

Still Life Photography: Daily Life

Lesson Overview

Students will plan and design a still life composition. When composing the still life, students will choose objects that emphasize a variety of shapes and textures, and arrange the objects to reflect balance. Next students will create a photographic still life and use it as inspiration to write a poem. Then students will present the still life photograph and poem to the class.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- analyze still life compositions in photographs, focusing particularly on the elements of shape and texture and the principle of balance.
- create an original still life using photography, reflecting their understanding of shape, texture, and balance.
- write and present poetry inspired by their still life photograph.
- present their photograph and poem to an audience.

Featured Getty Artworks

Bowl with Sugar Cubes by Andre Kertesz

<http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=62289>

Still Life with Bananas and Oranges by Edward Weston

<http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=51730>

Materials

- Reproduction of *Bowl with Sugar Cubes*, Andre Kertesz
- Reproduction of *Still Life with Bananas and Oranges*, Edward Weston
- Student Handout: "Elements of Art"
- Assorted objects selected by students from their homes
- Student Handout: "Principles of Design"
- Ruler (optional)
- Table with neutral backdrop
- Lamp or flashlight
- Digital camera
- Pencils
- Paper (ruled, 8 ½" x 11")

Lesson Steps

Part 1: Exploring Still Life Photography

1. Introduce the still life genre to the class. Explain that, traditionally, a still life is a painting of a group of natural and manmade objects, usually placed on a table or flat surface. Photographers adopted the style of still life painting (grouping natural and manmade objects), expanding the use of photography as a new mode of artistic expression.

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2. Show the class the reproduction of *Bowl with Sugar Cubes* by Andre Kertesz or *Still Life with Bananas and Oranges* by Edward Weston. Lead a class discussion about the photograph by asking the following questions:
 - What do you see in this photograph?
 - What shapes do you see in this photograph? Explain that shapes can be geometric, like squares, and circles or organic, like free-form or natural shapes.
 - What textures do you notice in this photograph? Explain that texture is the surface quality that can be seen and felt. Textures can be rough or smooth, soft, or hard. Textures do not always feel the way they look; for example, a drawing of a porcupine may look prickly, but if you touch the drawing, the paper is smooth.
3. After the discussion, assign homework to the class. Tell students they will be creating their own photographic still life. Ask students to bring to class objects from daily life that they want to include in their own still life. Tell them to find objects at home with shapes and textures that they find interesting.

Part 2: Composing a Still Life Photograph

1. Ask students to display the objects they brought from home on their desks. Then conduct a gallery walk in class.
2. After everyone has a chance to see each object, review the focus elements, shape and texture. Have students share with a classmate their objects with interesting textures and shapes.
4. Refer to the student handout “Principles of Design” to introduce the principle of balance (see the Getty website at http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building_lessons/principles_design.pdf). You may wish to distribute the handout to the class.
3. Display the reproduction of *Bowl with Sugar Cubes* by Andre Kertesz or *Still Life with Bananas and Oranges* by Edward Weston. (You may decide to use the same photograph from Part 1, introduce a new photograph, or use more than one.) Begin a class discussion by asking students to share what they see in the photograph. Tell students that artists often organize objects in a still life to create visual balance. Explain that balance is the distribution of the visual weight of objects, colors, texture, and space. If the design is a scale, these elements should be balanced to make a design feel stable. In symmetrical balance, the elements used on one side of the design are similar to those on the other side. In asymmetrical balance, the sides are different but still look balanced. In radial balance, the elements are arranged around a central point and may be similar.

You may wish to place a ruler on a reproduction of the work of art and point out where an artist has created balance on either side of the ruler. For example, in *Still Life with Bananas and Oranges*, you could place the ruler vertically in the middle of the composition and demonstrate symmetrical balance.

4. After the discussion, set up the table, backdrop, and lamp or flashlight. Give students time to compose or arrange their objects on the table so that they reflect a concern for balance. Students will take turns throughout the day composing their objects and

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experimenting with lighting (above the still life or beside the still life). Students may sketch the still life in order to remember their composition later.

5. Finally, have students photograph their objects to create their own still life.

Assessment

Students will be assessed on:

- whether their still life photographs include objects with a variety of shapes and textures.
- their attempt to create balance in their still life photograph.
- overall presentation of their work, specifically clear diction, pitch, tempo, and tone.