

Unit 6: Inquiry-Based Photography

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

Brief Summary of Unit

This capstone unit prepares students for advanced photographic study, including AP Art and portfolio-based coursework, by guiding them through the creation of a fully student-driven inquiry portfolio. Students will develop an original inquiry question that drives their artistic investigation and production of a cohesive 15-image photographic portfolio. Emphasis is placed on independent decision-making, conceptual depth, technical refinement, and sustained investigation. Students will apply all previously learned photographic skills, including traditional techniques, alternative processes, mixed media approaches, series development, and artistic voice, to create a unified body of work. The unit culminates in a formal presentation and critique where students articulate their inquiry, process, and artistic growth.

Revised: August 2026

Essential Questions

- How can an inquiry question guide and strengthen a photographic body of work?
- How do artists develop a sustained investigation through visual and conceptual exploration?
- In what ways do intention, process, and reflection shape a cohesive portfolio?
- How does a finished portfolio communicate both technical skill and personal artistic voice?
- What are the ethical responsibilities of a photographer when creating, altering, and circulating images?

Essential Understandings

- Artistic inquiry drives meaningful, sustained, and purposeful creative work.
- Photographers develop depth in their work by exploring a focused question over time through experimentation and revision.
- A cohesive portfolio reflects both technical mastery and conceptual development.
- Independent artistic decision-making is essential for growth as a photographer and visual thinker.

Students Will Know

- How to develop and refine an inquiry question that guides a sustained photographic investigation.
- How to connect conceptual ideas with technical photographic choices.
- How to curate, sequence, and present a cohesive portfolio of work.
- How to reflect on artistic growth, process, and decision-making through written and verbal communication.

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
- Complete a formal Portfolio Review and Exhibition.

Learning Plan

- **Essential Question Introduction & Inquiry Development:**
Engage in class discussions and reflective journaling to explore what makes a strong inquiry question. Students brainstorm personal interests, themes, and concepts to develop a focused photographic investigation.
- **Inquiry Question Proposal & Proposal Conference:**
Students write and submit an inquiry proposal outlining their guiding question, conceptual direction, and initial ideas for their 15-image portfolio. One-on-one conferences with the teacher support

refinement and goal setting.

- **Artist Research & Conceptual Inspiration:**
Research artists whose work is driven by sustained inquiry and conceptual investigation, including Cindy Sherman, Rineke Dijkstra, Alec Soth, Carrie Mae Weems, and Wolfgang Tillmans. Students analyze how these artists maintain conceptual focus across bodies of work.
- **Planning & Portfolio Mapping:**
Create visual plans including mood boards, shot lists, sequencing ideas, and conceptual sketches. Students map out how their inquiry will evolve across 15 photographs.
- **Independent Studio Production:**
Students independently produce photographic work aligned with their inquiry question, utilizing any combination of learned techniques (traditional photography, alternative processes, mixed media, sequencing, or revisiting earlier methods).
- **Teacher Conferences & Studio Critique Checkpoints:**
Regular one-on-one and peer critique sessions guide students in refining conceptual clarity, technical execution, and consistency of their portfolio. Teachers act as facilitators, supporting individualized learning paths.
- **Experimentation & Revision Cycles:**
Students refine their work through repeated cycles of experimentation, feedback, and revision. Emphasis is placed on strengthening visual cohesion and conceptual depth across the portfolio.
- **Curation & Sequencing of Final Portfolio:**
Students select, refine, and sequence 15 final images to create a cohesive portfolio that clearly communicates their inquiry. Attention is given to visual flow, narrative structure, and presentation quality.
- **Artist Statement Development:**
Students write a formal artist statement explaining their inquiry question, process, influences, challenges, and artistic growth throughout the unit.
- **Final Presentation & Exhibition:**
Students present their 15-image inquiry-based portfolio in a formal critique or exhibition setting. Presentations include verbal explanation of inquiry, process, and outcomes, followed by peer and teacher feedback.
- **Reflection & Portfolio Self-Evaluation:**
Students complete a final reflection evaluating their growth as photographers, the success of their inquiry, and readiness for advanced coursework such as AP Art Studio.

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.

Handouts, writing samples, 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

Suggested Strategies for Modifications:

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

[Fine Arts Accommodations & Modifications](#)