

Letter Photography



Grade: 5

Medium: Photography

Learning Objective: Students will express a message visually using a camera to respond to their cultural and natural environment.

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Elements of Art/Principles of Design

Contrast: a principle of design; a technique that shows differences in the elements of visual arts in an artwork, such as smooth/rough textures, light/dark colors, or thick/thin lines.

Emphasis: the area of a composition which is visually dominant.

Line: an element of visual arts; the flat path of a dot through space used by artists to control the viewer's eye movement; a long narrow mark or stroke made on or in a surface; a thin mark made by a pencil, pen, or brush. The repetition of lines (and/or shapes) is used to create texture, pattern, and gradations of value.

Space: an element of visual arts; the area above, below, around, and within an artwork; the illusion of depth or space on a flat surface, created by means of the following techniques: rendering shapes and forms so that they overlap and using size, detail, value, color, and linear perspective.

- **Negative Space:** the empty space surrounding a shape, figure, or form in a two- or three-dimensional artwork

- **Positive Space:** the actual space taken up by the line, shape, or form.

Shape: an element of visual arts; a two-dimensional (flat) area enclosed by a line.

- **Geometric:** shapes that are based on mathematical principles, such as a square/cube, circle/sphere, triangle/cone, or pyramid.

- **Organic:** irregular shapes, often curving or rounded, and more informal than geometric shapes.

Materials & Supplies

- Cameras or iPhones (enough for 4-5 students to share during photo sessions)
- Photo printer or another method of printing images
- Black tag board for mounting

Context (History and/or Artists)

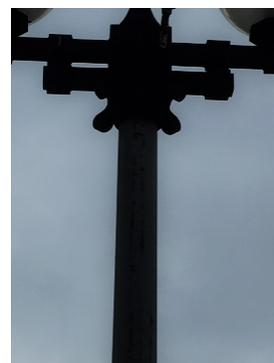
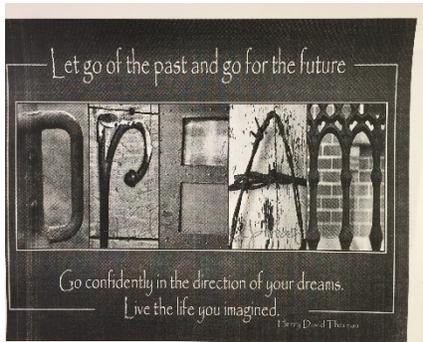
Photographers use images to convey meaning. Some show beauty/brutality of nature, some document important moments in history (raising the flag on Iwo Jima), some record cultural events, some bring us images from times past (Lindbergh's plane) or faraway places (earth seen from the moon) while others document things we can't see with the naked eye (snowflakes). This is how photography aids society; both to educate and to express what is meaningful to the photographer.

There are many important photographs you could quickly show the students to articulate making meaning with visual imagery. Include images from 'Alphabet City' in your presentation to students.

Stephen T. Johnson published a book on letter photography in 1995 called "Alphabet City." He is an artist interested in the connection between words and images. Besides photography, his art work also includes collage, 3-D, and painting.

Advanced Preparation

- Note: Students may not communicate directly with the volunteer art docents via social media or email. Work out a way to get the letter images from the students to the docent, through the teacher.
- Perhaps the students could manipulate their letters during computer lab time and print their own letters.
- Check out the book "Alphabet Photography" by Stephen T. Johnson.
- Find examples of letter photography on the internet or library. Print copies out to show the class.
- Find an example of the alphabet and print out a copy of the alphabet.
- Print out a list of words for the students to choose from (this will cut down on the random silly, friend impressing, inappropriate or first thing they can spell choices)
 - List of 'inspirational' words
 - Spelling words
 - Vocabulary from an upcoming play or drama event
 - Poetry they are studying



Tips & Tricks

- Talk to your teacher about the best way to gather the letter images from the students. Have them all send them to the teacher's email perhaps. Students may not communicate directly with the volunteer art docents via social media or email.
- This lesson works best in groups.
- Give the students a heads up that they will not be able to immediately see their artwork (words) at the end of the lesson.
- The art docent will print out their words and the students will mount their work at a second meeting.
- Have a volunteer helper with each student group.

Discussion Points

Discuss the history (quickly) to give students a context where the medium of photography came from. Some points to mention are: black and white photography, film, the development process and digital photography. In the past photographers had to set up, wait for the right light and then take photos, and they couldn't see the images until everything was developed. Now we can do all that 'on location'.

Talk about how now we can 'shoot', see, crop, zoom in and edit on location, which is how we will be working.

Talk about observation skills. Show how when you look at objects in the environment you can find many different things when you look closely. You can even find letters. At first it can be hard to see, but the more you take time to observe, the more you will see.

Talk about the concept of looking closely "zooming-in" and looking far away. Sometimes you can find letters by "zooming-in" or by looking in the distance.

As they look for letters, encourage them to find images with a lot of contrast (very dark & very light) so that the image can be seen well.

Assessment of Learning Objectives

Students took pictures of each letter by finding an example in their environment.

Students used contrast to highlight each letter.

Students did not photograph pre-written letters but found lines, shapes and forms that resembled letters.

Students chose a personally meaningful word.

Instructions for Lesson:

1. Give the class a short history of photography. Show examples of photographs (see discussion points). When has the camera been the best at showing us something, sending us a message or conveying meaning?
2. Talk about how contrast can add clarity and interest to their letters. Contrast can be between light and dark shades, geometric and organic shapes, smooth and rough textures, straight and curvy lines.

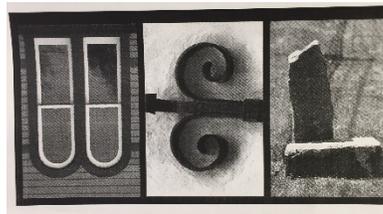
3. Have each student choose a word, 2 – 5 minutes for this otherwise you give them one. Have them choose from the list you provide.
4. Write the word on a piece of paper with their name.
5. Teach the students to make a 'view finder' with their fingers to better isolate what they see.
6. Have the class break up into groups of 2-5 people. Each student can take pictures of the letters they need while they stay in a group to hunt for them.
7. They can check off the letters as they take pictures. Some letters are easy to spot, some letters more challenging. They do not need to find the letters in order.
8. Each group needs one camera or phone which can take photos. The groups walk around the school to look at their environment, hunt for shapes that resemble letters. Part of the goal is to work together and take turns both finding letters and taking the photo.
9. Take a picture of the letter. Use framing skills to properly capture the letter. Be aware of the lighting when taking a photo because contrast is important for the letter to stand out.
10. Have students come back to the room, select their letters, and send their photos via email to the chosen location with their name in the message. Letters can then be sent to the docent who will print them.
11. Students will assemble their letters another day and time onto black tag board for presentation.

Examples:

“Kitty”



Part of
“Welcome”



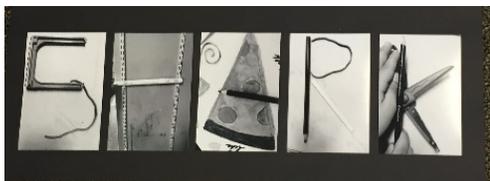
“Love”



“Fun”



“Shark”



References and Attributions:

Alphabet Photography, ABC Photo Art, Personal Wall Art, Inspirational Wall Art, Name Art & Word Art. Alphabet pixs. Creative and unique photographs that resemble the Letters of the Alphabet -- Framed & Ready to Hang. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 May 2017.

"Letter Photography Alphabet." *Google Search.* Google, n.d. Web. 15 May 2017

Johnson, Stephen. *Alphabet City.* N.p.: Paw Prints, 2009. Print.

"Stephen Johnson." *Welcome | Stephen T. Johnson Studio.* N.p., n.d. Web. 23 May 2017.

<http://www.stephentjohnson.com>.

Notes for Educators

21st Century Thinking Skills

Goal setting, observing, making connections, visualizing, sequencing, predicting, comparing/contrasting, classifying, finding evidence, problem solving, decision making, evaluating.

Habits of Mind

Thinking flexibly, persisting, questioning, creating, innovating, taking responsible risks, reflecting.

WA State 2017 Learning Standards

(VA:Cr2.3.5) a. Identify, describe, and visually document places and/or objects of personal significance.

(VA:Cr3.1.5) a. Create artist statements using art vocabulary to describe personal choices in art-making.

(VA:Pr5.1.5) a. Develop a logical argument for safe and effective use of materials and techniques for preparing and presenting artwork.

Arts Integration Opportunities

Students can look for spelling words or their names' letters to photograph.

Students can watercolor or color with colored pencils the negative space around the letters.

Students can view more historical or scientific photographs relating to other curricula being studied.

Students can use their word as a prompt for a story or poem.

Students can work with the computer lab to edit and print their own letters for mounting.