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

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

1.5.12adv.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

1.5.12adv.Cr1a	Visualize and generate art and design that can affect social change.
1.5.12adv.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.
1.5.12adv.Cr2a	Experiment, plan and make multiple works of art and design that explore a personally meaningful theme, idea, or concept.
1.5.12adv.Cr2b	Demonstrate understanding of the importance of balancing freedom and responsibility in the use of images, materials, tools and equipment in the creation and circulation of creative work.
1.5.12adv.Cr3	Refining and completing products.
	Artists and designers develop excellence through practice and constructive critique, reflecting on, revising and refining work over time.
1.5.12adv.Pr	Presenting
1.5.12adv.Pr4	Selecting, analyzing, and interpreting work.
1.5.12adv.Pr4a	Critique, justify and present choices in the process of analyzing, selecting, curating, and presenting artwork for a specific exhibit or event.
1.5.12adv.Pr5	Developing and refining techniques and models or steps needed to create products.
1.5.12adv.Pr5a	Investigate, compare and contrast methods for preserving and protecting art.
1.5.12adv.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.
1.5.12adv.Pr6a	Curate a collection of objects, artifacts or artwork to impact the viewer's understanding of social, cultural and/or political experiences.
1.5.12adv.Re	Responding
1.5.12adv.Re7	Perceiving and analyzing products.
1.5.12adv.Re7a	Analyze how responses to art develop over time based on knowledge of and experience with art and life.
1.5.12adv.Re7b	Determine the commonalities within a group of artists or visual arts attributed to a particular type of art, timeframe, or culture.
1.5.12adv.Re8	Interpreting intent and meaning.
1.5.12adv.Re8a	Analyze differing interpretations of an artwork or collection of works in order to select and defend a plausible critical analysis.
1.5.12adv.Re9	Applying criteria to evaluate products.
1.5.12adv.Re9a	Construct evaluations of a work of art or collection of works based on differing sets of criteria.
1.5.12adv.Cn	Connecting
1.5.12adv.Cn10	Synthesizing and relating knowledge and personal experiences to create products.
1.5.12adv.Cn10a	Synthesize knowledge of social, cultural, historical, and personal life with artmaking approaches to create meaningful works of art or design.
1.5.12adv.Cn11	Relating artistic ideas and works within societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding.

1.5.12adv.Cn11a	Assess the impact of an artist or a group of artists on the beliefs, values and behaviors of a society.
1.5.12adv.Cn11b	Assess the impact of an artist or group of artists on global issues, including climate change.

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