Unit 1: An Exploration of Traditional Photographic Themes

Content Area: **Fine Arts**
Course(s):
Time Period: **Marking Period 1**
Length: **8 Weeks**
Status: **Published**

Brief Summary of Unit

In this unit, students will explore traditional photographic themes in depth to gain a broader understanding of photography as an art form for communication. Selecting from the following themes: action/sports, aerial, advertising, documentary, fine art, macro/micro, movement, outdoor, photojournalism, travel, still life and portraiture, students will research photographers, images and techniques within their chosen subject area to produce a cohesive body of work to be presented to the class.

Revised: August 2026

Standards

Information Literacy

This unit challenges students to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively. Information literacy includes, but is not limited to, digital, visual, media, textual, and technological literacy. Lessons may include the research process and how information is created and produced; critical thinking and using information resources; research methods, including the difference between primary and secondary sources; the difference between facts, points of view, and opinions, accessing peer-reviewed print and digital library resources; the economic, legal, social, and ethical issues surrounding the use of information.

ELD standards:https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wdmsiGOdCHlrjU-WPvAtENnEgi0EStZXo0uiFYv1Nu4/edit

1.5.12acc.Cr1	Generating and conceptualizing ideas.
1.5.12acc.Cr1a	Individually and collaboratively formulate new creative problems based on student's existing artwork.
	Artists and designers experiment with forms, structures, materials, concepts, media, and art-making approaches. Artists and designers balance experimentation and safety, freedom and responsibility, while developing and creating artworks. People create and interact with objects, places and design that define, shape, enhance, and empower their lives.
1.5.12acc.Cr2a	Through experimentation, practice and persistence, demonstrate acquisition of skills and knowledge in a chosen art form.

1.5.12acc.Cr3	Refining and completing products.
1.5.12acc.Pr4	Selecting, analyzing, and interpreting work.
	Artists and other presenters consider various techniques, methods, venues, and criteria when analyzing, selecting and curating objects, artifacts and artworks for preservation and presentation.
	Artists, curators and others consider a variety of factors and methods including evolving technologies when preparing and refining artwork for display and or when deciding if and how to preserve and protect it.
	Objects, artifacts and artworks collected, preserved, or presented either by artists, museums, or other venues communicate meaning and a record of social, cultural and political experiences resulting in the cultivating of appreciation and understanding.
	Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed through engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, the natural world, and constructed environments. Visual arts influences understanding of and responses to the world.
	People evaluate art based on various criteria.
	Through artmaking, people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge and experiences.
	People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.
1.5.12acc.Cn11a	Compare uses of art in a variety of societal, cultural and historical contexts and make connections to uses of art in contemporary and local contexts.

Essential Questions

- How can photography communicate ideas, emotions, stories, and perspectives?
- How do photographers use composition, lighting, angle, and subject matter to create meaning?
- In what ways do different photographic genres influence the viewer’s interpretation of an image?
- How can research and experimentation help develop a cohesive body of photographic work?

Essential Understandings

- Photography is a visual language that communicates personal, cultural, and social ideas.
- Artists make intentional choices with subject matter, composition, and techniques to convey meaning.
- Different photographic themes and genres provide unique ways to document, interpret, and express experiences.
- Reflection, critique, and revision strengthen artistic growth and the development of a cohesive portfolio.

Students Will Know

- Characteristics and purposes of various photographic genres including portraiture, documentary, photojournalism, still life, and fine art photography.
- How photographers use elements and principles of design to create visually effective compositions.
- Basic camera techniques including the Exposure Triangle (Aperture, Shutter Speed, and ISO), white balance, depth of field, focus, lighting, framing, movement, and perspective.
- How to research photographers and analyze images to inform artistic decision making and personal style development.

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:

- Preview/Answer essential questions
- Meaningfully and appropriately participate in class critique and discussions
- Complete class projects including weekly critique assignments
- Complete self-assessment rubrics
- Participate in assessment discussions with teacher
- Complete final exam

Learning Plan

- Essential Question Introduction & Journal Reflection:
  Preview and discuss unit essential questions through class discussions and sketchbook journal prompts exploring how photography communicates ideas, emotions, stories, and perspectives.
- Introduction to Traditional Photographic Genres:
  Introduce traditional photographic themes and genres through mini lectures, visual presentations, and discussions examining the purpose and characteristics of portraiture, documentary, still life, fine art, sports/action, macro, travel, outdoor, and photojournalism photography.

- Artist Research & Visual Analysis:
  Research and analyze photographers connected to traditional photographic genres, including Ansel Adams (landscape photography), Dorothea Lange (documentary photography), Annie Leibovitz (portrait photography), Henri Cartier-Bresson (street photography and composition), and Steve McCurry (travel and photojournalism).

- Class Discussion & Brainstorming Activity:
  Participate in discussions examining how photographers use composition, lighting, angle, subject matter, and timing to communicate meaning. Brainstorm photographic subjects and themes connected to personal interests and artistic goals.

- Photography Technique Demonstrations:
  Practice foundational photography techniques including camera settings, composition, framing, lighting, depth of field, perspective, movement, focus, and visual storytelling through guided demonstrations and exercises.

- Genre Exploration Assignments:
  Complete short photography assignments exploring a variety of traditional themes such as:
    - Portrait photography emphasizing expression and lighting
    - Still life photography focusing on composition and symbolism
    - Action or sports photography capturing movement and timing
    - Macro photography investigating texture and detail
    - Documentary or photojournalism photography telling a story through images

- Photography Collection & Image Gathering:
  Conduct independent photo shoots experimenting with different environments, lighting conditions, subjects, and photographic techniques related to selected themes.

- Critique & Revision Workshops:
  Participate in peer critiques and teacher conferences evaluating technical skills, composition, creativity, and communication of ideas. Revise and improve photographs based on feedback and reflection.

- Process Documentation & Reflection:
  Document experimentation, planning, revisions, artistic influences, and technical discoveries through sketchbook notes, contact sheets, and written reflections.

- Digital Editing & Post-Processing: Students participate in foundational photo editing techniques, such as cropping, exposure adjustment, color correction, and dodging/burning, using digital software to refine their visual storytelling.

- Final Cohesive Body of Work Creation:
  Develop and finalize a cohesive body of photographic work focused on a selected traditional photographic theme demonstrating technical proficiency, artistic intent, and creative growth.

- Gallery Walk, Presentation & Critique:
  Present completed photographic works through critiques, gallery walks, class discussions, and written

artist reflections analyzing artistic choices, themes, and communication of meaning through photography.

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

Suggested Strategies for Modifications

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

Fine Arts Accommodations & Modifications