Lessons Beyond Art:
Photographic Essay
Middle and High School

Learn about photojournalism and build your own photo essay to document your experience of living through a world pandemic.

Supplies
Provided worksheet, internet browser, pen and paper or a word processor

Who was Berenice Abbott
Berenice Abbott (American, 1898-1991) spent her life challenging the conventions and expectations society placed on women. At the age of nineteen she left her home in Ohio and moved to New York City. In 1921, she sailed to Paris to study painting and sculpture. While in Paris, she worked for the photographer, Man Ray, as a studio assistant. It was there that she learned how to take and process photographs. She owned a successful portrait studio where she took innovative photographs of friends and celebrities including: James Joyce, Peggy Guggenheim, Jean Cocteau, and Eugene Atget.

In 1929, Abbott gave up her life in Paris and returned to New York. She found the city changed and was inspired by the rapid modernization, the skyscrapers that were replacing older buildings, and the masses of people. Captivated, Abbott started a project to capture and document the city. Abbott received support from the Federal Art Project of the New Deal’s Works Progress Administration and produced hundreds of photographs of New York.

Abbott carefully composed her photographs. She explained that “many [historically] interesting things aren’t photogenic at all; [the subject] has to have shapes, and forms, and lights and darks.” Abbott used dramatic diagonals and severe camera angles to convey the complexity of the New York urban environment.

More About Photojournalism and Photographic Essays
Photojournalism is the art or practice of communicating news through photographs. To tell a story, a photographer may take one image to support the text of a news article, or they may compile a photo essay. A photo-essay is a group of photographs arranged to explore a theme or tell a story.
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Learning Objectives
As a result of completing this project, students will be able to:
1. Critically analyze documentary photographs for intention, information, and biases.
2. Build a photo-essay to tell a story of personal experience

Resources
Tampa Bay Times, Coronavirus in Florida: [https://www.tampabay.com/coronavirus/](https://www.tampabay.com/coronavirus/)

Getting Started
1. Visit the Tampa Bay Times website for their coverage of the Coronavirus
2. Without reading the headlines or news stories, select a photograph that is visually appealing to you.
3. On the provided worksheet, describe what you think the article that goes with this photograph might be about. Use the question prompts to help analyze the photograph.
4. Read the article that goes with your photograph. Discuss how the photograph supports or does not support the text of the article.

Make Your Own
Now that you’ve analyzed documentary photograph, it’s your turn to create a photo-essay.
1. Use your camera to take pictures of your experience of living through a world pandemic. Don’t limit yourself during the photo taking process. Take a lot of photos, critiquing and editing comes later.
2. Now that you have a collections of photos, it’s time to start building your photo-essay. Select 5 images to tell your story. To do this, you want to consider:
   a. The Story-Your essay should make logical sense to the viewer without a written article
   b. A range of photos-A variety of angles, perspectives, details, and subjects should be included
   c. The order of the photos-The order of your photos determines what story is being told. Make sure the sequence creates an interesting and logical story.
   d. Information and emotion-Your photos should convey a combination of information and emotion. Try to include a variety to tell the whole story
   e. Captions-You will be writing captions to briefly describe what is happening and to help your viewer understand the story
3. Use the second worksheet or an online platform of your choice to compile your story. Start with your lead image. Like the first two sentences of a newspaper article, this photograph should draw in your audience and provoke curiosity in the viewer.

Modifications
If you don’t have access to a camera, consider sketching your images. Sketch several scenes a day. Like with picture taking, don’t filter your drawings, don’t limit yourself. Alternatively, you can use a google image search to find “Tampa Bay Times Coronavirus” photographs. Browse the sketches you’ve created or the photographs found on google and select 5 that resonate with you. Use the same criteria from step 2 above to determine which sketches or found images to use.
Photojournalism Analysis
Follow the instructions on page two from ART LESSONS: Photographic Essay to build a critical analysis of a documentary photograph.

Where can we find this photograph? Write or type the URL here

Describe the photograph. What do you SEE? Avoid judgement terms like sad or beautiful and list only what you see in the photograph.

Analyze the photograph. What decisions did the photographer make to create this photograph? Where did they crop it? What colors did they use? Is there a central focus? Did the photographer emphasize something?

Based on this photograph, what do you think this article is about? Who or what is the subject? What is the mood of the photograph? What story do you see?

Read the article that goes with the photograph.

Headline:

Date published: Date accessed:

Explain how the photo tells the story.

In your opinion, did the photographer accurately represent the story? Why or why not?
Create your own photo-essay
Your photo essay should include a mix of close-ups and wide angles, portraits and landscapes, objects and emotions. Select five images, one in each of the following categories and write a caption that is no longer than 240 characters for each image.

**Lead image:** This is the image that will draw your viewer in

**The Scene:** Set the stage with your second photo. This will likely be a wide angle shot.

**The Detail Photo:** This should focus on a single element, be it a building, a face, or an object.

**The Signature Photo:** This photo captures the key elements of your story in a telling moment.

**The Clincher Photo:** Your final photo should evoke an emotion in your viewer. What is the mood of the story?