

Composition in Photography

Inspired by the Photography of Ned Pratt

Lesson plan prepared by Adam Graham for the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

Suggested Grade/Age Levels

While this lesson is recommended for grades 6-12, it could be simplified for younger ages by focussing on identifying geometric shapes in the world around us.

Subject Areas

- Visual Arts
- Photography

Introduction

This activity is based on the work *Harbour Entrance* by Ned Pratt which is included the exhibition *Ned Pratt: One Wave*, on display at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia Halifax from October 2020 to February 2021. This piece is a part of a series of photographs selected from a decade of Pratt's work. *Harbour Entrance* is a good example of Pratt's compositional style, creating balance and symmetry through the isolation of geometric shapes.

Students will go on a photowalk and take pictures in the style of Ned Pratt. This activity challenges students to use photography to engage in new ways of seeing. Students are encouraged to see objects as compositional shapes (instead of 'subjects') and to make photographs with intent.

Set Up

Students should make sure batteries are charged and they have enough space on memory cards (or smartphones) to record their photos.

Materials

- Camera or smartphone
- Smartphone or desktop photo editing application

Process

- Discuss Harbour Entrance by Ned Pratt. What are your first impressions? How does this photograph make you feel? How is it different from other landscape photographs that you've seen?
 - Introduce the concept of composition as the arrangement of shapes within a picture. Photography is often viewed as a way to take a picture of something. Does something change when you make photos with the intent of arranging shapes instead of recording a specific subject?
 - Go on a photowalk with the intent of isolating shapes and arranging them with symmetry.
 - Be sure to remind students to never walk while looking through a camera or at a screen.
 - After the photographs have been taken, students can use editing apps to further explore their photos by cropping, adjusting contrast, etc.
 - An optional further activity would be to print student photos. They could then cut out isolated pieces and rearrange the pieces from different photographs into new compositions.
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Resources

- See more of Ned Pratt's work here: <https://christinaparkergallery.com/artist/ned-pratt/>
- An interview with Ned Pratt and more examples of his work: https://website-metiviergallery.artlogic.net/usr/library/documents/main/mediumformat_2020.pdf
- Another interview with Ned Pratt: <https://www.theeastmag.com/2019/10/01/heart-of-the-approach-a-conversation-with-minimalist-photographer-ned-pratt/>