

**BORDERS: COUNTRIES  
AND CULTURES (A  
PHOTO ESSAY)**



# **BORDERS: COUNTRIES AND CULTURES (A PHOTO ESSAY)**

## **Description**

In this lesson, students will compare and contrast the format, components and purpose of the photo essays “On the Border” by Alan Taylor and “Marisol: The American Dream” by Janet Jarman, defining what a photo essay is based on their observations of both. Students will also analyze individual photographs of Mexican-American borders using an in-depth guide, then create a photo essay expressing their views on either Mexican-American or Spanish-Moroccan borders.

## **Subjects**

English / Language Arts

## **Grade Level**

9-12

## **Duration**

90 minutes

## **Tour Links**

- Spain
- Morocco
- Mexico

## **Essential Questions**

- What is a photo essay?
- What are the components of a photo essay?
- What is the difference between a photo essay and a regular essay on the same topic?
- How can photo essays be used to shape or change public opinion?
- How does one analyze a photograph?

# Academic Summary

An intellectual says a simple thing in a hard way. An artist says a hard thing in a simple way. –Charles Bukowski

It is true what they say – a picture really is worth a thousand words. Photographers have the ability to convey complex thoughts and emotions in a very meaningful way, one that speaks directly to people and their unique experiences. It is from this sentiment that the concept of the photo essay was born.

A photo essay is a series of images intended to form a story or thought process when viewed together. Some photo essays are meant to be viewed in a certain order, others simply as a collection of images. Most attempt to reveal, inform, entertain, persuade, and/or compare and contrast. Photographs can be used to explain concepts, thoughts or emotions when words fail an author. So also can text be used in accompaniment with images to reinforce the point of the photographer/author. Because of this, it is common for photo essays to include text in the form of titles, captions, introductory paragraphs or accompanying articles.

Over the years, photo essays have been used to call attention to other areas of the world. Some show people cultures different from their own, others focus more on global issues. All utilize photographs and the human connection to express a certain point of view.

In this lesson, students will compare and contrast the format, components and purpose of the photo essays “On the Border” by Alan Taylor and “Marisol: The American Dream” by Janet Jarman, defining what a photo essay is based on their observations of both. Students will also analyze individual photographs of Mexican-American borders using an in-depth guide, then create a photo essay expressing their views on either Mexican-American or Spanish-Moroccan borders.

## Objectives

1. Students will compare and contrast the format, components and purpose of the photo essays “On the Border” by Alan Taylor and “Marisol: The American Dream” by Janet Jarman.
2. Students will define what a photo essay is based on their observations of example photo essays.
3. Students will analyze individual photographs of Mexican-American borders, using an in-depth guide.
4. Students will create a photo essay expressing their views on either Mexican-American or Spanish-Moroccan borders.

## Materials

- Computers, iPads, or projector
- *V-J Day in Times Square* Link or Printout
- *Photo Analysis: A Step-by-Step Guide* Handout
- *Create a Photo Essay / Photo Essay Rubric* Handout (double-sided)

# Procedures

## I. Anticipatory Set (10 minutes)

- “A picture is worth a thousand words.” What do you think this means? Discuss as a class.
- Show the class “V-J Day in Times Square” by Alfred Eisenstaedt, 1945. For one minute, write down any words or phrases that come to mind when looking at this photograph. Share with a partner, then discuss as a class. Could you continue this activity for longer than one minute? Is a picture really worth a thousand words? Did you and your partner have different reactions to the same photograph? Why do you think this is?
- Today, we will be learning about photo essays. What do you think a photo essay is? How does this tie into the phrase, “A picture is worth a thousand words”?

## II. Body of Lesson (70 minutes)

- Photo Essay Exploration: “On the Border” by Alan Taylor, and “Marisol: The American Dream” by Janet Jarman. In partners or groups (depending on the number of computers available), explore both photo essays about Mexican-American borders. Using a T-Chart format, have students compare the two photo essays. What are their components? What subjects are photographed? What were the photographers trying to accomplish? Do any images stand out to you? Why? Review as a class.  
Alternatively, you could explore the photo essays as a class with a projection screen or Smart Board.
- Class Discussion: How can photo essays be used to shape or change public opinion? Is text more powerful when it is combined with photographs? What is the difference between a photo essay and a single paragraph about the same topic? What can a photo essay do that a single paragraph cannot?
- As a class, formulate a definition of a photo essay. Have students copy the definition in their notebooks.  
Definition Suggestion: A photo essay is a series of images that form a story when viewed as a group. Sometimes photo essays include text (titles, captions, introductory paragraphs, accompanying articles). Text and photographs can work together to reinforce the point of the photographer/author. Photos may be intended to be viewed in a certain order, or may simply be a collection of images. The series attempts to do one or more of the following: reveal, inform, entertain, persuade, and/or compare and contrast. Most photo essays express a point of view. (Complete objectivity may be impossible, or undesirable.)
- Individual Photo Analysis: Have the students return to their previous groups. Pick one photo from the two essays that stuck out to you in particular. As a group, analyze the photo using the *Photo Analysis: A Step-by-Step Guide* handout. Share your findings with the class.

## III. Closure (10 minutes)

- Class Discussion: What have we learned today about Mexican-American borders? Besides physical borders, are there any other kinds of invisible borders that were present (social, economic, religious)? Do you believe these essays have shaped your opinion of the topic of Mexican-American borders in any way? Can essays like these be used to shape the opinion of the general public?
- Homework: Immigration is a hot topic in many countries. Many Moroccans immigrate to Spain, in much the same way that Mexicans immigrate to the United

States. Create a photo essay about the borders between either Morocco and Spain or Mexico and the United States using the *Create a Photo Essay* handout/rubric.

## Extension

### On four: Anywhere!

Find a border. It could be a physical border (like between two countries, two cities, or simply the gate surrounding a school), or an invisible border (social, economic, religious, etc.). Reflect on what this border means to you. What would you like others to take away from viewing this same border? Take a series of photographs with this vision in mind. Upon your return home, form a photo essay with your border photographs. Add titles, captions, an introductory paragraph, or relevant articles if they reinforce your view. Then spread the word by sharing your creation with others!

## Web Links

- [www.artinlimbo.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/tumblr\\_mboxbnha601qhn144o1\\_1280.jpg](http://www.artinlimbo.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/tumblr_mboxbnha601qhn144o1_1280.jpg)  
“V-J Day in Times Square” (photograph). Alfred Eisenstaedt, 1945.
- [www.theatlantic.com/infocus/2013/05/on-the-border/100510/](http://www.theatlantic.com/infocus/2013/05/on-the-border/100510/)  
“On the Border”, In Focus with Alan Taylor. The Atlantic, 6 May 2013. Photo essay documenting the border between the United States and Mexico.
- [janetjarman.com/](http://janetjarman.com/)  
Official website of Janet Jarman, a photojournalist and multimedia producer based in Mexico. Includes a collection of photo essays, including “Marisol: The American Dream”, a sixteen-year study of one Mexican family’s immigration experience in the United States.
- [www.choices.edu/resources/documents/photo\\_guidelines](http://www.choices.edu/resources/documents/photo_guidelines)  
“Photo Analysis Guidelines” (PDF), Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University. From the Choices Program. Source of the Photo Analysis: A Step-by-Step Guide handout.
- [education.nationalgeographic.com/media/file/GAW\\_photo\\_9-12edited922.pdf](http://education.nationalgeographic.com/media/file/GAW_photo_9-12edited922.pdf)  
“Create a Photo Essay (Grades 9-12)” (PDF), National Geographic Education. Supplementary material for students interested in creating a photo essay using original photographs.

## Key Terms

- **photo essay** a series of images that form a story when viewed as a group. Sometimes photo essays include text (titles, captions, introductory paragraphs, accompanying articles). Text and photographs can work together to reinforce the point of the photographer/author. Photos may be intended to be viewed in a certain order, or may simply be a collection of images. The series attempts to do one or more of the following: reveal, inform, entertain, persuade, and/or compare and contrast. Most photo essays express a point of view. (Complete objectivity may be impossible, or undesirable.)
- **documentary photography** photographs used to chronicle significant and/or historical events
- **objective** based on facts; unbiased
- **subjective** biased; based on someone's mood, attitude, opinion, etc.

