

Curriculum

ANSEL ADAMS CURRICULUM

OVERVIEW:

No man has the right to dictate what other men should perceive, create or produce, but all should be encouraged to reveal themselves, their perceptions and emotions, and to build confidence in the creative spirit.

- *Ansel Adams*

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR EDUCATORS

Prior to visiting this exhibit teachers are encouraged to view:

How Ansel Adams Changed Photography: https://youtu.be/Xw5_qb71bXs

Ansel Adams BBC Master Photographers (1983): <https://youtu.be/rdCq-1MJmHw>

Ansel Adams - Photographer: <https://youtu.be/efHKUxrgC0U>

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

In this lesson, you will learn how Ansel Adams:

- achieved eminence as a photographer of the American West.
- worked with Yosemite National Park.
- used his works to promote the conservation of wilderness areas.
- used his iconic black-and-white images to help establish photography within the fine arts.

THE ARTIST:

Ansel Adams (1902-1984), photographer, musician, naturalist, explorer, critic, and teacher, was a giant in the field of landscape photography. His work can be viewed as the end of an arc of American art concerned with capturing the “sublime” in the unspoiled western landscape. This tradition includes the 19th-century painters Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Cole, and Thomas Moran, and the 19th-century photographers Carleton Watkins, Timothy O’Sullivan, and William Henry Jackson.

For much of his early adulthood, Adams was torn between a career as a concert pianist versus one in photography. He famously likened the photographic negative to a musical score and the print to the performance. Most museum-goers are only familiar with the heroic, high-contrast prints on the high-gloss paper stock that Adams sold in the 1970s-80s, coinciding with the emergence of the first retail galleries devoted to photography. As performances, these later prints are akin to “brass bands.” Much lesser known is his intimate prints, rich in middle tones – the “chamber music” – that Adams crafted earlier in his career.

OBJECTIVES

★ Know:

- The importance of Adams' contributions to the world of art.
- How to teach the term “Visualization” (seeing the actual image in your head prior to taking the photo) coined by Adams.

★ Master Objective

- **Art & Science:** Adams worked as a conservationist and lobbyist for the creation and preservation of national parks.
- **Art & History:** The importance of capturing the beauty and uniqueness of the earth during a time when socio-economic issues appeared to have precedence.

★ Student Learning Outcomes:

- All students will develop knowledge of the process of critique, learn how to apply that knowledge, and reflect upon their critique.

- All students will **understand** and **analyze** the role, development, and continuing influence of the arts in relation to world cultures, history, and society.
- All students will **demonstrate** knowledge of how artists and artistic works connect with political, social, cultural, and historical events.
- All students will **investigate** sources of light and show how light behaves when it strikes different objects.
- Use **knowledge** of the English language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, and listening.

ACTIVITIES:

LESSON 1

Adams was a hopeless, rebellious student, but—once his father bowed to the inevitable and removed him from school at age 12—he proved a remarkable autodidact. He became a serious and ambitious musician who was considered by qualified judges (including the musicologist and composer **Henry Cowell**) to be a highly gifted pianist. After he received his first camera in 1916, Adams also proved to be a talented photographer. While photography and the piano shared his attention during his early adulthood, by about 1930 Adams decided to devote his life to photography. In 1930, he met the American photographer Paul Strand and was shown the negatives that Strand was then making in New Mexico. Adams was deeply impressed with the simplicity of the images' conception and by their rich and luminous tonality, a style in contrast to the soft-focus Pictorialism still in vogue among many contemporary photographers. The experience confirmed in him his evolution toward a purer and more realistic style. In 1932, Adams helped form Group f.64, a loose and short-lived association of West Coast photographers (including Edward Weston and Imogen Cunningham) who favored sharp focus and the use of the entire photographic grayscale, from black to white, and who shunned any effects

borrowed from traditional fine arts such as painting. He famously likened the photographic negative to a musical score and the print to the performance.

- Based on the information above, what kind of student do you think Ansel Adams was?
- What makes Adams so important to the world of visual arts?
- How would you describe the “simplicity” of art?
- Can you think of a time when you have noticed or experienced the “simplicity” of art? Describe what you saw in vivid detail.

VOCABULARY:

Autodidact - Someone who is self-taught.

Pictorialism - an approach to photography that emphasizes the beauty of subject matter, tonality, and composition rather than the documentation of reality.

Composition - the act or process of composing; specifically: arrangement into specific proportion or relation and especially into artistic form.

Realism - in the arts, the accurate, detailed, unembellished depiction of nature or of contemporary life.

Grayscale - black and white monochrome that uses only different shades of gray. These prints with different shades of gray are commonly called black and whites in the photography industry, while the design industry favors the term grayscale.

Contemporary Photographers - Contemporary photographers can create photographic images using either an analog camera or a digital camera. Contemporary in the art world refers to artworks created in the present time or very recent past. Usually, contemporary artists are alive and still actively working.

Lesson II

Study and analyze all 5 pictures below. Answer the following questions.

- 1.) What is something that stands out most to you in any particular photograph? Name the photo and explain.**
- 2.) Symmetry is a very formal type of balance consisting of mirroring portions of an image. Symmetry gives not only a sense of balance, but also a sense of calm, stability, and formality. Can you find symmetry in any of the photos? If yes please explain.**
- 3.) What are some similarities in each photo?**
- 4.) Consider Adams' concept of Visualization, choose one photo and analyze what you think Adams may have pictured in his mind prior to capturing the moment that made the subject photo-worthy.**

IMAGE 1

Coastal road, 1952-53 Vintage gelatin silver print 9 3/8 x 6 7/8 inches Frame size: 20 x 16 inches

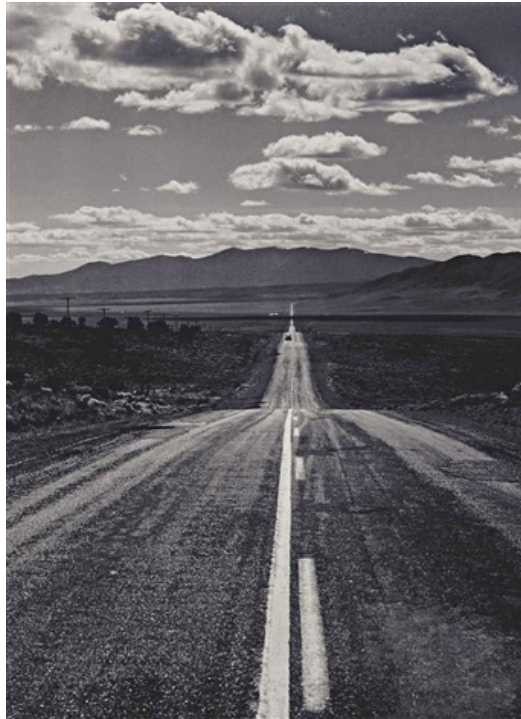


IMAGE 2

**The Abode of Snow, ca. 1923 Vintage gelatin silver print 6 x 8 inches Frame size:
14 x 18 inches**



IMAGE 3

Banner Peak – Thousand Island Lake, 1923 Vintage gelatin silver print 6 x 8 inches



Frame size: 14 x 18 inches

IMAGE 4

Mount Robson, 1928 Vintage gelatin silver print 15 x 10 7/8 inches Frame size: 30 x 24 inches

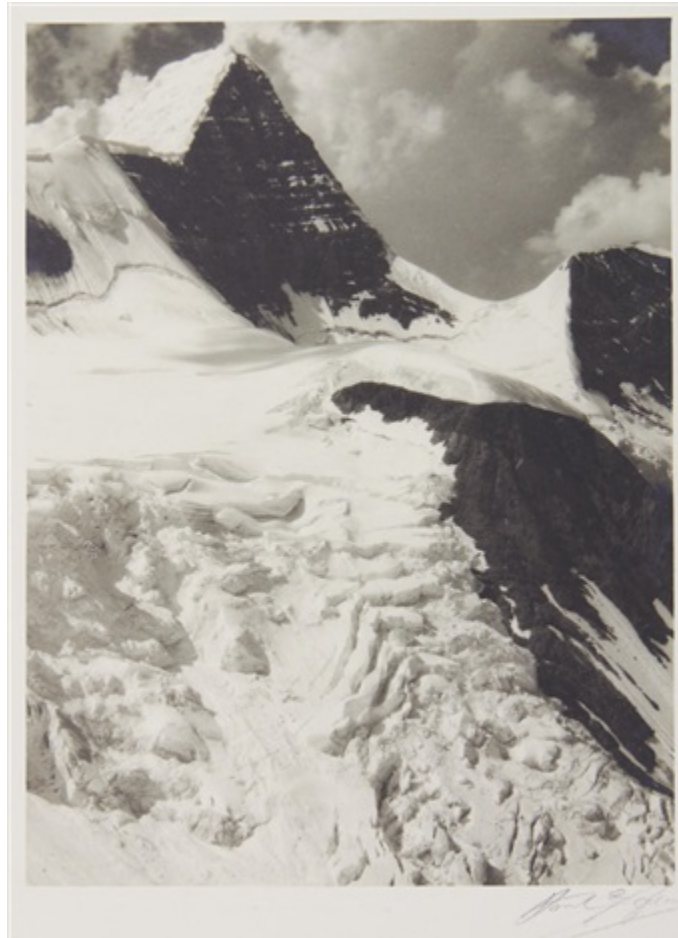


IMAGE 5

For this assignment, create small groups. Have students discuss the subjects below and create a group summary of their interpretation of Ansel Adams depiction of the scene in this photograph.



Cloud and Mountain, ca. 1925 Vintage gelatin silver print 6 x 8 inches Frame size: 14 x 18 inches

“It was one of those mornings when the sunlight is burnished with a keen wind and long feathers of cloud move in a lofty sky. The silver light turned every blade of grass and every particle of sand into a luminous metallic splendor: there was nothing, however small, that did not clash in the bright wind, that did not send arrows of light through the glassy air. I was suddenly arrested in the long crunching path up the ridge by an exceedingly pointed awareness of the light. The moment I paused, the full impact of the mood was upon me. I saw more clearly than I have ever seen before or since the minute detail of the grasses, the clusters of sand shifting in the wind, the small flotsam of the forest, the motion of the high clouds streaming above the peaks. There are no words to convey the moods of those moments.”

→ After reading this passage, why do you think Adams was called the “Poetic Photographer?”

Vocabulary:

Burnished - to make shiny or lustrous especially by rubbing.

Luminous - full of or shedding light; bright or shining, especially in the dark.

Flotsam - the wreckage of a ship or its cargo found floating on or washed up by the sea.
(people or things that have been rejected and are regarded as worthless.)

LESSON III

Ansel Adams Quotes: Read these famous quotes below by Adams and then express what they mean to you. Use some of the vocabulary words above to develop your expression.

- ❖ “You don’t take a photograph, you make it.”
- ❖ “There’s nothing worse than a sharp image of a fuzzy concept.”
- ❖ “I am sure the next step will be the electronic image, and I hope I shall live to see it. I trust that the creative eye will continue to function, whatever technological innovations may develop.”

Lesson 4

This exhibition focuses on the masterful small-scale prints made by Ansel Adams from the 1920s into the 1950s. In 1943 and 1944, Ansel Adams documented one of the darkest chapters in American history, shooting a series of photographs of Japanese-American citizens in incarceration. The exhibition of these photographs at the Museum of Modern Art in 1945, titled “Born Free and Equal,” was met with considerable controversy in an America still at war. Due to the outcry, the exhibition closed early; for added measure, the book on the exhibit was cleared from shelves and destroyed. In 2019, an exhibit of the photographs, along with others from that place and time, was mounted in San Francisco. Whether or not you have visited the High Sierras, chances are you have seen the signature black-and-white photographs of Ansel Adams. The dramatic monoliths, towering sequoia trees, and roaring waterfalls that populate the region have always been sources of wonder for hikers, naturalists, and park visitors, but it was only when Ansel Adams captured these scenes with his camera that many Americans saw them. Ansel Adams’ love of nature and his work in capturing these rarely seen places for all to see changed the American art world to include nature photography. Adams’ work became an important part of history and the American conservation movement, providing a constant reminder of our values and the landscapes that need to be protected. Whether Ansel was capturing a moment of darkness in American history or capturing vistas within the Sierras and other protected lands, his grayscale photography has proven to be undeniably exceptional.

Explain how Ansel Adams’s art is relevant politically, environmentally, culturally, or historically.

References & Resources

Learning and Teaching Handbook: SECTION 3: Curriculum Development - Durham University.

<https://mymodernmet.com/what-is-contemporary-art-definition/>By Kelly Richman-Abdou on May 9, 2021

<https://nationalseedproject.org/Key-SEED-Texts/curriculum-as-window-and-mirror>

Ansel Adams Quotes (Author of The Camera)

[https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/By Jake Rossen](https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/By+Jake+Rossen) February 20, 2019

<https://www.nps.gov/articles/ansel-adams-conservation.htm>

New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards

1.3.2 D. Visual Art 1. Identify the basic art elements of color, line, shape, form, texture, and space. 2. Discuss how art elements are used in specific works of art.

1.3.6 D. Visual Art 1. Describe the emotional significance conveyed in the application of the elements. 2. Describe a work of art that clearly illustrates a principle of design.

1.4.12 A. Knowledge 1. Examine the artwork from a variety of historical periods in both western and non-western culture(s). 2. Categorize the artistic subject, the formal structure, and the principal elements of art used in exemplary works of art. 3. Determine the influence of tradition on art experience, as an art creator, performer, and consumer.

1.4.12 B. Skills 1. Develop criteria for evaluating art in a specific domain and use the criteria to evaluate one's personal work and that of their peers, using positive commentary for critique. 2. Provide examples of how critique may affect the creation and/or modification of an existing or new work of art.

1.5.8 A. Knowledge 1. Analyze how technological changes have influenced the development of the arts. 2. Examine how the social and political environment influences artists in various social/historical/political contexts.

Standard 1.5 All Students Will Identify The Various Historical, Social, And Cultural Influences And Traditions Which Have Generated Artistic Accomplishments Throughout The Ages And Which Continue To Shape Contemporary Arts.

Standard 5.9 All Students Will Gain An Understanding Of Natural Laws As They Apply To Motion, Forces, And Energy Transformations

W.9-10.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.