with two vertical and two horizontal lines (like a tic-tac-toe game) then your subject and points of interest should be located at one or more of the intersections of vertical and horizontal lines. The more interesting images have the subject at the right intersections. The S-curve is another common composition format (Harvey 76). The Golden Mean is a proportional

guideline devised by ancient Greeks that says a “perfectly proportional” rectangle should have the longer sides 2/3 longer than the shorter sides – for example 5” x 8” (Peterson 86-110).

I usually have a little bit of difficulty trying to get students to move their main area of interest away from dead center of the page. When I give them the rule of thirds as an alternative, students are able to add interest to their compositions by moving their focus of interest accordingly. Showing examples of using a centered composition and a composition using the rule of thirds during a group critique is a pretty good way to explain why the rule of thirds is so much more interesting.

There are two main principles of composition – simplicity and tension. In designing your composition, you need to fill the frame and ensure there are not too many points of interest or your image will appear to be “cluttered.” Let your subject dominate. Get closer. Students invariably shoot pictures from way too far away. Get up close and personal. Keep it simple. Focus on your dominant element as your subject. Tension arises from interplay between the different objects in the picture and how they interrelate (using the elements of art and the principles of design) (Harvey 84).

Cameras today usually have a rectangular format. This means you have a choice between a horizontal composition and a vertical composition. A horizontal composition is very similar to the mood of horizontal lines – peaceful, calm, and tranquil. A vertical format, on the other hand, is more structured, shows pride and dignity, and is more formal (Harvey 86).

When composing a photograph, there are three decisions you need to make. First you need to decide on your subject. Next, you have to figure out how to frame your subject. Then you have to look at placement – where to place your subject within the frame (Harvey 98).

In deciding on composition, you need to pay attention to perspective. Specifically you need to be aware of foreground, middle ground, and background. And you need to decide how much depth of field you want and what you want in focus or out of focus. Distance from your subject will also determine what will be in focus (Harvey 85). Students have a tendency to not get close to their subject. Get close. Choose what you want to be in your photograph and exclude the clutter that you do not want in your photograph.

Once you go over the rules of composition, your students need to try it out – shoot pictures. A good way to guide them is to suggest that they use their camera lens to “see.” Encourage them to carry their camera(s) with them at all times and shoot whatever they find interesting. Approach a subject from a distance and shoot pictures coming towards it. Shoot from down low, mid range, up high, etc. Then look at all the results and observe how they “saw” through the camera lens. Try to avoid zoom at this time. Instead, move closer and further away to get the “zoom,” and shoot pictures as you approach and move away from your subject. See if you can find a different point of view – capture that defining moment (Peterson 14-23).

Then, look at what makes a striking image. According to Peterson, the answer is “commonplace subjects composed in the simplest way.” In other words, get rid of the visual clutter and too many points of interest (Peterson 48). Sometimes the ordinary becomes extraordinary. Look for those moments. That is what makes you stand out as a photographer – your ability to see the unusual in the usual. Go “see” with your camera lens. You decide what should or should not be in your photograph. Just because it is there does not mean you have to include it in your image. Watch the edges of your frame. Make sure clutter doesn’t “sneak in.” Your brain tends to filter out clutter. The camera does not (Peterson 86-110).

Lighting

Photography is all about light. Whole books have been written about lighting. I think it is safe to assume that students know how to use a flash. And most schools are not equipped with expensive professional lighting. Therefore, I am going to focus on available light when I talk about lighting.

Most cameras have automatic light meters built into them. If you want, you can teach your students about light meters, but the most important thing for them to know is how to look at light. Light meters pick up reflected light. A rule of thumb for lighting is that objects reflect on average 18% of light falling on them – more for light objects, less for dark objects. When pointing your automatic camera at subjects, you need to be aware of this and watch what you point at so that your lighting is accurate. In other words, point your camera at some mid-range and darker values. This will give you a good mix of value in your image. When working in strong sunlight, aim lens at the darkest area so you will still get detail in the shadows (Peterson 106-116).

Lighting issues will probably show up in the first round of photographs, which will be a great opportunity to show how the camera “read” the light in each photograph. This is the perfect time to learn from mistakes – backlighting, silhouetting, etc. when these techniques were not done deliberately.

Light has color. Different times of the day produce different colors in the same object. Early morning is a golden color, but cooler than the orange-gold an hour before sunset. A bright overcast day will cast a soft, delicate light. The clouds tend to diffuse the light. Monochromatic snow and fog add emphasis to anything bright. Seasons have different lights. The summer sun is harsh and direct while the winter sun is low-angled with long shadows. Spring brings clarity of light that is emphasized by the predominance of green – everything budding out. Autumn has clarity of light, but it is crispness that the first cool days bring (Peterson 134).

There are three main types of available lighting – frontlighting, backlighting, and sidelighting. Frontlighting is exactly what it says. Light hits your subject directly in front. Overcast conditions provide the best frontlighting, and the light is fairly even across your subject, which makes photographing subjects in this light simpler and easier. This is almost foolproof natural lighting. The best times to use frontlighting are an hour before sunrise and an hour after sunset. Backlighting comes from behind the subject, and is used for silhouettes. When shooting backlit subjects, make sure you aim your camera at something dark, and not the light coming from behind the subject. Otherwise you will end up with no detail in the shadows or dark areas. Finally, sidelighting is a great way to add dimension to a composition. Sidelighting is more dimensional and more dramatic. The best times to use sidelighting are a couple of hours after sunrise, and a couple of hours before sunset (Peterson 136-138). Light contrast varies with the weather, time of day, and altitude. Clouds diminish (diffuse) contrast (Harvey 144).

A recommended exercise in lighting is to shoot the same image at different times of the day with frontlighting, backlighting, and sidelighting. Just before dawn, the light is cool blue, magenta, rosy pink and vivid red. After sunrise, the light changes to a warm orange and gold. Sunset and after are the same colors as sunrise, but in reverse (Peterson 138). Overcast skies and rain soften light, which is great for photographing people.

LESSONS IN PHOTOGRAPHY

Introduction

The lessons in this unit each have a different theme with a similar format using five basic steps – take the pictures, a group critique, a how-to session, look at photographers to see effective examples, and then reshoot the assignment as an assessment tool.

The first lesson will probably take a lot longer than subsequent lessons because the information and activities in the lesson are new. Once the students have the background information (elements and principles) and understand the critique process, the remainder of the lessons should move much faster.

We do not have darkroom facilities at my school, so I have designed these lessons with a digital camera in mind with students printing their own photographs. I will recommend to them that they have exceptional photographs printed professionally for portfolio purposes. These lessons can be very easily adapted for film photography as well.

Each of the assignments I expect to take three 90 minute class periods depending on the number of students and how many photographs they are taking. The first critique (Step 2) will probably take up a good portion of the first class. The “how to” part (Step 3) along with looking at images showing successful “how to” examples (Step 4) will take up the second class. The third class period will be the final critique (Step 5) of the redo of the assignment and the next assignment to do.

Lesson One - Life

Objective

Students will be able to recognize the elements of art and the principles of design in photography.

Activity One

I will begin with a quick overview of the elements of art and the principles of design. This overview will give them a focal point for the first set of photographs they will be taking as well as a starting point for discussion when we begin doing the group critique.

Activity Two

The first assignment will be for students to take a series of photographs that describe their lives. When the assignment is about them, students tend to get more engaged. I will leave the assignment fairly wide open for students to do what they want so I can see what ideas they come up with. This is a great opportunity for students to get creative, and the results may be surprising.

At this point, I am not telling the students anything about how to take photographs – just to think about the elements and principles while shooting. This is a good time for students to learn from their mistakes.

Activity Three

When students bring in the assigned photos for critiques, I expect to see images taken too far away with lighting problems. We will critique the photographs, using the guidelines from the Process of Group Critiques section. We discuss the photographs that are successful and why and the photographs that need to be changed in order to be effective.

Activity Four

The next step will be a general discussion about composition, framing, camera angles, and the use of tripods and shutter release cables. This is the how-to part. This is when I explain the rules of composition and how to make photographs more interesting. Since I want the students to learn by trial and error, I explain specific concepts that relate to resolving the issues in the photographs we critiqued rather than issues that lie ahead. My idea is that students apply that knowledge to their next series of photographs. Students tend to retain the knowledge when they put it into practical use right away.

Activity Five

Students need to also see what makes a successful photograph, so the next step is to look at examples of photographs that relate to the theme of life. Using the resources in the annotated bibliography, I will find photographs of Edward Atget, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Lee Friedlander, Louis Hine, Paul Strand, and Gary Winogrand. These are just a few amongst many examples of photographers who have some wonderful images of everyday life.

PowerPoint is a very easy program to use to create slide shows, so I will create a slide show of work from these photographers. Then I will use an LCD projector (most school libraries or technology departments have these available for teachers to check out) to project the presentation for students to see and discuss.

The discussion will be centered on why these photographs are successful works of art. Also, this is a good time to show how photographers have addressed the same issues the students incurred in their attempts to photograph life. In this way students can see resolutions to problems they encountered, plus it may help spark their creativity for the next step, which is to go back and reshoot the life assignment using their new knowledge.

Activity Six

Now I have the students repeat the original assignment of photographing their life. I review what they have learned so far and the “solutions” they now have to work with. When they bring these photographs back in, we have another class discussion about the differences between the first series and the second series. At some point during this discussion, I will put both series up side by side so students can really see the difference.

Lesson Two - Portraits

Objective

Students will be able to use effective light and composition in their photographs.

Activity One

The second assignment will be portraits. Students will shoot a portrait of a friend or family member (self-portraits will come later). Again, I will not tell students much ahead of the assignment about portraiture. Instead, I will instruct them to remember to use the elements and principals in composing their photographs. Also, I will inform them that they need to take multiple shots of their subject and keep track of differences between each shot (i.e. angle, lighting, distance, framing, etc.). A notebook to write this information down in is invaluable, because they will not remember these details later.

Activity Two

I expect to see problems with composition, lighting, framing, and background in this series. During the group critique (same format as before), I will guide the discussion to cover these topics if they do not come up on their own.

Activity Three

After the group critique, I address the problems that came up with some how-to discussion focusing on portraiture. This is where I talk about where the person should be: how close, how far away. This is also the time to discuss the times of day for lighting and when to use a flash or not to use a flash. We will get more into the color temperature of light in the next lesson.

A new issue here will be background. Students rarely consider backgrounds when doing art pieces. I have an idea that this will hold true for photography as well. At this time, I will tell

them to pay attention to background, but I don't want to go into any detail about backgrounds until the next lesson.

Activity Four

I will create a PowerPoint for portraiture using the photographs of Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Julia Margaret Cameron, Walker Evans, Lewis Hine, Dorothea Lange, and Edward Steichen. Again, these are just a small sampling of portrait photographers. I will show the PowerPoint to my students, discussing the photographs and why they are successful photographs.

Activity Five

I will have the student reshoot the original assignment of portraiture and instruct them to focus on lighting, framing, and composition when shooting. Then we will have another group critique looking at the original set of photos alongside the photos that were reshot to see how their work progressed.

Lesson Three – Backgrounds

Objective

Students will be able to effectively shoot background photographs with interesting composition and use of light.

Activity One

The third assignment will be backgrounds and/or locations. Students do not usually think about backgrounds. When students are drawing, painting or printmaking, they rarely think about what is behind their subject. In fact, most of their work simply floats on a white background. This is a good time to address nature, buildings, and interiors. The focus will be lighting, composition, and framing, while adding in value and texture. This is a good opportunity to show what value and/or texture can add to a photograph.

I will tell students to take photographs of interiors and backgrounds. Again, I will not say much about what to do except to use what they have learned so far.

Activity Two

We have a group critique of the background/interior photos. I expect to see a lot of unnecessary visual clutter, awkward cropping, and uncomfortable tangencies in the background as well as lighting issues. As we talk about each photograph, we will discuss how some of these factors could have been left out. Alternatively, we will discuss how to use these factors if they cannot be removed when shooting the photo. We talk again about how composition and framing can affect the success of the image. We will also discuss how well the lighting is working in these photos, which will then segue into the how-to part of the lesson.

Activity Three

I will give a short lecture to the class about value and texture and what these elements can add to a photograph. We will go over these elements in more detail and discuss how to include these in their photographs. We will also review lighting issues here and introduce concepts like color temperature, light at different times of days, and how shadows affect images.

Activity Four

I create another PowerPoint that focuses on backgrounds and interiors. I will use images from Ansel Adams, Eugene Atget, Lee Friedlander, Lewis Hine, Minor White, and Gary Winogrand. As you can see, some of these names are looking familiar. This is a good opportunity to point out to students that photographers do not always fit into one category.

Activity Five

Students will reshoot their photographs concentrating on value, texture, composition, and light. We will look at the images with the first set the students shot, so we can compare the differences and see the changes.

Lesson Four - Fashion

Objective

Students will be able to shoot creative, emotional photographs using light, composition, value, and texture. These photographs will be specifically aimed at “selling” a product.

Activity One

Almost all teenagers pay attention to what they wear, whether they are male or female. So, the assignment for this lesson will be to take fashion photographs. They can determine what constitutes a “fashion photograph” without much input from me. My only stipulation will be that they take the photograph with the end object of selling the product in the photograph.

Activity Two

The group critique will focus on lighting, composition, setting (background), value, and texture. We will look at how successful these elements are in this batch of photographs. We will also see what can be changed and how.

Activity Three

The how-to will be about setting a mood, and the “selling” aspect of fashion photography. We will discuss ways students can get creative with their photographs – what will set them apart from the ordinary fashion photos. We will also cover how to create a mood or theme in photography. Then, we’ll talk about how to create extraordinary fashion photographs while still retaining the original goal – to sell clothes, accessories, and cosmetics.

Activity Four

The PowerPoint showing fashion photographs will cover a spectrum of photographers from the first half of the 20th century to the latter half. Students should see how fashion photography has progressed visually. The photographers I am including are Richard Avedon, Cecil Beaton, Louise Dahl-Wolfe, Toni Frissell, Horst P. Horst, Sarah Moon, Helmut Newton, Irving Penn, Man Ray, and Paolo Rivera.

An addendum to this activity will be for students to bring in current fashion magazines to discuss what the current trends in fashion photography are. In the Annotated Bibliography is an excellent slide presentation entitled “The Decline of Fashion Photography: An Argument in Pictures,” by Karen Lehrman, which will great impetus to the class discussion.

Activity Five

After the first four activities, students will reshoot the original assignment. Hopefully, I will see some real creativity and exploration in this assignment. We will look at the before and after pictures and see what has transpired in the photographs during that time.

Lesson Five – Self Portraits

Objective

Students will be able to design and shoot self-portraits using the elements of art, principles of design, rules of composition, proper lighting, creativity, and emotion (mood).

Activity One

Finally we come full circle back to the student for the fifth assignment of self-portraits. This of course is the all-important subject to every teenager. Now let's see what they do with it. The assignment is to shoot a self-portrait. I am carefully not going to say what constitutes a self-portrait. I want to see how students interpret "self portrait."

Activity Two

When we critique the first set of photos, we look again at what went right and what went wrong. This is when we talk about what is a self portrait. In the critique we talk mainly about the photographs themselves and how to correct problems that arose.

Activity Three

In this how-to activity, we discuss self-portraits, and how to do self portraits using photography. This is a good segue into setting up photographs. Students assume you simply photograph what is there. Now we will talk about setting up the scene and how that can be part of a self-portrait. This can evolve into an actual brain-storming for reshooting the self-portraits.

Activity Four

The photographers I am including in the self-portrait PowerPoint are Herbert Bayer, Martien Boonma, Nan Golden, Man Ray, Gerhard Richter, Cindy Sherman, and Andy Warhol. I am also including Sandy Skoglund, so students can also see some interesting set-up situations where the photographer totally controls what is contained in the photograph.

Activity Five

Students will repeat their self-portraits. It will be interesting to see what effect the critique, brain-storming, and the photographs the students see will have on the images the students redo. We will put the first photos up with the redone photos to see the progression and critique the outcome.

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