

Brooks Institute
Photographic Educator's Workshop
My Favorite Assignment

Submitted By:

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Objectives

- To produce a series of individual projects that combine together to create one exhibition dealing with a central subject or theme.
- To explore the school or the community in-depth; to build a document of something that the students in the class feel is important.
- To work together as a group to create a display that encompasses a wide range of visual communication processes (photography, video, graphic arts, etc.).

Activity Summary

This activity is designed to be an end-of-the-year project for the entire class. A topic or subject matter is selected by the class and then, using whatever materials or processes each student wishes, a multi-media program is assembled. This allows each student to study a new area of photography or to apply one which they explored in an earlier assignment.

Teaching Tips

1. This project is designed to involve the entire class on one thing while still allowing each student to explore their own area of interest: black and white or color photography; 35mm, 120mm or large format equipment; video; slide shows; computer graphics; etc.
2. The end result should be some type of exhibit, designed by the students, that can be shown at the school or somewhere in the community.
3. The teacher should act as the coordinator of the project, but the students should be involved in the assembly of the total project, including selecting the work to be shown. Have students submit their work to the class and then the work is juried by the entire class.

Instructional Strategy

- Allow the students to brainstorm for a topic that they are all interested in. Once the topic has been selected, each student is responsible for defining how their research project can work to support the overall project. It is up to the instructor to determine if the approval for the project should come from the class or from the instructor. Possible topics might include businesses (or business people) in the community, a part of the community that people are not aware of, something about the school or school district, etc. The topic should be broad enough for the entire class to work with, yet at the same time not so broad that there is no central theme.
- Weekly deadlines should be established for the students to examine each others work. This allows the students to critique each other as well as offer advice on directions for the student to take his/her work. This will also help the students meet the final deadline.
- As part of the project, the students (with the instructor's help) should locate someplace to exhibit the final project. This might be somewhere in the school, at the

school district administration building or somewhere in the community (library, city hall, other).

Equipment/Supplies

1. Will depend on the individual processes that the students select. This might involve black and white processes, a slide-tape program, video, color printing, desktop publishing, etc.

Evaluation Key

It is important the students feel that this documentary is “their” documentary. Part of the grade that each student receives should be based on an evaluation of the individual research projects by the other students in the class. This evaluation should include a discussion of the contribution of the individual’s research to the total project.

The instructor should also grade each student’s work, basing the grade on the work and the student’s written discussion of the basic and applied research that they were involved in as part of the overall project.

Introduction

A document is defined as “anything relied upon to record or prove something.” This activity provides the student, and the entire class, with the opportunity to build a document about a selected subject, using photographs, printed matter or other form of visual media.

This exercise should begin with the class deciding upon a single topic to build the document around. This topic could concern something at the school or in the community. Possibilities might include: a series profiling businesses or business owners in town; an in-depth look at how the students at the school contribute to the community; something that requires action by the community or the school (homelessness, pollution, traffic); a profile of specific classes offered by the school or district; or some other idea which the entire class can agree upon.

Once a general topic has been selected, it is the responsibility of each student in the class to define his or her part of the overall project. Each individual project should tie into and support the document. If, for example, the class had decided to produce a profile of businesses in the community, one student might choose to photograph in black and white a series of environmental portraits of some of the business owners. Another student might decide to prepare a video showing the businesses at work. And still another student might select large format color prints to show the physical facilities of some of the businesses. The important part is that each student’s research should champion the theme in some manner.

As part of the basic research, the student should find examples of professional work similar to what the student plans to produce. This work should be examined and evaluated to help plan the applied research the student intends to do.

Weekly deadlines should be established by the class, with the aid of the instructor, so that students can look at each other’s work and help suggest ways to improve or strengthen the work. For the final deadline each student should prepare their research project so that the rest of the class can evaluate it and determine its support of the entire document.

Once all the work is selected for the exhibit, the students should hold some type of opening, inviting the community to see the results of their labors.

Support Materials

The work of the following artists might be viewed:

Mary Ellen Mark — photographs and film (*Streetwise*)

Farm Security Administration photographers during the Great Depression

Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Ben Shahn, Russell Lee, etc.

Arnold Newman — environmental portraits

Eugene Atget — documentary photographs of Paris

William Albert Allard — documentary photographs

Geoff Winningham — *Rites of Fall*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979.

Garry Winogrand — *Stock Photographs*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980.

National Geographic

Current annual reports