

Investigation: Placing the pandemic in perspective



Background: COVID-19 pandemic

“The world experienced the COVID-19 pandemic together, but that experience was not universal. Individual experiences of the pandemic were very much shaped by the places where we live. At the macro level, public health restrictions varied from city to city, region to region. The pandemic’s isolating effects were felt more profoundly in places that were already geographically isolated. At the micro level, access to outdoor public infrastructure and opportunities for immersion in nature were significant predictors of mental health outcomes during shelter-in-place orders.”

— *Placing the Pandemic in Perspective*, *Canadian Geographic*

A person’s environment and circumstances shape their experiences of the world, and that is true of the COVID-19 pandemic as much as anything else. The COVID-19 pandemic affected all aspects of society in a multitude of different ways and has had lasting long-term effects. *Canadian Geographic’s* *Placing the Pandemic in Perspective* series explores a variety of perspectives on these challenges through personal stories that serve as case studies of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Warm-up discussion: What is where? Why there? Why care?

Break students into small groups and assign each group a story from the *Placing the Pandemic in Perspective* series in *Canadian Geographic’s* March/April 2023 issue, which you can find compiled online on the *Canadian Geographic website*.

Important: Review the articles before sharing them with students as some of the content may be sensitive for younger students.

Have students read the stories and analyze them. Ask each group to discuss the following questions:

- How did a person’s environment (i.e., their surroundings or the local geography) inform their individual experiences in the story?
- How did individual circumstances (i.e., their background, age, gender, etc.) affect their experience of the pandemic?
- What is this story about? How does it fit into the larger narrative of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What are the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic for the people in this story? Why is this story important for how we see and think about the impacts of COVID-19?
- Were there descriptions, figures of speech, or quotes in the story that you found particularly memorable?
- What parts of the story stuck with you after you finished reading? Did you learn something new or surprising?

Once students have had enough time to discuss the stories in their groups, bring all of them together for a class discussion to identify common themes or issues raised among the different stories. Use the following questions to guide discussion:

- What parts of the story made it clear to you that it was set during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Were there feelings expressed in the stories that were common across all of Canadian society? Why do you think people felt that way?

Overview

Students will read a selection of stories from *Canadian Geographic* about the COVID-19 pandemic and analyze them in group discussions. They will put into practice skills related to creating a shot list or storyboarding by brainstorming ways to tell these stories visually.

Time

1 class period



Investigation: Placing the pandemic in perspective



- Although all these stories happened in different settings, how do you think they were affected by the larger setting of Canada? How might these stories differ if they happened in another country?

Activity 7: Visualizing a written story

The word “photography” originates from a Greek phrase meaning “writing with light,” while the word “video” comes from the Latin verb meaning “to see.” Have students consider the stories they have read and how they would “write” these stories visually.

In the same groups as before, have students brainstorm ideas for how these stories could be turned into photo essays/video vignettes. Encourage them to look for existing visuals in the stories, such as: descriptions of setting or people, excerpts of dialogue, symbolism, and similes or metaphors describing feelings. Inform students that they don’t have to follow their story exactly scene by scene, but that they should try to capture what is at the core of the story (i.e., the main themes or concerns). Have students use the accompanying worksheet to help them brainstorm ideas.

Refer students to *Canadian Geographic’s* [The pause: A pandemic photo essay](#) for inspiration. This thematic photo essay features multiple photographers sharing a variety of perspectives.

Once students have completed their worksheets, have a discussion about what they learned from having to think visually. Ask students to share what they found difficult to visualize. Have students share examples of establishing shots for their stories and explain why they chose a particular shot to establish setting.

Additional resources:

- [The Globe and Mail: Photography](#)
- [National Geographic: Photography](#)
- [The Guardian: Photo essays](#)
- [World Press Photo: Collection](#)
- [Reuters: The Wider Image](#)
- [CNN: Photos](#)
- [PetaPixel: How to Create a Photo Essay](#)
- [Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY: The Photo Essay](#)
- [The Digital Trekker: The photo essay: Give it your best shot](#)
- [Masterclass: How to Create a Photo Essay: Step-by-Step Guide With Examples](#)
- [Shotkit: How to create an engaging photo essay \(with examples\)](#)
- [Digital Photography School: How to Make a Photo Essay: 5 Tips for Impactful Results](#)
- [Adobe: An introduction to camera shot types](#)
- [Adobe: How to make a shot list](#)
- [Shotkit: How to create a shot list \(+template\)](#)
- [Shorthand: How to create compelling video for multimedia stories](#)
- [Masterclass: Learn About B-Roll Footage](#)