

Action: Telling your own story



Warm-up discussion: What story do you want to tell?

Now that students have acquired a basic understanding of photography and videography, it is time to put the skills they learned into practice to share their own stories about the COVID-19 pandemic. Students will use visual storytelling to better understand the influence of geography on their personal experiences. Alternatively, students can choose to focus on a story from someone else's perspective, such as a friend, family member, or community member.

As a class, have a discussion about how the COVID-19 pandemic affected students. Use the following questions to guide discussion:

- Where did you spend the majority of your time during the pandemic? How was this different from before the pandemic? Did this change over time?
- What restrictions did you encounter in your community? Or at school? Or in your personal life?
- What did you start doing differently in your everyday life because of the pandemic? Did any of your habits change?
- Did you pick up new hobbies or activities during the pandemic?
- Were there experiences you missed out on or that were different because of the pandemic?
- How did you feel when the pandemic first began? How do you feel now?
- What did you learn about the pandemic that surprised you? How did the global pandemic affect your country and/or your local community? What were the short-term effects? What were the long-term effects?
- Has the pandemic changed how you view your community or surroundings? Has it changed your relationships with the people in your life?

The first step of any creative project is coming up with an idea. Encourage students to use the class discussion as inspiration and emphasize the importance of finding a topic that they're passionate about or that drives them to learn more. They should also consider their potential audience — would people relate to their story and/or find it interesting?

Activity 8: Conducting an interview

Students need to consider if there is any additional research they need to conduct in order to tell their story before they plan a shot list or storyboard. If students choose to create a video vignette, do they plan on including other people in their video? If they choose to tell a story about someone else or from another perspective, what do they need to know to tell that story effectively?

Knowing how to do an interview can be helpful in not only gathering content for a story but also in planning how that story can be illustrated with photos or video. Whether the interview subject appears on video or serves as a narrative guide for which photos to take, asking them the right questions is key.

Overview

Students will create their own project for visual storytelling, either as a photo essay or a video vignette. They will focus on their experience of the COVID-19 pandemic or choose a perspective/narrative on the pandemic that they want to explore further.

Time

2 class periods

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In an interview, it is important to ask open-ended questions that encourage your interview subject to provide details or tell anecdotes and stories. An open-ended question is a question that can't be answered with a simple "yes" or "no" and usually results in a longer response. The answers to these types of questions can also help you think of good follow-up questions to get the interview subject to elaborate on their story.

Have students read *Medium's* [What, How and Why: Asking Better Interview Questions](#) article to learn more about best practices for asking interview questions. Then, break students into pairs and have them practice interviewing each other. Encourage them to interview each other about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students should use this exercise as an opportunity to further brainstorm ideas for their visual storytelling project.

Activity 9: Creating your story

Provide students with parameters for their visual storytelling project. For a photo essay, 10-20 photos is a good range. For a video vignette, students can aim for a video length of three to five minutes, and no more than 10 minutes. They must also come up with a title for their project that reflects their theme and is specific to their story.

Students should use the following questions to guide them in their storytelling:

- How did local geography affect your experience of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What adjustments did you have to make during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What has changed and/or what is new in your life as a result of the pandemic?
- What places have been particularly meaningful to you and why?

Remind students to refer to the previous activities and to create a shot list or storyboard in their planning process. Make sure students include establishing shots, medium shots, and close-up shots. They should also aim to use at least five or more composition techniques to have variety in their visual storytelling. If students choose to do a video vignette, they should consider how B-roll and audio can be used to support their story. If students choose to do a photo essay, they should consider how captions can be used to provide context for their photos.

Extension activity: Editing and polishing

In photography and videography, post-production refers to the work that is done after the content has been produced (i.e., once the photos have been taken and video has been recorded). This part of the process is just as important as the production stage. Having great content to work with is key, so that when you get to the post-production stage, you have options to choose from that require less editing.

Post-production includes steps such as: selecting photos and video clips, editing your photos and footage, ordering and laying out your content, writing captions and creating special effects, as well as mixing sound and adding audio to your video content. Post-production can be as simple or as complex as you want to make it, but there are a few key things that students may want to keep in mind for the purposes of their visual storytelling project:

- **Writing captions:** Captions should provide additional context for photographs, not merely acting as a label. They don't need to describe what is happening in the photo (this is redundant). Provide background that would help a viewer make sense of what is happening, such as identifying people in the shot, where it is taken, when, and any other relevant details. Keep captions brief — no more than a couple of sentences. Learn more with the [International Journalists' Network: Writing photo captions](#) blog.



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- **Photo editing:** It is important to take good photos from the beginning, so that it will reduce the need for edits in post-production. However, post-production can help improve a photo, such as for example in cases where a photo might need cropping for better composition, readjustment for light or contrast, or colour correction. In photojournalism and documentary photography, photo manipulation is considered unethical — you should aim to keep your edits minimal to reflect the reality of what you originally photographed (e.g., don't erase anything from a photo, don't oversaturate or change colours, don't crop out important elements). Learn more with the [Digital Photography School: Photo Editing for Beginners: A Simple Introduction](#) blog, the [REI Co-op Expert Advice: Photo Editing Basics](#) blog, and the [Photo Review: Ethics and Editing](#) blog.
- **Video editing:** Putting together video clips into a cohesive, final product involves ordering them in such a way that the clips make narrative sense. To build a video sequence, you need to consider which clips you will use to establish your setting, introduce characters (i.e., yourself or people you have interviewed), and then use B-roll to flesh out your story. Other, more advanced steps in the video editing might include adding background or ambient sound (e.g., noise from a park, the sound of traffic), music (e.g., to open or end your video), or voiceover (i.e., audio narration layered over a part of the video), as well as editing and colour correction. If this is the first time students are creating a video project composed of multiple video clips, they should keep things simple and focus simply on placing clips in the best order for their story. To learn more about video editing, check out the [Primal Video: How to Edit Videos](#) blog or explore the additional resources.

Additional resources:

- [Writer's Digest: 10 Interviewing Tips for Journalists](#)
- [Lines of Sight: How to Write a Photo Caption](#)
- [Photography Life: Post-Processing Tips](#)
- [Expert Photography: 12 Best Free Photo Editing Software in 2023](#)
- [Descript: 11 basic video editing principles for budding filmmakers](#)
- [Adorama: 13 Best Video Editing Tips for Beginners](#)
- [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](#)

