The Past and Present in Photographs

This activity complements the *Eugene: Then and Now* DVD presentation and general study guide.

**Grade Level**  Junior High and High School students (level of topic presentation can be modified for different grade levels)

**Time Required**  2 to 3 classroom sessions (based on 50 minute sessions)
3-4 hours outside classroom for field trip

**Activity Objectives**

Students will learn:
- The effects of urban development on human and natural environments.
- How historical change impacts communities.
- The basics of photographic composition.
- The role of photographs as historical documents.

**Materials**

- Camera (see Procedure no. 2)
- Access to historical photographs of your community (see Procedure no. 3)
- Presentation resources (see Procedure no. 8)

Downtown Eugene, Oregon
- circa 1920
- Photograph Courtesy of Lane County Historical Museum

Downtown Eugene, Oregon
- circa 1980
- Don L. Hunter

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**PROCEDURE** *(Note: These are suggested steps and can be modified according to instructor needs and resources)*

**Prep:**

1. Divide the class into groups of 2-8 (depending on class size).

2. Depending on your school’s resources, you can decide the appropriate format to complete the exercise by:
   - Obtaining digital cameras for each group.
   - Purchasing a disposable camera for each group.
   - Having students bring a camera (disposable, film, or digital) from home (one per group).
   - Having the instructor take a series of photographs of important architecture, landscape, and transportation examples from around your local community to bring into class, which will be divided between groups.

3. Students will need to obtain photocopies of historical architecture, landscape, and transportation examples from your local community. Examples of historic (old) photographs: city library, long-standing local business, river or other geographic features located in your community. Possible ways to obtain photocopies would be to:
   - Contact your local historical society/museum and ask if they can provide photocopies, or ask if a speaker can present these historical photographs for the class.
   - Use other resources such as student’s parents and grandparents who have lived in the area and have old photographs that can be photocopied.
   - Have students visit the local city library to find historic photos to photocopy.
   - Instructor provides photographs.
   - Local newspaper archives.

**Fieldtrip:**

4. Groups will photograph a series of significant buildings, roadways, landscapes, vehicles, etc. around their local community. The photos should be similar to the historical photos by way of angle and composition (although things such as trees and/or roads may have changed from the time the historic photo was taken). Students should be able to compare old photos to their new photos easily.

Taking photos around the community can be accomplished:

- By arranging a walking field trip for the entire class, or
- By assigning the groups to complete the series after school.
- If classroom time and/or resources are not available for a student fieldtrip the instructor can provide the photographs.

(Continued on next page)
Post-Fieldtrip:

5. The instructor will review the photography terminology. This review can take the form of a lecture, handout (see example: Appendix A), slide presentation using examples, or a combinations of the three. (Note: depending on the instructor’s goals this lecture can come before or after Step 4 above)

6. Groups will match their photographs with historical ones (such as the city’s library or famous university building).

7. Groups will examine each photograph carefully and document in writing what photographic elements are present in each photograph. Students should also write down any elements that are absent that would make the photo more effective. (This writing can be completed through the use of a designated group writer or individually turned in for each student.)

8. Groups will decide how they want to present their final findings:
   - Exhibit
   - Slide show
   - Presentation
   - Other?

9. Final presentations should be both informative and creative. The basic structure:
   75% = History/research based. Students will answer for both the historical and group produced photographs:
   1) What has changed between the time periods of the histocial and student photographs?
   2) How do these changes reflect larger changes within the community during this time period?
   25% = Photographic technique based. Students will answer for their group photographs:
   3) What photographic elements were used? What elements were not used? (Were there any new elements that you discovered?)
   4) What are the strongest photographic elements in each photograph? How do these elements help tell the story of the photograph?
**Questions for Class Discussion**

1. What were the difficulties of showing your town’s history in photographs?

2. Do you feel photography is a good record of a community’s history? Why or why not?

3. How has your town changed since you have lived here? How has it changed in the last 25 years? 50 years? 100 years? 500 years?

4. How do you think your town will change in the next 5 years? 10 years? 25 years? 50 years? 100 years? 500 years?

5. How do these changes impact the people who live in your town?

**Assessment**

Student assessment may be based on the following specific exercises or in combination:

- Student’s photographs evaluated in terms of conveying the information:
  
  o Was the student able to accurately convey photographic/design techniques in their photographs?
  
  o Was the student able to accurately describe:
    1) Photographic/design techniques found in their photographs?
    2) Techniques that were not found but would enhance the photograph if included?

- Student’s descriptions of historical photographs evaluated in terms of conveying information:
  
  o Was the student able to accurately describe photographic/design techniques in the historical photographs?
  
  o Was the student able to present a structured analysis of the original photographer’s reasons for using various techniques?

- Completion of final presentation project and does the student sufficiently answer the questions:
  
  1) How the student and historical photographs are different?
  2) Why the two sets of photographs are different (what has changed)?
  3) What photographic elements were used? What elements were not used?
  4) What are the strongest photographic elements of each photograph? How do these elements help tell the story of the photograph?
  5) What general historic developments are shown by both sets of photographs?

- Participation in class discussion.

- Matching final student knowledge of the topics in relation to your state standards.
**EXTENSIONS**

- Watch the DVD presentation, *Eugene: Then and Now* by Don L. Hunter, and have a class discussion around the topics presented.

- Have students write an essay that addresses why and how changes in their local towns/cities have occurred. Discuss trends in architecture, landscape, and transportation.

- Do a photography project focusing on landscapes and the natural world.

- Have students research a famous photographer (such as Dorothea Lange or Walker Evans) and present on the photographer’s use of elements and the stories they tell.

- Take the students on a field trip to view a local photography exhibit (art gallery, historical museum, etc.).

- Produce a photography exhibit for the entire school (present it in the library, hallway, gym, etc.).

- Create a performance art piece around the student’s photographs.

- Have students categorize the photographs into different topics and then discuss the reasoning for this organization.
Appendix A

**Elements of Photography** (a basic, but not comprehensive, list)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Proximity:</strong> Grouping related (similar) objects together. This implies that the objects have a relationship to each other. Creates recognizable patterns for the viewer’s eye.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Proximity Diagram]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alignment:</strong> All objects in a design should be placed so they have visual connections to other objects in the design. This creates a balance and a cohesive overall design. A flow is then created within the overall design that involves: <strong>symmetry</strong> (equally balanced on each side of an axis) and <strong>asymmetry</strong> (unequally balanced on each side of an axis, but still creating a feel of cohesion, flow, and a balanced visual effect.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Alignment Diagram]</td>
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<td><strong>Contrast:</strong> Elements that are different (opposites such as black &amp; white and large &amp; small) and are used in combination to create unique visual designs. Contrast creates a lively and exciting design that captures and directs the eye. Additionally, contrast creates striking visual interest to hold the viewer’s attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Contrast Diagram]</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Repetition:</strong> Repeating an element throughout the overall design that creates a consistency. Recognizable elements are repeated to create a flow and rhythm within the overall design and a pattern that allows the designer to help the viewer identify important visual cues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>![Repetition Diagram]</td>
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<td><strong>Rule of Thirds:</strong> Within a frame the human eye naturally directs itself to four points. These points are defined by horizontally and vertically dividing the frame; and where the points of the divisions intersect. (In Western cultures it is assumed that the upper left corner is where the eye initially falls. This corresponds with the Western tradition of reading left to right, top to bottom.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>![Rule of Thirds Diagram]</td>
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</table>
**Depth/Perspective:** Creates the illusion of volume, differences in size, and three-dimensional space.

**Visual Vectors (leading lines):** Certain elements, such as lines and shapes, that direct the viewer’s eyes through a design. These are also called “leading lines” and in combination point to an object of interest, such as a lightning bolt directing the eye to a product.
Exposure (aperture/shutter speed/film speed): The exposure of a photograph combines camera and film settings to control the look of a photograph. Photographers control the way a photograph looks by opening or closing the size of the lens aperture, setting the shutter speed (timing the duration that the film is exposed to an outside light source), and utilizing different film speeds for low or high light level photography.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aperture</th>
<th>Shutter Speed</th>
<th>Film Speed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>f/2.8</td>
<td>1/1000 second</td>
<td>800 ASA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f/22</td>
<td>1/30 second</td>
<td>100 ASA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f/11</td>
<td>1/125 second</td>
<td>400 ASA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aperture: The lens opening size, which allows for a certain amount of light into the camera. The smaller the f number the greater amount of light allowed into the camera. The larger the f number the lesser amount of light allowed into the camera.

Shutter Speed: A mechanism inside the camera that opens and allows light onto the film for certain set times. The faster the speed the lesser amount of light allowed into the camera. The slower the speed the greater amount of light allowed into the camera.

Film Speed (ASA): Films are made up of grains and the more grains on film the lower the speed rating (this is a nationally determined standard). The lower the film speed the smaller and greater number of grains on the film and the less light that is captured for each grain, but more detail can be captured because of the tightly packed grains. The higher the film speed the larger and lesser number grains on the film and the more light that is captured for each grain, but less detail can be captured because of the loosely packed grains (leaving gaps/blank spots between the grains that cannot capture any incoming light).

Example = A action photograph that you take inside a sports arena with lower light levels. This will allow you to capture motion, such as a basketball player in mid-air, without blurring, but at same time will blur the background crowd.

Example = A scenic photograph that you can take outside with lots of sun, and that you want to capture a large area all in focus, such as a mountain in the background and a sign near to you.

Example = A normal snapshot photograph that can be taken inside during the day with bright sunlight (windows) or outside under normal bright skies (with some some clouds). This will allow for three rows of the family group photograph to be in focus, but the grill in the foreground and the billboard in the far background will be blurred.

Note: These are not 100% accurate settings, but are given as generalized examples of the difference in settings needed to capture certain effects.