



Photography: Darkroom to Digital - Unit 1 - Darkroom

Unit Focus

In this unit, students undergo a transformative journey from passive observers to intentional creators of photographic art. This curriculum bridges historical foundations with modern professional practices, guiding students from casual digital snapshots to the high-quality execution of 35mm film compositions. By blending technical mastery of darkroom chemistry with the nuances of portrait lighting, students develop a sophisticated visual vocabulary rooted in the capacity: Design. Students are challenged to develop strategic plans that allow them to examine the impact of every step toward a finished product, purposefully refining their work through both external feedback and rigorous personal reflection. Central to this artistic growth is the cultivation of another capacity: Self-Awareness. Beyond technical skill, students must learn to reflect on their individual strengths and areas for growth, making real-time adjustments to their creative process. This unit requires students to effectively manage their time and maintain the internal motivation necessary to transition from technical learners to self-directed artists capable of communicating complex narratives through a single frame.

Stage 1: Desired Results - Key Understandings

Standard(s)	Transfer	
National Core Arts Standards Visual Arts: HS Proficient <ul style="list-style-type: none">Document the process of developing ideas from early stages to fully elaborated ideas. (VA:Cn10.1.HSI.a)Apply relevant criteria from traditional and contemporary cultural contexts to examine, reflect on, and plan revisions for works of art and design in progress. (VA:Cr3.1.HSI.a)Analyze, select, and curate artifacts and/or artworks for presentation and preservation. (VA:Pr.4.1.HSI.a)Establish relevant criteria in order to evaluate a work of art or collection of works. (VA:Re9.1.HSI.a) ISTE Standards (2024) ISTE Standards (2024): K-12 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Set learning goals, develop strategies leveraging technology to achieve them and reflect on the learning process to improve learning outcomes. (1.1.a.)Use technology to seek feedback that informs and improves their practice and to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways. (1.1.c.)	<i>Students will be able to independently use their learning to...</i> T1 Create intentional visual narratives by manipulating light, composition, and technology to evoke specific emotional responses in an audience. T2 Analyze and Critique visual media using professional vocabulary to evaluate the technical and ethical impact of images in a global context. T3 Navigate complex technical environments (like a darkroom) with self-direction, prioritizing safety, precision, and professional standards. T4 Curate a professional digital identity that documents their growth, process, and mastery of a craft for a real-world audience.	
	Meaning	
	Understanding(s)	Essential Question(s)
	<i>Students will understand that...</i> U1 The Power of Light: Light is not just a requirement for visibility; it is a tool for emotional impact and "visual guidance." U2 Intentionality: Mastery in photography comes from controlling variables (aperture, shutter speed, ISO) rather than relying on chance. U3 The Intentional Eye: Professional photography is not an instant act but a deliberate process of decision-making regarding light, time, and framing. U4 Ethics & Citizenship: Photographers hold power as historical witnesses and must balance artistic expression with legal boundaries and ethical responsibilities.	<i>Students will keep considering...</i> Q1 Technical: How do the physics of light and the chemistry of the darkroom work together to "fix" an image? Q2 Ethical: What are the legal and ethical responsibilities of a photographer when documenting reality or engaging with diverse communities? Q3 How does a photographer move from "getting lucky" to producing high-quality work consistently?

Stage 1: Desired Results - Key Understandings

- Develop, test and refine prototypes as part of a cyclical design process. (1.4.c.)
- Create learning opportunities that challenge students to use a design process and/or computational thinking to innovate and solve problems. (2.6.c.)

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- Design: Engaging in a process to refine a product for an intended audience and purpose. (POG.2.2)
- Self-Awareness: Examining current performance critically to identify steps/ strategies to persist. (POG.4.1)

U5 The Chemistry of Creation: The physical process of developing film and prints creates a tactile connection to the art form that requires precision, patience, and scientific understanding.

U6 Visual Literacy: Mastering the "grammar" of composition (leading lines, rule of thirds, etc.) allows a photographer to guide a viewer's eye and move from passive capturing to active constructing.

U7 The Value of Process: The "latent image" in the darkroom and the iterative nature of film development teach patience, persistence, and precision.

U8 Communication: A photograph is a "visual vocabulary" that communicates complex stories to diverse audiences without the need for words.

Q4 How do technical constraints (chemistry, manual camera settings) actually foster creative freedom?

Q5 In a world saturated with "snapshots," what makes an image a "story"?

Q6 How does the medium (digital vs. analog) change our perception of reality and history?

Q7 Professional: How does the process of curation and reflection in a digital portfolio transform a student from a learner into a professional practitioner?

Q8 Why is the ability to critique and be critiqued essential to the growth of an artist?

Acquisition of Knowledge and Skill

Knowledge

Students will know...

K1 Technical Mechanics: The triangular relationship between Aperture, Enlarger Height, and Exposure Time.

K2 Darkroom Chemistry: The specific functions of Developer, Stop Bath, Fixer, and Photo-Flo.

K3 Compositional Grammar: Principles of design, including leading lines, the rule of thirds, value (negative space), and point of view.

K4 Studio Lighting: The six types of portrait lighting and how to replicate them using both artificial and natural sunlight.

K5 Technical Vocabulary: Terms like Aperture (f-stops), ISO, Shutter Speed, Depth of Field, and Negative Space.

K6 Compositional Rules: Rule of Thirds, Leading Lines, Point of View, and the Principles of Design

K7 Lighting Types: The six types of in-studio lighting and their natural-light equivalents.

K8 Safety Protocols: Darkroom ventilation, chemical handling, and emergency equipment locations.

Skill(s)

Students will be skilled at...

S1 Operating Hardware: Loading 35mm film, using an SLR camera's light meter, and adjusting an enlarger's height and focus.

S2 Darkroom Processing: Developing film rolls using a changing bag and creating contact sheets and final 8.5"x11" prints.

S3 Critical Analysis: Evaluating information critically and identifying patterns in their own work and the work of peers (Critical Thinking).

S4 Digital Curation: Building and organizing a Google Site portfolio to serve as a professional digital archive

S5 Physical Craftsmanship: Using a mat cutter with precision to prepare work for a gallery exhibition.