

Beyond the Image: A Photo-Educator Guide

A guide for [*In Light and Shadow: A Photographic History from Indigenous America*](#) was created by contributing artist Nīa MacKnight. It is designed for educators and students looking to explore the social, political, and economic dimensions that shaped the work of early and contemporary Indigenous photographers from the Americas. Through guided analysis, students will examine the role of the photographic image within three units: Representation, Relationality, and Remembrance. Each unit includes photographs from *In Light and Shadow: A Photographic History from Indigenous America*, guiding questions, standards based arts vocabulary, background resources, and a suggested art activity. Educators are encouraged to incorporate the following activities to correspond with each unit:

- I. Representation: (Portrait & Interview) Create a portrait of someone from a chosen community. Consider your use of framing to include significant objects in the image. Next, interview them through a series of questions that explore their life's story.
- II. Relationality: (Photo Essay) Explore an environment of your choice (e.g. school, neighborhood, home) and use your camera to focus on the people, animals, and/or buildings that play an active role in it. Next, narrow your sequence to 10 images and discuss your relationship with your chosen environment.
- III. Remembrance: (Collage) Create a collage that explores the "Memory of Self". Build a composition of found images, words, colors, materials and textures that hold value to you. As you build your collage, reflect on the role of memory and how it has shaped aspects of your identity today.

I. Representation

One of the earliest collectives to include Indigenous photographers, Cusco School of Photography, documented profound social, political, and economic changes within their communities in Perú. The photograph below by Miguel Chani, a member of Cusco School of Photography, portrays the moment that the first train arrived in Cusco, Perú, in 1908. An expectant crowd eagerly awaits the arrival of the passengers on board, as the train moves past the Andean foothills.



The first train arriving in Cusco, Perú, 1908. Photograph by Miguel Chani. Courtesy of Fototeca Andian CBC. CHAN00124

Describe the scene in the photograph.

How is modernity portrayed through the photographer's use of perspective?

In what ways does the photograph above use contrast to tell a story?

List 5 objects that you see in the photograph by B.A. Haldane.

In 1899 in Metlakatla, Territory of Alaska, self-taught photographer B.A. Haldane opened one of the first Native-owned portrait studios. His studio served as a site for community members to express their Tsimshian identity despite strict colonial rule. The self-portrait by Haldane shows him at his studio seated between two cameras, a megaphone, and a gramophone, with his arm resting on a model totem pole that displays his Laxgyibuu (Wolf Clan) crest at the bottom.



B.A. Haldane self-portrait inside his photography studio, Metlakatla, Alaska, c. 1900. Photograph by B.A. Haldane. Courtesy of Ketchikan Museums. KM 89.2.14.21

What do the objects in the photograph symbolize?

After studying the portrait of Melina Monserrat, how would you describe her expression?

Yalaltepec photographer Citlali Fabián was raised in Oaxaca de Juárez, México, and witnessed the magic of the darkroom in her father's photography shop at a young age. The portrait below of Melina Monserrat, a teenager of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican descent, was created in 2018 as a part of a documentary chapter titled Ben'n Yalhalh-Soy de Yalálag. Fabián states, "We have developed our identities beyond our 'territories.' Melina is a beautiful reflection of that to me."



Melina Monserrat, Oaxaca de Juárez, México, June 2018. © Citlali Fabián

Is portraiture a collaborative process? Why or why not?

How is photography an act of self-determination?

Activity: Create a portrait of a person from your chosen community. Consider your use of framing to include significant objects in the image. Next, interview them through a series of questions that explore their life's story.

II. Relationality

After decades of negotiations between the Blackfeet Confederacy and the U.S. government, the traditional territory of the Blackfeet became a forest reserve known as Glacier National Park in 1910. As outlined in the [Lame Bull Treaty](#), the Blackfeet maintained their rights to hunt and gather on their traditional territory. However in 1932, a District Court ruling claimed that citizens of the Blackfeet Nation did not have the right to hunt or gather in the park. Photographer Ella Mad Plume Yellow Wolf was among many Blackfeet community members that continued to practice their treaty rights. In the photograph below, she is pictured cleaning a freshly cut fish at Two Medicine Dam in Glacier National Park.



Ella Mad Plume Yellow Wolf near the dam at Lower Two Medicine Lake, Blackfeet Nation, c. 1940–45. Photograph by Louie Yellow Wolf. Montana Historical Society Photography Archives. PAC 97-37.29

How would you describe Ella Mad Plume Yellow Wolf's relationship to the landscape that she is pictured in?

How does access shape one's relationship to their homelands?

How did Mad Plume Yellow Wolf utilize photography as an act of resistance?

With the arrival of Kodachrome, Tlingit photographer Tsu-Xoog-Eesh/William Lackey Paul Jr. explored color for the first time through a photographic series created at Bristol Bay, Alaska. He visited Bristol Bay with his brothers at least three seasons in the year, to earn money for law school at The University of Washington. His fascination with boats, and his love for the waters that carried his boyhood memories are conveyed in the photograph.



Bristol Bay, Alaska, c. 1941. Photograph by William Lackey Paul Jr. Courtesy of Ben Paul.

Describe the atmosphere depicted in the photograph.

How does the color in the photograph evoke emotion?

How did the invention of color photography enhance storytelling?

Photographs and Poems by Sioux Children, a catalogue of photographs and poems by students at Porcupine Day School, was published in 1971 to accompany an exhibit at the Sioux Indian Museum. Oglala Lakota artist and educator Arthur Amiotte led the group of young artists through a curriculum that celebrated the achievements of their ancestors, while exploring contemporary aesthetics across the Native Nations in America. The following poem and photograph featured in the catalogue was created by his 8th grade students.



Richard Peters, Grade 8, Age 15, National Archives (RG 435-PD)

A road has no end
And never knows where or
When to stop.
The road comes and goes
Through streams, hills, and cities.
A road is where you can
Find happiness and again
You can find sadness.

-Marlene Locke, Grade 8, age 14

Which line of the poem stood out to you the most? Why?

What does "the road" as a metaphor mean to you?

Activity: Explore an environment of your choice (e.g. school, neighborhood, home) and use your camera to focus on the people, animals, and/or buildings that play an active role in it. Next, narrow your sequence to 10 images, and write a paragraph describing your relationship with your chosen environment.

III. Remembrance

The photographic collage *Forever in Our Hearts* by Métis artist Rosalie Favell depicts burials, funerals, and inscribed headstones. The assemblage of images is a “mapping of the family” and a reminder of the prophecy that each generation affects descendants seven generations into the future. Favell stated “This family archive feeds my spirit. I feel a responsibility to keep my family alive through my mining and re-presenting them.”



Forever in Our Hearts, 2021. © Rosalie Favell.

Describe a dominant theme in the work by Rosalie Favell.

How does Favell reclaim narratives through her “mapping of the family”?

Does photography hold the power to heal? Why or why not?

Interdisciplinary Cree artist Kimowan Metchewais began compiling an alphabetized Polaroid collection that formed the foundation of his arts practice. "My studio has been a laboratory where I have conducted an archaeology of the self. I work this way to accidentally produce live relics only to be purposefully found later," Metchewais wrote in 2009. The self-portrait below consists of layered photographs on ledger paper, depicting him in a white shirt and jeans with a flowing hairpiece that spills to the floor.



Untitled, 1988. Photo collage on ledger paper. Photograph by Kimowan Metchewais. Kimowan Metchewais [McLain] collection, NMAI.AC.084, National Museum of the American Indian Archive Center, Smithsonian Institution. NMAI-084_001_11_001

Kimowan Metchewais referred to his art studio as a laboratory where he produced "live relics". How do artists shape history through art?

How does the self-portrait by Metchewais confront stereotypes?

Does self-portraiture alter perspectives about identity? Why or why not?

Táhila Moss, an artist of Yaqui/Jewish descent, photographed the portrait below of traditional Corn Grower and Seed Keeper Angela Ferguson from the Onoñda'gegá' Nation. Ferguson is the director of the Onondaga Nation Farm, a self-sustaining and community-minded refuge giving rise to the nation's food sovereignty. She is depicted wearing an assembled crown of dried Haudenosaunee White Corn husks, seeds, ribbons, and beads.



Sovereign, 2022, from the series *My Grandmothers' Light Shines Through Me*. Supported by the Sharjah Art Foundation. © Táhila Moss

After studying the portrait, describe the tone of the image.

How does Táhila Moss honor traditions through the medium of photography?

Activity: Create a collage that explores the "Memory of Self". Build a composition of found images, words, colors, materials and textures that hold value to you. As you build your collage, reflect on the role of memory and how it has shaped aspects of your identity today.