Unit 3: Alternative Photographic Processes

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

Brief Summary of Unit

Students will explore alternative photographic processes and experimental image-making techniques to expand their understanding of photography beyond the traditional camera. Through hands-on experimentation with processes such as cyanotypes (sun prints), pinhole photography, photograms, image transfers, and mixed-media techniques, students will investigate how artists manipulate light, materials, chemistry, and process to create unique photographic artworks. Students will research historical and contemporary artists working with alternative photography and develop a series of experimental works that emphasize creativity, problem solving, and artistic exploration.

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.Cr	Creating
1.5.12acc.Cr1	Generating and conceptualizing ideas.
	Creativity and innovative thinking are essential life skills that can be developed. Artists and designers shape artistic investigations, following or breaking with traditions in pursuit of creative art-making goals.
	Explore

1.5.12acc.Cr1a	Individually and collaboratively formulate new creative problems based on student's existing artwork.
1.5.12acc.Cr2	Organizing and developing ideas.
	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.Cr2c	Redesign an object, system, place, or design in response to contemporary issues.
1.5.12acc.Cr3	Refining and completing products.
	Artists and designers develop excellence through practice and constructive critique, reflecting on, revising and refining work over time.
1.5.12acc.Pr	Presenting
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.
1.5.12acc.Pr5	Developing and refining techniques and models or steps needed to create products.
	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.
1.5.12acc.Pr6	Conveying meaning through art.
	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.
1.5.12acc.Re7	Perceiving and analyzing products.
	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.
1.5.12acc.Re7a	Recognize and describe personal aesthetic and empathetic responses to the natural world and constructed environments.
1.5.12acc.Re7b	Evaluate the effectiveness of visual artworks to influence ideas, feelings, and behaviors of specific audiences.
1.5.12acc.Re8	Interpreting intent and meaning.
	People gain insights into meanings of artworks by engaging in the process of art criticism.
1.5.12acc.Re9	Applying criteria to evaluate products.
	People evaluate art based on various criteria.
1.5.12acc.Cn	Connecting
	Through artmaking, people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge and experiences.
1.5.12acc.Cn10a	Utilize inquiry methods of observation, research and experimentation to explore other subjects through artmaking.
	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 alternative photographic processes change the way images are created and experienced?
- In what ways does experimentation contribute to artistic growth and innovation?
- How do artists use materials, light, and process to communicate ideas in photography?
- What can alternative photography teach us about the history and evolution of photographic art?

Essential Understandings

- Photography can be created through a variety of experimental and nontraditional processes.
- Artists use experimentation, risk-taking, and problem solving to develop original ideas and artworks.
- Alternative photographic processes connect contemporary photography to historical methods and artistic traditions.
- The materials, techniques, and presentation of artwork influence how viewers interpret meaning.

Students Will Know

- Historical and contemporary alternative photographic processes including cyanotypes, pinhole photography, photograms, and image transfers.
- How light-sensitive materials and exposure affect image creation.
- Safe and proper use of photographic materials, tools, and darkroom or studio procedures.
- How experimentation and revision contribute to creative development and artistic voice.

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 discussion and sketchbook journal prompts exploring experimentation, innovation, and nontraditional photography techniques.

- Introduction to Alternative Photography Processes:
  Introduce alternative photographic processes through mini lectures, demonstrations, videos, and visual presentations examining how photography existed before and beyond digital technology.

- Darkroom and Chemical Safety: Students will participate in a comprehensive safety training covering the review of Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS), proper darkroom ventilation, safe chemical mixing and disposal protocols, and the safe handling of volatile materials like acetone for image transfers. (if materials will be used)

- Artist Research & Visual Analysis:
  Research and analyze historical and contemporary artists working with alternative photographic methods, including Anna Atkins (cyanotypes), Man Ray (photograms/rayographs), Abelardo Morell (camera obscura photography), Jerry Uelsmann (darkroom manipulation), Matthew Brandt (experimental photographic materials and processes), Binh Danh (who uses the chlorophyll process to print on leaves), and Lorna Simpson (who utilizes photo-transfers on felt to explore identity and history).

- Class Discussion & Brainstorming Activity:
  Participate in visual analysis activities examining how artists use light, chemistry, materials, layering, and experimentation to communicate ideas and alter photographic imagery. Collaboratively brainstorm unconventional ways photography can be created or manipulated using materials, light sources, handmade tools, nature, texture, and mixed media applications.

- Alternative Process Exploration Stations:
  Rotate through hands-on experimentation stations to explore alternative processes including:

    - Cyanotype sunlight prints using objects, plants, or transparencies
    - Photograms created without a camera using light-sensitive paper
    - Pinhole camera photography and camera obscura investigations
    - Image transfers using gel medium or acetone processes
    - Mixed media alterations using ink, watercolor, stitching, collage, or drawing over photographs
    - Layering transparencies and found materials to create texture and depth
- Mini Experimental Photography Challenges:
  Complete short experimental challenge prompts such as:
    - Create a photogram that communicates mood or emotion using only objects and light
    - Design a cyanotype composition using natural forms or symbolic objects
    - Alter an existing photograph using mixed media to transform its meaning
    - Create a pinhole photograph exploring unusual perspective or movement
- Process Documentation & Reflection:
  Document artistic experimentation, discoveries, revisions, and reflections through sketchbook notes, process photographs, and written observations.
- Photography Collection & Image Gathering:
  Conduct independent photo collection activities capturing textures, shadows, patterns, and imagery intended for future alternative process manipulation.
- Planning & Creative Development:
  Sketch and plan final experimental artworks by testing compositions, materials, processes, and conceptual ideas before production.
- Final Alternative Process Artwork Creation:
  Create a finalized collection of alternative process photographic artworks demonstrating experimentation, craftsmanship, conceptual thinking, and creative problem solving.
- Gallery Walk, Critique & Reflection:
  Participate in gallery walks, critiques, peer discussions, and written reflections analyzing how alternative processes influence the meaning, appearance, and experience of 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, pre-treated cyanotype paper, traditional light-sensitive black-and-white photographic paper

Suggested Strategies for Modifications

Suggested Strategies for Modifications:

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

Fine Arts Accommodations & Modifications