

One Week to Better Photography

Lesson 3 – Visual Storytelling

The objectives of this lesson are:

1. Be able to recognize characteristics of effective visual storytelling.
2. Gain a working knowledge of effective visual storytelling techniques.
3. Gain experience in visual storytelling.

This lesson has two handouts, two related readings and one exercise. To do the exercise, it is not mandatory but optimal that students have a camera they can use; even a cell phone camera would work.

Related Readings

Five Simple Ideas For... Storytelling with Photos

<http://www.walsworthyearbooks.com/idea-file/40290/storytelling-with-photos/>

Choosing the Right Photos Crucial to Design

<http://www.walsworthyearbooks.com/idea-file/39070/choosing-the-right-photos-crucial-to-design/>

Visual Storytelling Handout – Telling a story with images

As a yearbook photographer, you are a journalist with a camera. Good photos, full of interaction, emotion and expressions will make the year come alive to yearbook readers. Great visual storytellers, like great journalistic writers, rely on the basic strategies of great reporting.

1. **Know your subject** – Do background research before the event. Find out what will be taking place and the significance of individual people and activities. Unless you know the subject, all of the other reporting techniques are difficult to apply.



2. **See the image environment** – Think format, background, metering and lighting. Pre-think metering and learn to use flash effectively.
3. **Observe before you start shooting** – Watch how the action unfolds and anticipate the best moments to make photos. Constantly scan the situation for interesting image possibilities of the event itself and related activities, for example, a football game and the fans in the stands.
4. **Look for the lead image** – Be alert for the single image that best captures the event's purpose and mood.



5. **Break down the story** – Just as a writer uses separate paragraphs to tell different parts of the story, you need to capture different parts of the story in individual images. Make sure you leave the assignment with a set of images that tell the complete story.
6. **Follow through** – Great photo moments are often followed by another great moment. Keep shooting and make sure you have plenty of battery power to do it.
7. **Work for visual variety** – Remember, the editors may want to publish more than one image from the event. Visual storytellers need to be alert to opportunities to capture diverse content using varied formats and a variety of camera angles and positions.
8. **Capture the continuity** – Work to capture the flow of the event from beginning to end. Be alert for cause-and-effect images and images that provide visual context for subjects using foreground and background information.
9. **Find the closer** – A good reporter follows the story to the end. Visual storytellers need to keep taking photos even though the main part of the event or action may have ended. Look for the images that show subjects in unguarded moments after the event. Answer the “what happened next” question for the reader. Some of the most interesting images for readers are the ones that capture action and expression that they did not stick around to see.

Visual Storytelling Handout – Photo shooting checklist

Your newer photographers may need some help once they go on assignment. Here is a checklist that can be placed in every yearbook camera bag or taped inside every photographer's notebook, as a reminder for certain tasks. This checklist was created by Jill Chittum, Walsworth yearbook sales representative in Arkansas and Oklahoma, for her publications staffs when she was an adviser at Blue Valley High School in Stilwell, Kan.

1. Before you leave the classroom, make sure you have a charged battery and your CF or SD card. Double-check the camera bag to make sure all equipment is there and working.
2. Before you take any photos, erase (format) your CF or SD card using the camera's menu functions. This allows you to start with plenty of memory, and may help you avoid deleting images as your card fills up.
3. Before you begin shooting photos at your assignment, assess the lighting situation. Indoor? Outdoor? Fluorescent? Tungsten?
4. Set the white balance (WB) so it is appropriate for your situation, using the camera's menu.
5. Set your ISO. Use the following as a guide:
 - Night football: 1600
 - Volleyball/Basketball/Pep Assemblies (anything in gym): 1600
 - Most classrooms: 800
 - Outside/Cloudy or Overcast Day: 400
 - Outside/Sunny Day: 100 or 200
6. Set your camera to manual (M) mode so you can control the shutter speed and aperture.
7. Based on lighting conditions, set your shutter speed and aperture so your images will be properly exposed. USE YOUR LIGHT METER.
8. Gather caption information while at the assignment. Get names (spelled correctly), grade/position, and ask a few questions about what they are doing while you are there. It can be helpful to jot notes about clothing and looks so that you match the proper face with names when you are back in the yearbook room.
9. Return the camera to the cabinet as soon as possible so it is available for the next photographer. Double-check to verify that all equipment you left with is in the bag. If there is a dead battery, put it on the charger, and leave a note with the bag.

Visual Storytelling Exercise – Visual journaling

To practice visual storytelling, you need to record observations. Use any one, or combination of, the following recording methods:

- Film camera or single-use film camera
- Digital camera
- Note pad

A day in the life

Select one day in your life to document with images or descriptions of images. Cover the day from beginning to end in a way that makes for good visual storytelling.

- Take or describe moments that are significant.
- Take or describe moments that are visually interesting.
- Work to get a collection of images or image descriptions that document more than just a series of events.
- Make sure your images or descriptions capture the mood of the day.
- Remember to vary the camera angle and distance from the subject.
- For each image, provide written captions that include information not obvious from the visual information.

Editing

Select from all of the images or descriptions of images collected during the day. Edit down to a few images that best tell the story of that day in your life.

Sharing

You will be sharing the images or image descriptions with the rest of the class for a class critique session. Save your best five to seven images to a jump drive or other means so they can be accessed in class.