



***Think Before You Shoot:
Creating Images with Impact in the Journalism Classroom***

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:
High school journalism, yearbook and digital photography courses

Keywords: Visual literacy, media literacy, yearbook, journalism, photography, photo manipulation, media representation.

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: Because most Americans have easy access to digital cameras, many of us simply snap a picture and post it online without much thought about how it was created or the underlying message it contains. This is particularly true of today's high school students, who have lived virtually their entire lives in a digital world. Yet, those setting the framework for what students need to be successful in the 21st century stress the importance of media literacy in both analysis and creation; we need to understand the format, content, purpose and meaning of the photos we view and produce. Meanwhile, photography has had the power to change lives and minds since its invention. This curriculum unit explores the idea of photography as message maker and agent of change. After learning about the elements of photographs and what makes them effective, students will create their own images for student media in order to tell their story visually. It is geared toward teachers looking for strategies to push their students to produce impactful, quality photos that accurately represent the student body and school. Throughout the unit, students will assemble a portfolio of the photographs they have analyzed and produced themselves.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 30 students in Yearbook I.

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Introduction

Virtually everyone is a photographer. Advances in cell phone technology mean a majority of Americans have a high quality camera in their pocket or purse. This easy access produces billions of photos each year. Consider: every *two minutes*, Americans take more photographs than were taken in all of the 1800s; just six years ago, we hit a worldwide mark of 380 billion photographs *per year*.¹ Quantity does not necessarily mean quality, and many people do not think before shooting and posting photos. This includes media students. Send out a student with no photography training on an assignment and you are likely to get a photo of a group of people standing in a straight line against a wall or a group selfie-style photo. Most American students have access to cameras and editing tools, but many lack the skills to analyze and interpret the photographs they see or intentionally create messages in the photographs they take.

This curriculum unit explores the idea of photography as message maker and agent of change. After learning about the elements of photographs and what makes them effective, students will create their own images for student media in order to tell their story visually on their terms. It is designed for a high school yearbook, journalism or newspaper course but can be adjusted for a variety of visual arts classes, such as digital photography. It is geared toward teachers looking for strategies to get their students to produce impactful, quality photos and copy that accurately represents the student body and school.

Background/Demographics

This unit will be implemented initially in an urban high school in Charlotte, NC with an enrollment of approximately 1,800 students as of September 2017. It is a Title I school in which the 2016 demographics were approximately 43 percent Hispanic, 42 percent African-American, 8 percent Asian and 4 percent White. The majority of students were born in the United States, but the other most popular countries of origin include El Salvador, Mexico, Honduras, Nepal, Guatemala, Myanmar, Vietnam, Congo, Somalia and Thailand. This high school also has the highest percentage of English Language Learners in the district, with nearly 30 percent of students served by the ELL program. Portions of the population are transient, and the school experiences a chronic absence rate of 38 percent and below average achievement overall. The school achieved a 76 percent graduation rate over four years (82 percent graduated in five years) in 2016-17 and exceeded growth on targets for student progress. On a North Carolina Department of Public Instruction scale of A+ through F, this school moved from a score of D to C in 2016-17. Testing data includes a score of 19 percent in ACT readiness (the percent of students who scored high enough to qualify for admission in the UNC system) and 33 percent in EOC proficiency (those who earned grade-level scores on Biology, Math I and English II exams.)²

The current administration is devoted to celebrating and leveraging the school's unique demographics in its improvement plans. A campus-wide learning goal is for every student to be able to critically defend an argument orally and in writing in both English and his or her native language. The principal wants all students and staff to feel "welcomed and expected" on campus,

and several strategies are underway to reduce absenteeism and create a school-going culture. The theme for the 2017-18 school year is tied to the Winter Olympics; each department is representing one of the countries of origin mentioned above. In a friendly competition, departments earn points by positively promoting the country they represent, attending after-school events or otherwise fostering a sense of community and school spirit.

While these efforts are improving the social climate on campus, many students remain dismayed at the negative reputation our school has in Charlotte, so they do not take pride in it. Starting last year, in order to push against media stereotypes about our school, I challenged my journalism classes to produce positive news stories, photos, and videos to be featured on our news website and posted around campus. This unit acts as an extension of that initiative because it will give students the opportunity to visually tell their stories in their own terms, in online media and the yearbook, leading to a greater sense of community and school pride. The benefit of using visual literacy in this manner is that it is democratic. All students have access to digital cameras, whether on their personal devices, my classroom cameras or on Chrome books, so they can create and edit photos easily. All students can react and respond to a photo, regardless of reading level or language proficiency. All students can contribute in some way to campus media.

Rationale

English/Language Arts teachers tend to be word and writing-centric. Images are often an afterthought, particularly in an age of high-stakes testing. Yet analyzing and creating images not only improves school media projects, it builds writing and critical thinking skills and empowers students. As a former journalist who teaches media courses, I tend to assign students a story to write, and then encourage them to take a photograph or find an image online to accompany the story. I would now propose that reversing the process - putting the picture first - might result in better writing. For example, Jeff Share describes how first-year teacher Jennifer Pineda used student-generated photography to improve her first graders' writing skills. Students were allowed to photograph anything they wanted at school and were encouraged to bring in photos from home. They discussed the photos with each other, and then wrote detailed stories about them. Because the students had strong connections to the photos, they were interested, motivated and empowered by the writing process. Citing similar assignments in other classrooms, Share argues that the process promotes complex thought.

When students move between different communication systems, be they oral language, print literacy, or visual imagery, they must invent connections between the different sign systems, something that enlarges and expands the meaning. The photographs did not replace print literacy—they enhanced the multiple literacy processes.³

Mary T. Christel describes a similar lesson developed by Louis Mazza that forces students to recognize the ambiguity of photos, a valuable skill in an age of “fake news.” In this version, students swap family photos and create a narrative based on what they see. The fake stories are then shared with the class, who evaluates how the story connects with the image. The owner of each photo then shares the “real” story as they remember it. That real story may evolve

into a written memoir.⁴ This is just one of dozens of ways images can be used in classrooms to discuss how photos represent more than one reality.

Even more relevant to this unit is the notion that photography provides a voice. Jeff Share discusses ways that the camera has been used as a “tool to talk back and respond to dominant media portrayals” in after school programs and non-profits. Share cites programs in which homeless children, teenage girls, indigenous people of southern Mexico and marginalized groups across the world are given cameras in order to document their lives and essentially create their own narrative. He argues that while photography is not often used in classrooms to push against stereotypes in order to effect social change, it should be.

The power of photography to objectify people can be challenged when the camera is used to tell different stories by the people who have traditionally been disempowered by technology. When the people who are often marginalized are the photographers, they move from being objects to becoming subjects empowered to name and frame their ways of seeing.⁵

While the level of disenfranchisement at a given school may depend on its demographics, I would argue that any student – privileged or not – would benefit from developing a voice through photography.

Finally, for yearbook teachers, quality photos mean a quality yearbook and affect the bottom line: sales. Michigan teacher Christina Vettrano, whose yearbook *The Gladiator* has earned state and national honors, created a yearbook curriculum that includes a photography unit. She devotes time to comparing photos with good composition versus those with flaws, and asks students to analyze which rules have been ignored. She then sends them out with cameras to use the photo composition rules to take pictures at designated spots on campus. She also urges students to always consider their audience. After all, students usually buy yearbooks to see pictures of themselves. Vettrano states: “A yearbook may have fantastic designs, but it is defined by crisp, clear, action photographs that capture the important moments of the year and depict the diversity of the student body.”⁶ Despite the pervasiveness of technology, my students thoroughly enjoy thumbing through printed yearbooks from past years. Rarely are they reading the copy; their eyes are drawn to what the people and places looked like “back then.” When they realize that they too will be contributing to the permanent record of the school, they develop a sense of responsibility. This unit pairs that responsibility with the skills to create meaningful photographs.

Unit Goals

The activities and formative and summative assessments in this unit directly align with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English III-IV in reading, writing, speaking and listening and have corresponding College and Career Readiness (CCR) Anchor Standards (see Appendix 1.) This unit provides a strong emphasis on visual text analysis skills and the use of technology. By the end of this unit, students will be able to analyze visual texts for an author’s purpose and rhetoric, identify photo composition and its effect on the message and the viewer’s response, and explain how photos can be an inaccurate or incomplete representation of a person or situation. They also will be able to create meaningful digital images for publication and

evaluate the images they and their classmates have created. The final product/assessment will be a portfolio of student-generated photographs in which each student may choose his or her best work to submit to a digital or printed newspaper or yearbook spread.

Instructional Implementation

Overview

The Partnership for 21st Century Learning has included information, media and technology skills in its framework of what students need to learn in order to be effective citizens and workers. Acknowledging both the unprecedented amount of information available today and the capability to contribute to media more than ever before, the Partnership defines media literacy as the ability to both analyze and create media. Analysis encompasses how and why messages are constructed, how people interpret them differently, and their influence on beliefs. Creation of media products means using appropriate tools, expressions and interpretations in multi-cultural environments.⁷ In the spirit of this two-pronged approach, this unit mingles two sets of skills – the analysis of images and the creation of images. It is designed to shift continuously between the two, but some teachers may find it beneficial to teach them consecutively.

Image Analysis

Students will learn the difference between portraits (posed photos) and candid photos as well as basic composition terms, including proximity, vantage point, sense of place, framing, leading lines, peak of emotion and rule of thirds. The corresponding notes (see Appendix 2) are an adaptation of a handout I created five years ago. I have added a column that includes more details on the effects of the composition strategies using terms from John Suler's *Photographic Psychology: Image and Psyche*.⁸ As students are learning to identify the terms, they will begin discussing how these traits affect the meaning or message of photos. A variety of inquiry strategies will be provided, including the Center for Media Literacy's Core Concepts listed below (see "Teaching Strategies.") Next, they will begin to examine iconic news photos and reflect on how these images affect the way a society remembers and records history. They also will compare multiple versions of the same subject to determine how different photographers create different messages about the same subject. Finally, they will examine visual coverage of their own school that may include photos by professional journalists, social media postings and past yearbook images in order to determine the different messages publicized about their school.

Photo Creation

As students are learning to effectively analyze photography created by others, they can then demonstrate the composition elements in their own photos. They will produce a photo that mimics the composition of an iconic photo they find engaging, take multiple photos of a subject from different vantage points and demonstrate photo editing techniques and how cropping, enhancing and otherwise altering photos affects their meaning. By the end of the unit, each student will have compiled a portfolio that highlights their mastery of each of the techniques and

topics learned as well as an evaluation of a photo created by a classmate. A portfolio checklist is provided in Appendix 3, but the teacher will decide how many points to assign to each portfolio item and whether they wish to weigh certain items heavier than others. In past years, I have assigned a similar project that included full captions with the photos, but I have left the caption requirement out of this version in order to encourage students to focus on the qualities of the photos themselves rather than the who, what, when, where and why. As stated earlier, I am flipping my traditional procedure of writing a story and taking a photo concurrently; I would rather students choose their favorite photo first, then write a story about it. Therefore, the steps for the second assessment include choosing a photo for publication, writing a corresponding caption, copy block or full story, and posting the finished project on the news website or on a yearbook spread. A simplified rubric appears in Appendix 4, but teachers may wish to limit the written portion to captions or expand it to a more complex report.

Teaching Strategies

Differentiation is key in any classroom in order to reach students at different levels and with varied learning styles. My media classes tend to be academically heterogeneous, ranging from freshman who are new to the country to seniors enrolled in AP courses. This unit employs a variety of teaching and learning techniques in order to reach mastery. It contains ways for everyone to be involved as a classroom community.

Differentiated Inquiry

The Center for Media Literacy provides a list of five core concepts as the basis of its MediaLit Kit for educators and parents along with corresponding key questions for students and scaffolded questions for young children or struggling learners. These concepts and questions can be used to analyze professional photographs as well as student-created ones and are leveled to accommodate different proficiencies. The chart below combines CML’s Five Key Questions and Core Concepts (Q/TIPS) for Consumers and Producers⁹ with its questions to guide children.¹⁰

Key Words	Core Concepts	Key Questions	Questions to Guide Children	Construction Questions
Authorship	1. All media messages are “constructed.”	Who created this message?	What is this? How is this put together?	What am I authoring?
Format	2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.	What techniques are used to attract my attention?	What do I see or hear? Smell? Touch or taste? What do I like or dislike about this?	Does my message reflect understanding in format, creativity and technology?
Audience	3. Different	How might	What do I think and	Is my message

	people experience the same media message differently.	different people understand this message differently from me?	feel about this? What might other people think and feel about this?	engaging and compelling for my target audience?
Content	4. Media have embedded values and points of view.	What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented or omitted in this message?	What does this tell me about how other people live and what they believe? Is anything or anyone left out?	Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles, and points of view in my content?
Purpose	5. Media are organized to gain profit and/or power.	Why was this message sent?	Is this trying to <i>tell</i> me something? Is this trying to <i>sell</i> me something?	Have I communicated my purpose effectively?

Modeling

When teaching hands-on skills and activities that will require students to work independently outside of the classroom, such as taking photographs and conducting interviews on campus, it is crucial for teachers to model the steps involved in the skill and their behavior expectations. I will model the skill while students watch, we will practice the skill together, and they will practice the skill with peers before they leave the classroom.

Project-Based Learning

Hands-on projects are an effective way for many students because they are “learning by doing” rather than merely taking notes and taking a test. When students are able to design their own projects, they are more apt to take ownership of the activity and remain engaged.

Peer Teaching and Evaluation

Being able to teach a task or concept to a peer is a reliable indication of mastery. Furthermore, students are often better equipped to explain and learn concepts from people who are their own age. Peer teaching and evaluation, using rubrics, helps foster relationships and trust in the classroom.

Small group/whole class discussions

Small group and whole class discussions allow students to engage with different points of view and form arguments. They help students feel comfortable with speaking in public and prepare them for classroom discussions in the college environment. Small groups in particular help shy students contribute ideas in a more comfortable setting. They also ensure that students come prepared with questions and comments.

Lessons/Classroom Activities

Each lesson includes a warm up activity, direct instruction, individual or small group practice and a portfolio assignment. The lessons are designed to build upon each other in skill and complexity. The portfolio acts as the culminating assessment but is intended to be compiled as students are progressing through the lessons.

Lesson 1: Why Study Photography?

As a warm up, students will respond in writing to this prompt: *You may have heard the saying “A picture is worth 1,000 words.” What does this saying mean to you? Describe a photograph you have seen that you believe is worth “1,000 words” or is otherwise meaningful.*

After giving time for individual responses, the teacher will ask students to share their ideas with a partner, then with the whole class. The teacher will explain the difference between a portrait (posed) photograph and a candid (caught in the moment, off guard) photograph and students will record the definitions in their notes (see Appendix 2). Depending on the number of students in the class, the teacher will distribute at least one caption from the CNN slideshow “25 of the Most Iconic Photographs” (or one similar) to each student.¹¹ The photos will offer a meaningful introduction to the power of photography and will offer examples of high quality, high impact photography. As the teacher advances through the photos on a projector, the student holding that caption on view will read it aloud. The teacher and students will discuss the photo and note whether it is a candid photo or portrait. Note: This slideshow contains some potentially disturbing images and teachers should use with discretion based on the maturity of their students.

After the slideshow, students will respond to these questions:

1. Which type of photo, candid or portrait, was used most often in these news photos?
2. Why do you think this type was used more often?
3. What makes these photos “iconic?” What do they have in common?

Portfolio item 1: Take a portrait of a person or small group of people. Then, take a candid of this same person or group when they are not paying attention. Compare the two photos. How are these photos different representations of the same person or people?

Lesson 2: The Basics of Composition

For the warm up, the teacher will choose one of the iconic photos from the previous lesson that seemed to resonate with students. They will have the basic information about the photo already because they would have heard the caption, but this exercise asks them to take a closer look. First, they will make a list of everything they notice in the photo, which may include people, objects, color, distance and other elements. Next, they will explain the tone, meaning and what

they like or dislike about the photo and why. They will record their responses in the chart below, share their responses with a partner, and contribute to a whole-class discussion.

1. What do you see in this photo? Make a list of everything you notice.
2. What do you like or dislike about this photo? Why?
Based on what you see, what is this photo about? What does it mean?
How would you describe the tone of this photo in a few words?

The teacher will introduce the following vocabulary words and students will record in their notes: proximity, vantage point, sense of place, framing, leading lines, rule of thirds and peak of emotion. After each term, the teacher will point out the technique in one or more of the iconic photos studied previously or in the examples provided on the handout. In the third column of notes, students will record the reason or effect of using each of these techniques.

Portfolio items 2-8 (these may be introduced on this day but can be completed throughout the unit):

- Take a photo of one subject in close proximity and another from further away. Explain how the change in proximity affects the photo.
- Take a photo of one subject from three different vantage points/angles. Explain how the change in angle affects the photo.
- Take a photo that illustrates a sense of place at your school. Explain how this location is unique to your school.

- Take a photo that uses an object to frame your subject. Describe the object used and why you chose that object.
- Take a photo that uses leading lines to lead to your subject. Explain the lines you used.
- Take a candid photo that captures peak of emotion. Describe the emotion you captured.
- Take a photo of a subject that uses the rule of thirds and one in which the subject is centered. Explain the difference between these photos.

Lesson 3: Why Take Photographs?

For the warm up, students will respond in writing to the following prompt: *Why do you take pictures? Why do other people take pictures? Why are they important?* Students will discuss with a partner, and then contribute to whole class discussion. They will then view the video “Teenage Documentarians Show the Power of Photography,” which features the stories of three students in New York who are involved with documentary photography projects.¹² After the video, students will respond to and discuss these questions:

1. What reasons did these students give for taking photographs? What were they hoping to accomplish?
2. What are some reasons to take photographs at your school or in your community? What are some possible topics you could explore?

Next, students will use a five-step inquiry technique to analyze the message of a photo. The teacher will choose one news media photograph to model the inquiry process described above (see Differentiated Inquiry.) The following example uses a photo of Elian Gonzalez from the CNN photo slideshow viewed in Lesson 1, but teachers should feel free to choose a journalistic photo that is locally relevant or that they believe will resonate with students. The Gonzalez photo is not available to reprint here, but may be found in the CNN slideshow or through a Google image search.

The teacher will begin by projecting the photo and guiding students through the Center for Media Literacy’s five key questions. Teachers may decide to use the questions for children or a combination depending on the level of the students.

1. Who created this message? Ask students to infer who the photographer may be and where this photo may have been published. If they struggle, ask whether it is a portrait or a candid photo. Discuss the vantage point of the photographer and the quality of the photo. Inform students that this is a Pulitzer Prize news photo by Alan Diaz of the Associated Press, who was staying with the family in Miami.

2. What techniques are used to grab my attention? Students will most likely notice how the majority of the photo is consumed by the INS agent, as well as the size and location of the gun in the foreground, and the open mouths and facial expressions of the subjects. They may add that the barrel of the gun acts as a leading line to the horrified look of the people at right and that these people are partially cut out of the frame. They should also note that the subjects at right

appear trapped or cornered in the closet by the men, who appear to be wearing military-style uniforms.

3. *How might different people understand this message differently?* Ask students how they feel about this photograph. Most will likely state that they feel sympathy for the boy and the man and outrage toward the agents with guns. Push them to think about how someone might view this differently, such as a military or government official.

4. *What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?* Students will probably see this as a victimization of the civilians, particularly the child. They may note that it seems to be criticizing the military/government for putting a helpless child in danger. Ask them if they can detect any bias in the photograph.

5. *Why is this message being sent?* Remind students that this photo ran on numerous front pages in 2000 and that it won the top award in journalism. This would be an ideal time to include more context about Elian Gonzalez. The 6-year-old boy was traveling on a small boat from Cuba to the United States. The boat capsized, killing his mother and 12 others, but the man at right rescued Elian. Elian's father in Cuba fought for custody with the boy's family in Miami until INS agents stormed the house and took the child, sending him back to Cuba. Students will probably say that the photo is meant to create sympathy and support for Elian's Miami relatives and to make the immigration agents seem like villains. They may even consider it a statement about U.S. immigration policies.

Time permitting, there are two companion texts to this photograph that would add to the depth of the conversation. In an article published 10 years after the incident, photographer Alan Diaz explains how the photo came about and how he tried to tell Elian, in Spanish, that "...nothing's happening. It's going to be alright." He remains haunted by the child's screams that day.¹³ Conversely, a 2013 CNN report quotes a 20-year-old Elian Gonzalez as being grateful for his return to Cuba and praising Fidel Castro as a father figure. He states that he would have suffered if he had been forced to stay in the United States.¹⁴

Next, students will work in pairs or small groups to repeat the five-step process with a photo about their school that they choose from local media or yearbooks from previous years. The teacher may print the photos and have students work through the charted questions on paper or have each group submit electronically. Regardless, there should be time for students to see each other's photos and analysis via a gallery crawl or electronic presentation, such as a Google slideshow.

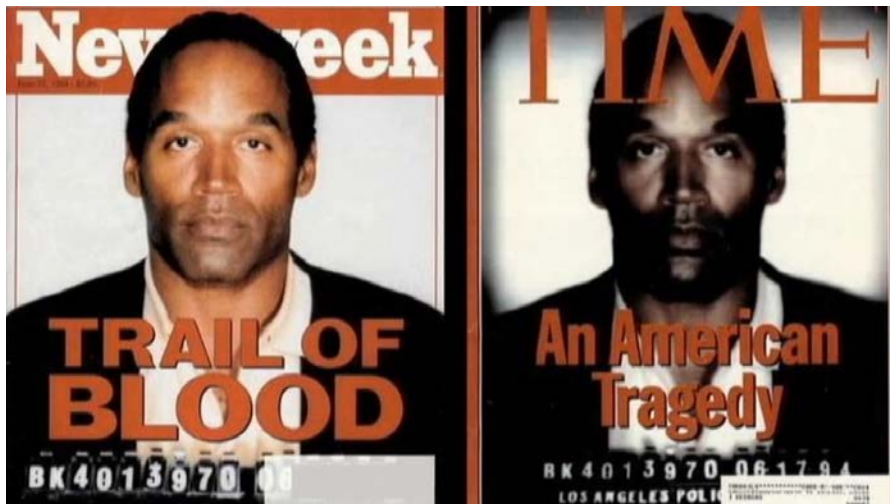
Portfolio item 9: Choose another news media or yearbook photo of your school not already covered in class. Complete an analysis of the photo using the five-step chart. Then, explain the overall message this photograph sends about your school.

Lesson 4: Manipulating Photographs

For the warm up, the teacher will show the original Kent State Massacre photo from the CNN iconic photo slideshow side-by-side with an edited version that removes the pole behind Mary Ann Vecchio's head. It is worth mentioning to students that the original photo was taken by 22-year-old photojournalism student, who was not much older than they are now, and won a Pulitzer in 1971. The version below is labeled for noncommercial reuse, but the original photos, the altered version, and an explanation may be found at <https://petapixel.com/2012/08/29/the-kent-state-massacre-photo-and-the-case-of-the-missing-pole/>.¹⁵



Without revealing the answer, the teacher will ask students to compare the two photos and spot the difference. Once someone has found it, students will discuss why someone would have removed the pole and how it alters the meaning of the photo. Students should also discuss whether they believe it was acceptable for the fence post to be removed. Next, for a more dramatic comparison, the teacher may project these *Newsweek* and *Time* magazine cover photos of O.J. Simpson from June 1994.



Students should notice immediately the darker image on the *Time* photo and may discuss the difference in tone and possible racial implications of each photo. For added reinforcement, the teacher may show a short PBS video about the implications of Photoshop.¹⁶ The video includes references to the Kent State and O.J. Simpson photos as well as several other egregious photo edits.

In an idea adapted from Nancy Palmquist,¹⁷ students will then visit the C-Net website “Pictures that Lie,” view and discuss the 26 photos with a partner/small group and choose one to respond to in writing.¹⁸ Their written responses will address the following:

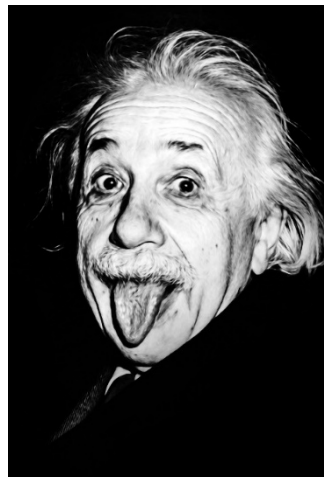
- Describe what is happening in the photo. What is it about?
- Explain how the photo was changed or altered.
- How does the alteration change your perception or opinion of the subject?
- When is it acceptable to alter a photo? When is it not?
- Should journalists be held to a higher standard when altering photos? Why or why not?

The portfolio assessment for this lesson requires students to use a photo editor such as Photoshop. If Photoshop is not available, there are numerous free applications available online. Most MS Word applications allow cropping, color adjustments, transparency alterations and filters. Depending on the skill level of students, the teacher may need to model or provide a mini-lesson on the process.

Portfolio item 10: Take a new photo or choose one you have already taken. Use a photo editing application to change the photo in some way. You may crop, adjust color, remove or add items or otherwise alter the original. Paste both photos in your portfolio and explain how you changed the photo and the effect your changes have on its meaning.

Lesson 5: The Power of Portraits

For the warm up, students will compare two portraits they have seen previously in the CNN iconic photograph slideshow – Winston Churchill and Albert Einstein. The teacher will print and/or project these two portraits side by side. Students will record what they notice in each photo considering the following aspects and questions.



- Describe the lighting in each photo.
- Describe the subjects' facial expressions.
- What is each subject wearing?
- Compare the proximity of each photo.
- What, if anything, is in the background of each photo?
- Considering each of these questions and other observations you make, how would you describe the tone of each photo and the personality of each subject?

Students will likely notice the powerful aspects of the Churchill photo versus the playfulness of Einstein's and the fact that Churchill's is shadowy and taken from a distance, projecting a serious and sinister tone. Next, students will examine multiple portraits of the same person taken in different contexts. To model and discuss in the whole group, the teacher may compare a cover portrait of Arnold Schwarzenegger on a fitness magazine versus one on a political magazine cover, though a comparison of just about any celebrity would suffice. For added practice, students will choose another famous person and compare two portraits published in the media. They will construct a written response using the same questions in the warm up.

Portfolio item 11: Choose a person on campus and take a portrait of them. Choose the background, lighting and camera angle carefully based on the image or tone you would like to portray. Do you want them to appear powerful? Playful? Vulnerable? Explain the reasons behind your choices.

Lesson 6: #iftheygunnedmedown: Does the media reinforce stereotypes?

This lesson examines the choices media make in publishing photos, particularly of minorities who are victims or perpetrators of crimes. After black teenager Michael Brown was fatally shot by police in Ferguson, Mo. in 2014, several media outlets published "thuggish" photos of him. In a social media protest, people posted on Twitter under #iftheygunnedmedown two contrasting photos of themselves - one considered "positive" and the other "negative" - asking hypothetically which photo of them would be published if they were killed.¹⁹ For the warm up, the teacher will show an example of one of the juxtaposed pairs and ask students to describe both what they see and what they would assume about the subjects based on what they see.

Portfolio item 12: #iftheyclosedusdown. Find two photos of your school that have been published in local media and portray contrasting messages. Include the published caption or basic information about each photo (who, what, when, where, why) as well as the five-question analysis discussed previously in class. If your school were to close today, which photo would the media be most likely to publish? Explain and defend your answer. Is this the photo you would choose to represent your school? Why or why not?

Lesson 7: Reimagined Photos.

For this assignment, students will need ample time to view a variety of photos, as they will be asked to choose an iconic (or at least well-known) photo and recreate it. For the warm up, the teacher will show an example or two of reimagined photos. Easily accessible examples are available on the *Today* website at <https://www.today.com/slideshow/12-awesome-recreations-famous-pics-48677073>.)²⁰ Students will compare the original photo to the recreation, noting how the new photo is different in subject, tone, and meaning. (There are also several humorous examples available involving the actor John Malkovich.) Students struggling with ideas or narrowing down options should be urged to choose a topic they are passionate about first, such as nature, politics, sports, and search popular photos based on that topic.

Portfolio item 13: Choose an iconic or famous photo pertaining to a topic of your choice. Analyze the photo fully, paying special attention to lighting, framing, location and the other photographic traits you have learned in this unit. Next, set up a photo shoot in which you recreate the photo by putting your “spin” on it. Publish the original photo next to your recreation in your portfolio. Explain why you chose this photo to recreate and the choices you made.

Additional Portfolio Items

Portfolio item 14: Choose one of the photos you created and complete the five construction questions provided in class.

Portfolio item 15: Exchange the photo from item 14 with another classmate. Evaluate his or her photo using the five key questions discussed in class. Share your evaluation with that student and have them share their evaluation of your photo with you. Did your evaluation of the photo match your partner’s intentions? Did his or her evaluation match yours? Explain.

Assessment 2: Submission to Student Media.

Since the ultimate goal of this unit is for students to create interesting images worthy of publication, each student will either choose one of his or her self-produced photos from the portfolio or take a new photo that her or she feels accurately tells a story about the school. Then, the student will write a short story to accompany the photo in the yearbook or on the student newspaper or news site. The teacher will need to determine the length of the story based on space and skill level. Rather than assigning an event to “cover” and photograph, this assignment asks students to first take a compelling photo that is meaningful to them, *then* write the story of the people, object or action represented as explained in the rationale portion of this unit.

Appendix 1: Implementing Teaching Standards

Reading Informational Standards

RI-1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. *Students will list direct evidence viewed in the visual texts and draw conclusions on its meaning based on what they see.*

RI-6: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text. *Students will "read" and analyze visuals for author, format, audience, content and purpose as noted in the Center for Media Literacy's five core concepts and questions.*

RI-7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem. *Students will compare visual topics and subjects created by different media outlets in order to determine how each outlet portrays the subject. They will compare visual representations with written accounts of the topics.*

Writing standards

W2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content. *Students will use inquiry techniques to examine visual texts and produce written responses that explain and defend their analyses. They will create visual texts and compose at least one written companion piece.*

W6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information. *Students will use digital cameras to create visual texts and a technology-based application to publish a portfolio of their work. They will research photojournalistic news coverage of their school using the Internet. They will share their work with peers for feedback and publish a photograph and story on a news website or in a yearbook.*

Speaking and Listening Standards



SL5: Make strategic use of digital media in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning and evidence and to add interest. *Students will share one or more of their products in small-group and whole-class presentations.*





Appendix 2: Elements of Photography Notes

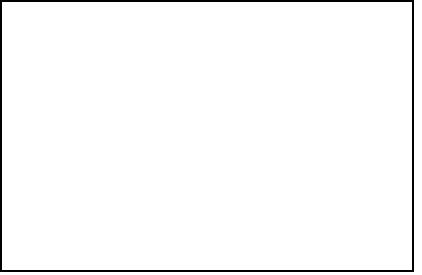
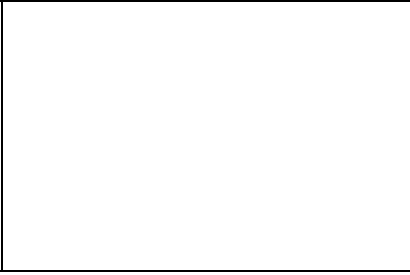
Types of Photos

Type	Definition	When to Use
Mugshot	Head and shoulders photo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification • Including many faces in a story
Portrait	A posed photo that includes elements of the background or story. The subject is often looking at the camera	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With written profiles • When the clothing or background is important
Candid	Subjects are not posed and are acting naturally. They are caught in the moment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • News, events, sports • To show action

Composition Strategies

Strategy	Definition	Effect/When to Use
Close proximity 	Close up photo achieved by getting close to subject, using zoom lens or cropping.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show detail • Show intimacy with subject
Vantage Point <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Front angle 2. High angle (pictured) 3. Low angle 4. Back angle 5. Tilted angle 	Where the photographer is standing and pointing the camera. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Eye level with subject 2. Above, shooting down. 3. Below, shooting up. 4. Behind the subject 5. Not level. Camera tilted to the right or left. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Direct, honest, equal 2. Often more flattering; may make subject seem less powerful or vulnerable than viewer. 3. Subject may seem more powerful/dominant. 4. Seems secretive or distant. 5. Adds energy or tension.

<p>Sense of Place</p> 	<p>Photo is zoomed out to show the location.</p>	<p>Travel photography, landscapes or when location is otherwise important.</p>
<p>Framing</p> 	<p>Surrounding the subject with an object, such as a door or trees.</p>	<p>Leads the viewer's eye to the subject in an interesting way.</p>
 <p>Leading lines</p>	<p>Objects and features such as roads and rivers that create lines leading to the subject or center of interest.</p>	<p>Leads the viewer's eye to the subject. May create movement.</p>
<p>Peak of emotion</p> 	<p>Capturing the moment when something happens; revealing the action, reaction, motion or emotion.</p>	<p>In a conflict or high energy situation, such as disasters, sports, elections, disasters and other competitions.</p>
<p>Rule of thirds</p>	<p>Off centering the subject by using the grid intersections or aligning the subject along one of the horizontal or vertical lines.</p>	<p>Adds space and visual interest.</p>



Appendix 3 Photography Portfolio Checklist

Page/Slide	Description/requirements
Slide 1 Portrait vs. Candid	<input type="checkbox"/> Candid photo is a correct demonstration of the term and student-created. <input type="checkbox"/> Portrait is a correct demonstration of the term and student-created. <input type="checkbox"/> Complete comparison included.
Slide 2 Proximity	<input type="checkbox"/> Close proximity photo is a correct demonstration of the term and student-created. <input type="checkbox"/> Distant photo is of same subject but farther away. <input type="checkbox"/> Complete comparison included.
Slide 3 Vantage Point	<input type="checkbox"/> Vantage point 1 is labeled with type and student-created. <input type="checkbox"/> Vantage point 2 is labeled with type and student-created. <input type="checkbox"/> Vantage point 3 is labeled with type and student-created. <input type="checkbox"/> Complete explanation of effect included.
Slide 4 Sense of Place	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo is a correct demonstration of the term and student-created. <input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of chosen location is included.
Slide 5 Framing	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo is a correct demonstration of the term and student-created.
Slide 6 Leading Lines	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo is a correct demonstration of the term and student-created. <input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of type of line used and effect is included.
Slide 7 Peak of Emotion	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo is candid, correct demonstration of the term and student-created. <input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of the emotion conveyed is included.
Slide 8 Rule of Thirds	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo is a correct demonstration of the term and student-created. <input type="checkbox"/> Gridlines are drawn on the photo.
Slide 9 School Photo Analysis	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo is a media or yearbook photo of the school not covered in class. <input type="checkbox"/> Five-step chart analysis is included.
Slide 10 Photo Manipulation	<input type="checkbox"/> Original photo is student-created. <input type="checkbox"/> Second photo is manipulated version of the original and is student-created. <input type="checkbox"/> Editing techniques explained. <input type="checkbox"/> Effect changes have on meaning is explained.
Slide 11	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo is a portrait and is student-created. <input type="checkbox"/> Choices for background, lighting and vantage point are explained.

Portrait	
Slide 12 #iftheyclosedusdown	<input type="checkbox"/> Two photos of media coverage of school are included. <input type="checkbox"/> Photos convey contrasting messages. <input type="checkbox"/> Each photo includes five-step chart analysis. <input type="checkbox"/> Media choice for photo is explained and defended. <input type="checkbox"/> Student choice for photo is explained and defended.
Slide 13 Reimagined photo	<input type="checkbox"/> Copy of original iconic photo is included. <input type="checkbox"/> Five-step analysis of photo is included. <input type="checkbox"/> Photo recreation mimics original photo and is student-created. <input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of choices is included.
Slide 14 Self-analysis	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo is student-created. <input type="checkbox"/> Five-step analysis of photo is included.
Slide 15 Peer Analysis	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo is created by a peer. <input type="checkbox"/> Five-step analysis of peer's photo is included. <input type="checkbox"/> Explanation of whether peer evaluation matched intention is included.

Appendix 4: Photo Story Rubric/Checklist

Aspect of story	A-B	C-D	F
Headline	Strong, catchy headline. Most likely uses a subject and verb. First letter of each word except articles is capitalized	Headline is about the topic but is boring. Capitalization may be incorrect.	No headline
Byline	Includes BY and the writer's name directly under the headline.	Incomplete or in the wrong spot.	Not included
Story elements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Interesting lead/opening sentence draws in reader. <input type="checkbox"/> The rest of the story includes the who, what, when, where and why. <input type="checkbox"/> The story includes interesting details that add to the meaning of the photo. <input type="checkbox"/> Ends with a sense of closure. 	Story includes all four story elements and is interesting to read.	Story is missing one of the elements.	Story is missing two of the elements and/or is confusing.
People involved in the story are quoted or paraphrased	Two people quoted	One person quoted	No one is quoted
Photo	Student-produced photo exceeds qualities of composition.	Student-produced photo meets qualities of composition.	Photo quality is poor.

Relevance to school community	Directly relevant to school readers.	Possibly interesting to school readers.	Not relevant.
Peer edit	Story was peer edited and revised. Peer's name:		Story was not peer edited.
Spelling/Grammar	Few to no mistakes	Some mistakes, but meaning is still clear.	Mistakes make story unreadable.

Materials for Classroom Use

Photos

All photos appearing in the unit and appendix are labeled for noncommercial reuse. Links to each are provided below.

Nun viewing Kent State Massacre photo:

https://c2.staticflickr.com/2/1334/5104145372_16e31cbb1d_b.jpg

O.J. Simpson cover photos: http://i.vimeocdn.com/video/524019761_1280x720.jpg Winston

Churchill: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bc/Sir_Winston_Churchill -](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bc/Sir_Winston_Churchill_-_19086236948.jpg)

[_19086236948.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bc/Sir_Winston_Churchill_-_19086236948.jpg)

Albert Einstein: [http://www.publicdomainpictures.net/pictures/230000/velka/albert-einstein-](http://www.publicdomainpictures.net/pictures/230000/velka/albert-einstein-1505932669R3h.jpg)

[1505932669R3h.jpg](http://www.publicdomainpictures.net/pictures/230000/velka/albert-einstein-1505932669R3h.jpg)

Close proximity <https://static.pexels.com/photos/69932/tabby-cat-close-up-portrait-69932.jpeg>

Vantage Point: <https://static.pexels.com/photos/373934/pexels-photo-373934.jpeg>

Sense of place:

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/52/In_tribute_to_Ansel_Adams_McGown_P](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/52/In_tribute_to_Ansel_Adams_McGown_Peak_reflected_on_Stanley_Lake%2C_Idaho_in_black_and_white.jpg)

[eak_reflected_on_Stanley_Lake%2C_Idaho_in_black_and_white.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/52/In_tribute_to_Ansel_Adams_McGown_Peak_reflected_on_Stanley_Lake%2C_Idaho_in_black_and_white.jpg)

Framing: https://c1.staticflickr.com/1/160/351362491_d2d1bae32a_b.jpg

Leading lines: https://c1.staticflickr.com/4/3232/3082839059_43055ea50d_b.jpg

Peak of emotion: https://pixabay.com/p-2391697/?no_redirect

Rule of thirds: https://c1.staticflickr.com/3/2675/4003860671_6ac65f4e22_b.jpg

Students also will need access to a camera (point-and-shoot digital, camera phone or on a computer), photo editing software, and an electronic program on which to create a portfolio, such as Google slides or PowerPoint.

Resources for Students and Teachers

- "12 Awesome Recreations of Famous Pics." TODAY.com. August 15, 2012. Accessed November 19, 2017. <https://www.today.com/slideshow/12-awesome-recreations-famous-pics-48677073>. Today show viewers contributed to a 12-photo slideshow of famous photos they recreated. The slideshow is quick and easy to review and illustrates that average people have the ability to recreate an iconic photo.
- "25 of the most iconic photographs." CNN. September 27, 2016. Accessed October 28, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/01/world/gallery/iconic-images/index.html>. Some images in this slideshow are disturbing, so teachers should use with caution. It provides journalistic photos from several decades in history and includes short captions that add context.
- Bustos, Sergio R. "Photographer who took famous Elian Gonzalez picture haunted by events 10 years later." Tribunedigital-sunsentinel. April 22, 2010. Accessed November 19, 2017. http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2010-04-22/news/fl-elian-photographer-20100422_1_cry-elian-gonzalez-haunted. In this short article, Associated Press photographer Alan Diaz explains how he captured his award-winning photo of Elian Gonzalez while staying in the family home in Miami in 2000 and how he tried to comfort the young refugee.
- Griffin, David, "How Photography Connects Us to the World," *TED Talk*. February 2008. Accessed November 19, 2017. https://www.ted.com/talks/david_griffin_on_how_photography_connects#t-6442. Griffin presents delightful examples of storytelling through photography from his work as an editor at *National Geographic* magazine. The video may not engage very young audiences, but many will find the incredible nature photos inspiring.
- Oppmann, Patrick. "Elian Gonzalez makes first trip outside Cuba since return from Miami." CNN. December 08, 2013. Accessed November 19, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/06/world/americas/elian-gonzalez-travel/index.html>. As a young adult, Elian Gonzalez states that he is grateful that he was returned to Cuba to live with his father and that he views Fidel Castro as a father figure. It is an interesting counterpoint to what many Americans viewed as an injustice in 2000.
- "Pictures that lie (photos)." CNET. May 11, 2011. Accessed October 28, 2017. <https://www.cnet.com/pictures/pictures-that-lie-photos>. The slideshow includes 26 photos, ranging from celebrities to military endeavors, that push students to examine the ethics behind using photo-editing tools.
- Smit, Gareth. "Teenage Documentarians Show the Power of Photography." The New York Times. May 04, 2017. Accessed October 28, 2017. https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2017/05/04/the-power-of-photography-for-teenage-documentarians/?WT.mc_ev=click&WT.mc_id=NYT-E-I-NYT-E-AT-050417-L6&=&em_pos=large&emc=edit_el_20170504&nl=at-times&nlid=6316818&ref=headline&te=1&_r=0. This four-minute documentary follows three New York students as they attempt to chronicle life in their communities and families through photographs. It is highly relatable to students and will serve to motivate young photographers in documenting their own lives.

- Stampler, Laura . "#IfTheyGunnedMeDown Hashtag Responds to Michael Brown Shooting." Time. August 11, 2014. Accessed October 28, 2017. <http://time.com/3100975/iftheygunnedmedown-ferguson-missouri-michael-brown/>. After Michael Brown was killed by police in Ferguson, Mo. in 2014, some of the photos published of him were labeled “thuggish.” As a form of protest, many people posted contrasting photos of themselves and asked which photo the media would likely publish if they were killed. The article only features four tweets posted by African-Americans, but is effective in launching a conversation on how the media chooses to portray victims of violence, especially minorities.
- "What happens when Photoshop goes too far?" PBS. July 26, 2015. Accessed October 29, 2017. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/now-see-exhibit-chronicles-manipulated-news-photos>. This four-minute video gives ample examples of journalistic photo editing and encourages viewers to consider the ethical consequences of altering photos for publication.
- Zhang, Michael. "The Kent State Massacre Photo and the Case of the Missing Pole." PetaPixel. August 29, 2012. Accessed October 29, 2017. <https://petapixel.com/2012/08/29/the-kent-state-massacre-photo-and-the-case-of-the-missing-pole/>. Viewers will see the unedited and edited versions of this famous photo from 1970. The short article explains how the edited version was published frequently as recently as 1995. The mystery of who airbrushed the pole out of the original image remains unsolved, according to the article.

Bibliography

- Christel, Mary T. "Presenting My Selfie to the Digital World: Visual Composition for Better Representation" in *Essentials of Teaching and Integrating Visual and Media Literacy: Visualizing Learning*, edited by Danilo M. Baylen, and Adriana D'Alba, 119-145. 2015. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=985138>. The author argues that understanding visual composition allows us to analyze the images we create everyday as well as those published in the media. She offers several activities that help users of technology choose the best medium for communicating a message. It is chapter 6 of a highly useful anthology for educators interested in media literacy.
- "Key Questions to Guide Young Children." Center for Media Literacy. Accessed September 23, 2017. <http://www.medialit.org/reading-room/key-questions-guide-young-children>. The CML has developed this highly useful set of questions to help viewers analyze authorship, format, audience, context and purpose of photographs and images that young children and struggling readers can understand easily.
- "Media Lit Kit, CML's Five Key Questions and Core Concepts (Q/TIPS) for Consumers and Producers." *Center for Media Literacy*. 2009. Accessed November 19, 2017. http://www.medialit.org/sites/default/files/QTIPS%20CHART_0.pdf. This is a version of the CML question set referenced above but includes a set of questions aimed at the creator of the visual message. It will prove useful when students are conducting self-evaluations of their work.
- Mirzoeff, Nicholas. *How to See the World: An Introduction to Images, from Self-portraits to Selfies, Maps to Movies, and More*. New York: Basic Books, 2016. 1-69. The author discusses the evolution of images and the effects of using technology to view and create images on their meaning. He argues that visual culture is not only seeing events but has the ability to create change.
- "NC School Report Cards." North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. 2015-16. Accessed September 22, 2017. https://ncreportcards.ondemand.sas.com/src/#/?_k=mpdibp. Each public school in North Carolina is assessed each year based on test scores, graduation rates, teacher retention and dozens of other factors.
- "P21 Framework Definitions." Partnership for 21st Century Learning. May 2015. Accessed November 19, 2017. http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/docs/P21_Framework_Definitions_New_Logo_2015.pdf. In its recommendations for preparing students for modern civic and work life, the partnership strongly advocates for media literacy through student analysis and production. This document is an overview of all of the concepts included in the framework.
- Palmquist, Nancy N. 2008. "Creating Images to Understand Visual Literacy". *Knowledge Quest*. 36 (3): 20-23. Palmquist is a high school media specialist who created a photography curriculum in which students analyze images and create their own. The article includes several useful activities and strategies and would be easy to adapt for a high school journalism or photography course.

Share, Jeff. "Cameras in Classrooms: Photography's Pedagogical Potential" in *Essentials of teaching and integrating visual and media literacy: visualizing learning*, edited by Danilo M. Baylen, and Adriana D'Alba, 97-115.

2015. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=985138>. Share gives numerous first hand examples from his classroom and those of other teachers on interesting ways to use cameras to study everything from vocabulary to social issues. He argues that photography is an effective agent for change.

Suler, John. *Photographic Psychology: Image and Psyche*. 2013. Accessed November 19, 2017. http://truecenterpublishing.com/photopsy/article_index.htm. Suler explains how viewers of images create meaning based on photo composition techniques. The section about camera angles is thorough and particularly useful.

Vettraino, Christina M. 2007. "Yearbook 101: A How-To Guide for Teaching the Yearbook Basics." *English Journal*.96 (5): 25-29. Vettraino was a yearbook adviser who could not find a suitable yearbook curriculum to use with her students so she created her own. Her unit is well planned and spends an ample amount of time on photography production.

Notes

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- ¹ Mirzoeff, *How to see the world*, 4-5.
 - ² NC School Report Cards 2015-16
 - ³ Share, "Cameras in classrooms," 104.
 - ⁴ Christel, "Presenting My Selfie to the Digital World," 134.
 - ⁵ Share, "Cameras in classrooms," 111.
 - ⁶ Vettraino, "Yearbook 101," 28.
 - ⁷ "P21 Framework Definitions."
 - ⁸ Suler, "Photographic Psychology."
 - ⁹ "Media Lit Kit."
 - ¹⁰ "Key Questions to Guide Young Children."
 - ¹¹ "25 of the most iconic photographs."
 - ¹² Smit, "Teenage Documentarians."
 - ¹³ Bustos, "Photographer who took famous Elian Gonzalez picture."
 - ¹⁴ Oppmann, "Elian Gonzalez makes first trip outside Cuba."
 - ¹⁵ Zhang, "The Kent State Massacre Photo."
 - ¹⁶ "What happens when Photoshop goes too far?"
 - ¹⁷ Palmquist, "Creating Images to Understand Visual Literacy," 22.
 - ¹⁸ "Pictures that lie."
 - ¹⁹ Stamper, "#IfTheyGunnedMeDown."
 - ²⁰ "12 awesome recreations of famous pics."