Unit 3: Subject Matters in Photography

Content Area: **Fine Arts**
Course(s):
Time Period: **Marking Period 1**
Length: **1 Week**
Status: **Published**

Brief Summary of Unit

Unit 3: Subject Matters in Photography

This unit explores three key genres of photography: still life, portraiture, and landscape. Students will study the history, techniques, and unique compositional elements of each subject matter, gaining hands-on experience through creating their own photographs. The unit emphasizes the use of lighting, composition, and context to enhance the emotional and narrative impact of images. Through practical assignments, peer critiques, and self-reflection, students will deepen their understanding of how different subjects in photography can convey meaning. The unit culminates in a final project where students apply their knowledge to create a cohesive photographic series, showcasing their skills and creative choices.

Revision Date: July 2025 - Samantha Berk

Essential Questions

- How do different subject matters in photography evoke emotions and meaning?
- What techniques and compositional choices can be used to enhance the impact of still lifes, portraits, and landscapes?
- How do cultural and historical contexts influence the representation of subject matters in photography?

Essential Understandings

- Students will understand that the subject matter in photography shapes the narrative and emotional impact of an image.
- Students will recognize that different types of photography (still life, portraiture, and landscape) require distinct technical and compositional approaches.
- Students will gain an appreciation for how personal expression and historical/cultural contexts influence photographic works.

Students Will Know

- Key concepts and techniques in still life, portrait, and landscape photography.
- How to use lighting, composition, and subject arrangement to enhance the storytelling power of their photographs.
- The historical and contemporary significance of still lifes, portraiture, and landscapes in photography.
- How to critique and analyze photographic works with an understanding of these different subject matters.

Evidence/Performance Tasks

Fine Arts students demonstrate differentiated proficiency according to their ability to answer the essential questions through formative and summative assessments. Evidence of progression may be demonstrated in divergent ways through the Artistic Process of Creating, Presenting/Producing, Connecting, and Responding.

Tasks will include:

- Answer the essential questions
- Brainstorm Ways in which visual images are used to communicate
- Brainstorm qualities that make for a successful image
- Meaningfully and appropriately participate in class critique and discussions
- Complete class projects including weekly critique assignments
- Complete assessment rubrics
- Critique photographic images using appropriate terminology.
- Participate in assessment discussions with teacher
- Complete final exam

Learning Plan

- Teacher will introduce the various subject matters in photography
- Preview the essential questions and connect to learning throughout the unit.
- Analyze and discuss various famous photographers that explore the various subject matters
- Led students in a discussion regarding the various subject matter and various techniques on how to capture them and why.

- Teacher will present the essential questions.
- Students will compare and contrast photographs of various subject matters.
- Students will photograph various subject matters in differing styles and techniques (lighting, compositional, multi-medium, etc.)
- Students will explore various themes such as (identity, culture, food, etc.) to create meaningful photographs that convey a message that is personal to them.
- Students will create portfolio showcasing their learning
- Student and teacher facing assessments such as, but not limited to, artist statements, peer critiques, self assessment, rubrics, etc.

Suggested Activities:

- I=Introduction to Subject Matter: Still Life Photography
    - Students learn the history and purpose of still life photography, study classic and contemporary examples, and set up their own still life scenes focusing on lighting, composition, and symbolism.
- Exploring Portraiture: Emotion, Identity & Lighting
    - Through lecture and visual analysis, students examine famous portraits and discuss how pose, lighting, and expression convey meaning. They then photograph a peer using controlled lighting and thoughtful composition.
- Landscape Photography: Framing Space and Mood
    - Students analyze iconic landscape photos and explore how environment, light, and perspective create mood. They complete an outdoor photo shoot, experimenting with natural light and leading lines.
- Peer Critique & Reflection: Reviewing Genre Work
    - Students participate in a guided critique session, presenting one photo from each genre (still life, portrait, landscape), using photography vocabulary to give and receive constructive feedback.
- Final Project: Cohesive Series Development
    - Students choose one genre to focus on or blend all three in a themed photographic series. They plan, shoot, edit, and present a 3–5 photo series that demonstrates technical skill and narrative intention, accompanied by an artist’s statement.

Materials

The materials used in this course allow for integration of a variety of instructional, supplemental, and intervention materials that support student learners at all levels in the school and home environments. Associated web content and media sources are infused into the unit as applicable and available.

Digital Cameras, Sketchbook, Various Pencils, Sharpies, Markers, Various Papers, Various Erasers, Mirrors, Blending Sticks, Charcoal, Graphite, Sharpeners, Colored Pencils, Oil Pastel, Chalk Pastels, YouTube Videos, Value Scales, magazines, glue, scissors, Watercolor, Watercolor paper, paint brush, ink, printing materials, chromebooks, ipads, Paint, Color Wheels, Drawing Pen, Rulers

Websites:

- Introduction to Photography Subject Matters
  Overview of common photographic genres (still life, portrait, landscape) with examples and teaching ideas.
  Website: https://digital-photography-school.com/understanding-photography-genres/

- Famous Photographers and Their Styles
  Profiles and portfolios of renowned photographers exploring diverse subjects and techniques.
  Website: https://www.artsy.net/genre/photography

- Still Life Photography Techniques and History
  Articles and tutorials on setting up still life scenes with lighting and composition tips.
  Website: https://www.picturecorrect.com/tips/still-life-photography-techniques/

- Portrait Photography: Lighting and Emotion
  Guides on portrait lighting setups and capturing emotion, with visual examples for teaching.
  Website: https://digital-photography-school.com/portrait-lighting-techniques/

- Landscape Photography Tips and Inspiration
  Resources for teaching framing, natural light use, and creating mood in landscapes.
  Website: https://www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/photo-tips/landscape-photography-tips/

Suggested Strategies for Modifications

Suggested Strategies for Modifications:

This link includes content specific accommodations and modifications for all populations:

Fine Arts Accommodations & Modifications

- additional time on task
- alternative outcome options
- assessment based on individual development in the area of study
- audio tape of instruction
- cooperative learning groups
- handouts of notes, procedures, processes, diagrams, etc.
- images and visual aids
- one-to-one instruction and assistance
- preferential seating
- reading material modified to student level
- revised techniques, use of tools and media in hands-on activity
- study partners
- testing materials appropriate to student level