
THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

ART:
GRADES 6-8



FRAMING AN ICON: COMPOSITION TECHNIQUES IN PHONE PHOTOGRAPHY

Exhibit Connections: Opening Day, World's Most Famous Building, Stephen Wiltshire & Cityscape Art, Artistry in Light, Postcard Display, Observation Deck, #empirestatebuilding social media panels

OVERVIEW OF LESSON PLAN

The Empire State Building is one of the most photographed buildings in the world. Over the course of three lessons, students will explore images and the image making process, assess and evaluate images they create, and understand how visual art helps us understand our world. They will investigate techniques and strategies for taking composed pictures using the cameras on their cell phones. The teacher will introduce the importance of composition in visual art and photography by teaching students about focal points, the rule of thirds, and leading lines. Students will identify these concepts and techniques before the trip to the Empire State Building by studying existing photographs of the iconic building via an internet image search or using the photos from esbphotocontest.com. During their field trip, students will apply these techniques using the camera on their cell phone to take several photographs. Following their trip, students will assess their work and that of their peers using a teacher and student-created rubric.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Develop an understanding of compositional techniques in visual art and photography
- Be able to explain shot composition
- Be able to define a focal point and secondary focal point
- Be able to define the rule of thirds in photography
- Be able to identify leading lines in photographs
- Apply compositional techniques to improve their phone photography skills by taking photographs of the Empire State Building and/or other subjects

SUGGESTED TIME ALLOWANCE:

One hour



RESOURCES/ MATERIALS:

- Trip Worksheet
- Camera phone or tablet with camera
- Computer
- Internet access

ACTIVITIES/ PROCEDURES:

PRE-TRIP ACTIVITY

Background: A focal point is a key place to which your eye is drawn. It is a specific place of visual emphasis in a photograph, painting, or drawing. A focal point can be created by showing a difference (the Empire State Building is shown in color while the rest of the buildings are black and white), isolation (an object in a frame is positioned away from other objects), placement (rule of thirds), convergence of leading lines, or the unusual (the subject of the photograph is made unusual from the rest of the objects).

A secondary focal point is the next place that your eye is drawn in the image. It may help create a feeling of movement in a photograph, but it is not necessary to include.

The rule of thirds is a guide for how to position objects in an image. It suggests that an image be divided into nine equal parts by two equally spaced horizontal lines and two equally spaced vertical lines. The important objects should be placed along these lines or their intersections for good composition.

Leading lines are lines that appear in a photograph that have been framed and positioned by the photographer to draw the viewer's eye toward a specific point of interest. These lines often draw the viewer's eye in a specific direction or toward a designated portion of the photograph.

Brainstorm: *What is an image? Where and how do we encounter images in our lives? How do images influence our views of the world?*

The teacher will tell students that they will explore techniques and strategies for taking better pictures using the cameras on their cell phones. The teacher will introduce the importance of composition in visual art and photography by teaching students about focal point, secondary focal point, the rule of thirds, and leading lines. Students will begin by doing an online search for "photos of the Empire State Building. Students will choose four photos that they like, then verbalize or write about why they like the photo, and answer the following questions:

- Where is the Empire State Building positioned in this photo? Use the rule of thirds to help you.
- Is this photograph in portrait or landscape orientation?
- Where do you think the photographer positioned themselves to take this photo?
- Are there leading lines in this photo? If so, describe them.
- What do you think the photographer is trying to tell the viewer in this photo?
- How does this photo make you feel?

In small groups, have the students share the images they chose, giving credit to the photographer, when possible, along with their answers to the questions. After all students have shared, tell the students that they are going to apply some of these composition techniques when they visit the Empire State Building on their field trip. Advise students to have their phones fully charged prior to the field trip and review how to turn on the grid feature on their camera phones. Students will use the grid feature to assist them in composing their shot using the rule of thirds.

ON-SITE ACTIVITIES One hour

As students approach the Empire State Building, encourage them to think about the positioning of the building in the photographs they studied and consider where the photographer may have placed themselves to take the photograph. Throughout their trip to the Empire State Building students will use their trip sheet to study and assess the composition of photos and images of the Empire State Building as they walk through the exhibit spaces. The teacher may encourage the students to spend extra time in the Opening Day, World's Most Famous Building, Stephen Wiltshire & Cityscape Art, Artistry in Light, and Postcard Display exhibits, although they are not limited to these exhibits as images of the Empire State Building can be found throughout all the exhibits.

EXHIBIT: OPENING DAY (15 minutes)

Choose an image of the Empire State Building. You are going to assess the photo's composition by answering the following questions:

- Where is the Empire State Building positioned in this photo? Use the rule of thirds to help you.
- Is this photograph in portrait or landscape orientation?
- Where do you think the photographer is positioned to take this photo?
- Are there leading lines in this photo? If so, describe them.
- What do you think the photographer is trying to tell the viewer in this photo?
- How does this photo make you feel?

Find a partner who chose a different photo and share your answers.

EXHIBIT: 86TH FLOOR OBSERVATION DECK (30-45 minutes)

- From your view on the 86th floor observation deck, choose a subject to photograph. After you position your subject, stop, and evaluate your frame. Think about what you want your photo to say.
- Turn on the grid feature on your camera phone. Use this grid to help you compose your shot.
- Choose a portrait or landscape orientation. A portrait shot draws your attention to the focal point in the center of the photograph. A landscape shot gives a more natural feel.
- Is everything in the frame in the position you want it to be in? If not, consider repositioning yourself.
- Is everything in the frame relevant? Beware of creating dead space as you aim to create a balanced photograph.
- Blur your eyes to see abstract color and form. Squinting or blurring your eyes helps you see where the contrasting, leading lines, and saturated areas are, which can help you set up a balanced shot.
- Are there distracting elements at the edges of your frame?
- Take multiple shots from different positions to get all the elements in your shot to work together to create the feeling you are aiming for.
- Try taking the same photo in black and white and then in color.
- Use leading lines such as streets, buildings, and windows to create a 45-degree line that cuts across the frame or a one-point perspective (four lines leading to a center point on the horizon line).

POST-TRIP ACTIVITY/FURTHER DISCUSSION

Have students choose four of their best photos from the field trip and answer the following questions:

- What do you want viewers or your audience to feel when they look at your photograph?
- Are you making a social or political commentary in your photos? Why or why not?

Have the students upload their best photos to a shared folder (e.g., Google Photos).

Finally, students may discuss or provide a written response to the following questions:

- How has technology changed the way photos are captured, preserved, and experienced?
- How do photographs help us understand the lives of people of different times, places, and cultures?

POST-TRIP ACTIVITY

In small groups, students will review all the photographs in the shared folder and work together to complete a photo scavenger hunt. Students will assess all the photos their peers took and identify three themes. For example, students can group together photos that include bridges, buildings, people, waterways, streets, or windows as their focal points. After sorting the photos, students will need to identify a photograph that has a building as its secondary focal point, demonstrates one-point perspective, demonstrates a leading line at a 45-degree angle, and a landscape photo in black and white. The teacher and students can develop the scavenger hunt criteria together based on student interest.

Students may continue to practice and apply what they have learned and enter the Empire State Building photo contest.

Use the #empirestatebuilding on Instagram to track and curate their photos; create a new Instagram account documenting the trip.

Students can compare and contrast focal points, leading lines, and perspectives in their photos and the Empire State Building photos of Lewis Hine.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Teacher will assess student photos using a teacher/student-created rubric. Criteria may include: overall composition, frame edges, light, balance, contrast, movement, and lines. Students may also assess each other's photos using the shared rubric.

- **Grade 6:** Students will focus on one composition strategy throughout the unit: focal points, leading lines, or rule of thirds.
- **Grade 7:** Students will compare and contrast different compositional techniques and how they influence overall composition of a photograph or visual art piece.
- **Grade 8:** Students will focus on providing greater analysis and demonstrate application of how compositional methods and technique influence visual art through verbal or written responses.
- **Special Needs:** Students will work with a partner, teacher, or paraprofessional to compose and set up their shots. Students who require assistive technology should be provided with the appropriate devices (i.e., iPads, camera mounts for wheelchairs, etc.) to execute their photos.

CONNECTIONS TO THE STANDARDS

NEW YORK STATE LEARNING STANDARDS FOR THE VISUAL ARTS:

Projected Outcomes

INTERMEDIATE LEVEL: GRADES 6–8

STANDARD 1: Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Visual Arts

Students will:

- Produce a collection of art works, in a variety of media, based on a range of individual and collective experiences. **(1a)** Know and use a variety of sources for developing and conveying ideas, images, themes, symbols, and events in their creation of art. **(1b)**
- Use the elements and principles of art to communicate specific meanings to others in their art works. **(1c)**
- During the creative process, reflect on the effectiveness of selected media or techniques to convey intended meanings. **(1d)**
- Identify and use, in individual and group experiences, some of the roles and means for designing, producing, and exhibiting art works and discuss ways to improve them. **(1e)**

STANDARD 2: Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources in the Visual Arts

Students will:

- Develop skills with a variety of art materials and competence in at least one medium. **(2a)**
- Use the computer and other electronic media as designing tools and to communicate visual ideas. **(2b)**
- Take advantage of community opportunities and cultural institutions to learn from professional artists, look at original art, and increase their understanding of art. **(2c)**
- Understand the variety of careers related to the visual arts and the skills necessary to pursue some of them. **(2d)**

STANDARD 3: Responding to and Analyzing Works of Visual Art

Students will:

- Discuss and write their analyses and interpretations of their own works of art and the art of others, using appropriate critical language. **(3a)**
- Identify, analyze, and interpret the visual and sensory characteristics that they discover in natural and human-made forms. **(3b)**
- Compare the ways ideas and concepts are communicated through visual art with the various ways that those ideas and concepts are manifested in other art forms. **(3c)**
- Compare the ways ideas, themes, and concepts are communicated through the visual arts in other disciplines, and the various ways that those ideas, themes, and concepts are manifested within the discipline. **(3d)**

STANDARD 4: Understanding the Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of the Visual Arts

Students will:

- Demonstrate how artworks and artifacts from diverse world cultures reflect aspects of those cultures. **(4a)**
- Demonstrate the ways in which some particular artworks and artifacts reflect important aspects of the diverse cultures of the United States. **(4b)**
- Create artworks that reflect a particular historical period of a culture. **(4c)**

TRIP WORKSHEET

NAME _____

DATE _____

FRAMING AN ICON: FRAMING COMPOSITION TECHNIQUES IN PHONE PHOTOGRAPHY

OPENING DAY EXHIBIT

Choose an image of the Empire State Building. You are going to assess the photo's composition by answering the following questions:

Where is the Empire State Building positioned in this photo? Use the rule of thirds to help you.

Is this photograph in portrait or landscape orientation?

Where do you think the photographer positioned themselves to take this photo?

Are there leading lines in this photo? If so, describe them.

What do you think the photographer is trying to tell the viewer in this photo?

How does this photo make you feel?

Find a partner who chose a different photo and share your answers.

TRIP WORKSHEET

NAME _____

DATE _____

FRAMING AN ICON: FRAMING COMPOSITION TECHNIQUES IN PHONE PHOTOGRAPHY

86TH FLOOR OBSERVATION DECK

- From your view on the 86th Floor Observation Deck, choose a subject to photograph. After you position your subject, stop and evaluate your frame. Think about what you want your photo to say.
- Turn on the grid feature on your camera phone. Use this grid to help you compose your shot.
- Choose a portrait or landscape orientation. A portrait shot draws your attention to the focal point in the center of the photograph. Landscape shots give a more natural feel.
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