



Daniela R., portfolio photo. What emotions or feelings does this photograph evoke?

Pandemic PORTFOLIOS

Shannon Oden

Introducing new concepts via remote learning during a pandemic has its challenges. I asked my students, who were new to photography, to embrace the hand we were dealt and to document this historical time through storytelling with photography.

I wanted students to share their perceptions of the pandemic and their experiences with me through photo stories. The majority of these students entered the program in January and only had seven weeks of class before we left for spring break, and then we transitioned to remote learning. I wasn't sure what I would get in return.

I gave students this photo story assignment mainly because of its historical significance, but also because

I was worried, I missed them, and I wanted to make sure they were okay during this uncertain time.

The Photo Story as Theater

When I presented the concept of a photo story, I told students that they need to imagine their story as theater. They need to include images of the stage (the environment) in which their photo story takes place. They also need to introduce the actors (the individuals the story will feature) and the props (the details which give the characters and environment context).

Preliminary Photo Lesson

To get students thinking about what a photo story looks like, I had them do some visualization. I gave them a prompt, something easy so they can see that a photo story can be created out of almost anything, such as “a bundle of colored pencils” and asked them to think about and describe in writing an image to represent each shot I listed (bird’s-eye, worm’s-eye, leading lines, negative space, etc.).

After I introduced students to planning a variety of shots for interest, I wanted them to understand that the sequence of images in a photo story is just as important as the individual images; the photos need to combine to present a cohesive story. I gave them a series of twenty images I shot

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at a waffle house and asked them to edit the portfolio down to ten images. Then I asked them to place the images in order to present a story. Most students did well on this and understood the concept of storytelling enough to create their own original images.

After these lessons, students had a good sense of how to organize a concept and plan the architecture of their story. Because we were learning remotely, I decided to introduce it as a prompt.

Assignment Prompt for Students

- I want you to think about what the pandemic means to you. How is it impacting you emotionally and physically? Think about others in your household and how it is affecting them as well. I’d like you to create a photo story, a portfolio of images documenting this pandemic, a story we will continue to tell for generations to come.
- Think of all the images that could be used from your home or yard which could tell this story. Your final portfolio will consist of twenty images and one video. I’d like you to submit a video that will not be shared with the class. It will be a personal message to me. I’d like to hear from you and how this is impacting your life right now, how it is making you feel, and what story you think you can tell through imagery. This video will be the first item due.
- Every week, we’ll have assignments with eight images due, followed by weekly critiques by me. Then you’ll submit a final draft of the selected images, receive final critique, and upload your final portfolio.
- In planning your photo story, first develop a shot list. Be consistent in style when it comes to the overall look. Shoot in color first to give yourself the option to decide later whether your story comes across stronger in color or black-and-white.
- In your final portfolio edits, you may choose to tell your story with diptychs (two images per page), or single images. It’s up to you. You may want to add text or graphics from the news to your images.

Responses

Looking at the photos, I think you can agree, the results speak for themselves. I cried when I first saw them. I was extremely proud but also profoundly sad they had to experience this. A baby was born, an aunt was lost, and parents as first responders were pulled from family responsibilities to fight the pandemic on the front line.

I was impressed that my stu-

dents could turn this huge negative situation into a positive learning experience and come out with such meaningful images they will have to show for generations to come. 🙏

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Above: Rachel M. makes a kaleidoscopic use of light.
Top- and bottom-right: Monica C. decided to make her final photos black-and-white.

NATIONAL STANDARD

Connecting: Relate artistic ideas and work with societal, cultural, and historical content to deepen understanding.

RESOURCE

Ben Barber Innovation Academy Art:
bbcta.mansfieldisd.org/programs-of-study/arts-av-technologycommunications