

# Service and Photography



*My Support*, Grecia Carey Ortega, 2018

**Grade levels:** 9–12

**Duration:** One 45-minute classroom period

---

## Learning Objectives

### **Is being of service the same thing as being an advocate, and how can photography contribute to these issues?**

#### **Message to Educators**

The idea of being “of service” has shades of meaning. Is collecting food for a food bank the same as serving meals at a food bank? What about documenting the experience of the food bank? Is it different to volunteer at a food bank versus being employed at a food bank? Why do some types of service feel more or less challenging to us? Why do some types of service feel more or less impactful?

This lesson asks: Who are the “helpers” in our communities? What does it mean to be a helper or to be of service? How do people offer service to each other and to their communities? Is being of service the same as being an advocate? What role can photography play to impact or inspire service?

In undertaking this lesson, you will help your students unpack the idea of service, understand where advocacy fits in, and encourage them to envision themselves both as photographers and as advocates. Some will become passionate, outspoken champions. Others will see themselves more as quiet documentarians. Both of those roles have a place in the ecosystem of service. This lesson plan includes photography examples to spark discussion, a list of materials, and cues to help you foster a safe space and lead confidently, as they begin to turn their convictions into action.

You do not need to be practiced at facilitating discussions using photography to effectively lead this lesson. Getty is committed to supporting meaningful dialogue through photography, and the lesson plan was created with educators to carefully walk you through the steps.

---

### **Lesson Plan Four: Service and Photography**

This lesson marks the beginning of identifying how and where service happens, preparing to participate in service efforts, and contributing to advocacy through photography. In the first three lessons, students investigated themselves and their backgrounds, explored their communities,

and encountered case studies of artists as social justice advocates. Now we begin to turn toward strategy and approach. This lesson asks students to identify different types of service, where they fit into a model of service, how they can begin to see themselves as advocates, and the roles of photography in advocacy efforts.

To start this exploration, the group considers definitions of service and advocacy by analyzing two photographs. While service can manifest as either direct or indirect action, advocacy is a mode of service wherein you publicly support and speak up for an idea, a cause, or members of an identity group. Students then choose an issue or community, and show or describe related examples of each type of service. After a discussion of types of service, students weigh how they might take action for community needs. As practice, students will use photography to illuminate types of service they observe in their communities. In the final reflection, individuals begin to imagine themselves engaged in service and advocacy.

---

## Associated Standards

- Getty SJA LO (Getty Social Justice and Advocacy Learning Objective): Identify distinctions among types of service, settings for service, and methods of service.
- Getty SJA LO: Understand methods of social change.
- CCSS (California Curriculum State Standard).ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C: Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D: Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.5: Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphic, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence, and to add interest.

## Materials

- Projector
  - Photograph from Getty Unshuttered community
  - Photograph from Getty Museum collection
  - Service Ideas graphic organizer
  - A digital camera or smartphone
- 

## Vocabulary

You may wish to ground the discussion of service with shared definitions of the four forms of service.

- Direct service directly affects the community or issue on which you wish to have an impact. An example is serving at a soup kitchen.
  - Indirect service takes place away from the community or issue on which you wish to have an impact. Collecting donations for a food pantry is an example.
  - Advocacy is when you publicly support and speak up for an idea, a cause, or members of an identity group. Petitioning a government organization to support food pantries is advocacy.
  - Research and documentation means discovering or focusing attention on information that informs or demands action. Research your subject so you become knowledgeable. You can then document through photography. For example, you could research and document food insecurity.
- 

## Instructional Plan

### Introduction

We've seen some examples of photographers as social justice advocates. Now we'll explore how advocacy fits into the larger landscape of service to community and others.

The questions for inquiry at the center of this lesson include:

- What are the different but related forms of service?
- Where does photography fit in?

- When and how is photography advocacy?
- Can photography be service without necessarily being advocacy?
- And ultimately, what is your place in that picture?

## Set the Stage

Project the image shown below without the caption. Discussion can begin by simply asking students what they notice about the photograph.



*My Support*, Grecia Carey Ortega, 2018

### Questions for discussion:

- What do you notice first about this image? (It features two women in profile, who are engaged in conversation and smiling or laughing with each other.)
- What compositional and photographic elements do you notice, and why?

- How is the photo framed? (The image uses a landscape aspect ratio, which is balanced by having each subject on either side of the composition.)
- How are the subjects positioned? (Both are in profile and face each other from opposite side of the photo frame, seated across a table from one another. Their body language suggests comfort and informality, with relaxed smiles, and the subject on the right leans into the table.)
- What do we notice in the foreground? Or the background? (The subject on the left has a large accordion file on the table in the foreground, as well as a laptop and a bag or backpack between her and the other woman. On the wall immediately behind the women is a poster that reads, "Seniors are required to apply to 6 Scholarships before Graduation!")
- Where might this have been taken? (It seems like an institutional setting; possibly a guidance or college counselor's office, given the table and chairs, the poster in the background, and the messages and folders of handouts pinned to the wall.)
- Who do you think the artist is portraying? (It is unclear whether we are seeing a mentor and mentee duo, two peers, or a guidance counselor and student—but in all these possible relationships, the common element is that they are relationships of support.)
- Does the title, "My Support," give us any clues? Do you think it refers to a subject in the photo, or to the things she has with her?
- If you think one of the subjects is a guidance counselor, what do you think the artist thinks or feels about her? What feelings or experiences does it call up for you? Do you think guidance counselors provide a social service?

---

## Photographer and Subject

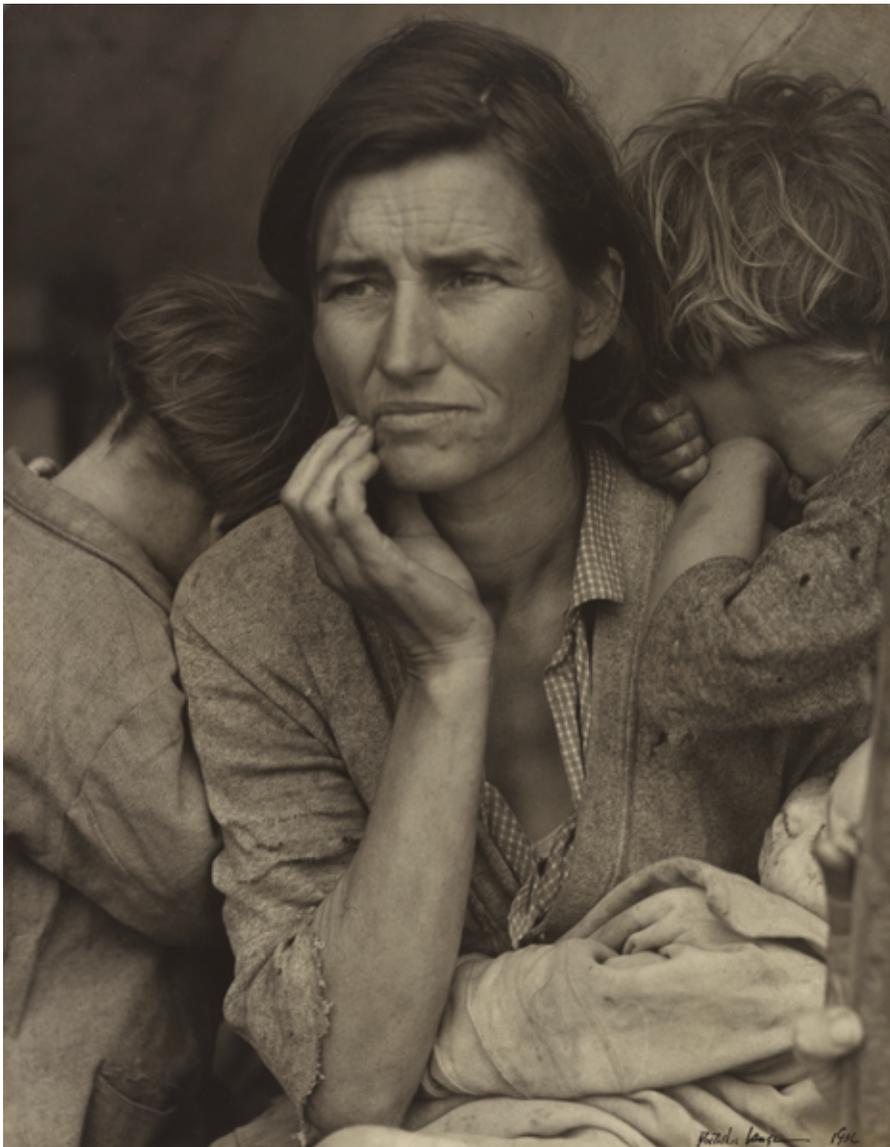
**Grecia Carey Ortega** began taking photos in middle school with her dad's camera and credits her time in Getty Unshuttered as an opportunity to learn more of the technical skills. "I tend to focus on telling stories, whether it's my own or others', about love, trust, forgiveness, and other themes. I use a lot of symbolism or the materials I have around me that have influenced me or reflect what I want to showcase in my photos."

---

## Discuss: Types of Service

Now that we've looked at an example in which a student photographer communicates about helpers in a community, let's look at another example from the Getty collection. Here we will ask: how do photographers use their work as an act of service in their communities?

Project the photograph below.



*Human Erosion in California (Migrant Mother)*, 1936, Dorothea Lange, gelatin silver print. The J. Paul Getty Museum

Download the image:

<https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/125690/dorothea-lange-human-erosion-in-california-migrant-mother-american-march-1936/>

### Questions for discussion:

- What do you notice first about this image? (The black-and-white photo shows a woman, presumably a mother, with two young children leaning against her, their faces turned away from the viewer and nestled in the woman's neck, and a sleeping baby in her arms. The woman does not look at the children, the viewer, or the photographer; instead she gazes into the distance. Her face seems to express worry and weariness, with lines etched in her face and a furrowed brow, while her right hand distractedly touches her chin.)
- What do you think the photographer is interested in communicating about the subjects? (The woman and children all wear clothes that have holes and frayed edges that indicate they do not have the means or access to other clothes. That the woman and three children are all nestled together suggests they are comforting each other in the face of adversity or a difficult situation, perhaps even the gaze of the photographer.)
- Consider the following information about the photographer and the photo:
  - The title and date, *Human Erosion in California (Migrant Mother)*, 1936, identifies the group as a mother and her children, experiencing hardship during the Great Depression. By "migrant mother" we understand the subject to be a migratory farmworker, from a community of workers who were particularly affected by the crisis.
  - Dorothea Lange made this photograph while working for the Resettlement Administration, a government agency dedicated to documenting the devastating effects of the Depression during the 1930s.
  - Within twenty-four hours of making the photographs, Lange presented them to an editor at the *San Francisco News*, who alerted the federal government to the migrants' plight. The newspaper then printed two of Lange's images with a report that the government was rushing in twenty thousand pounds of food for the workers.
- Does anything change when you know a bit more about the photographer and her assignment from the Resettlement Administration? (The intent of the photographer, in light of her

assignment, was to document the effects of the Depression. This very intimate photo became iconic. On a broad scale, the image came to symbolize the lasting hardships and injustices of the Depression. Even more directly, the photograph immediately inspired those in local government to provide assistance to the migrant community.)

- Where is the line, with photography, between documenting and advocating? Is there a line?

---

## Dorothea Lange

Dorothea Lange's poignant images of a mother and her children during the Great Depression depicted the hardships endured by migratory farmworkers. Within a day of documenting them, Lange presented her series to the *San Francisco News*. The newspaper published two of the images and reported that the federal government was rushing in food for the workers, underscoring the power of photography to move people to action.

View Dorothea Lange photographs in the collection:

<https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/artists/1656/dorothea-lange-american-1895-1965/>

---

## Exercise: Identifying Types of Service

Building on types of service (or introducing them if not already done), let's map out some service opportunities for ourselves. Project and distribute the Service Ideas graphic organizer. [See Resources section]. This project asks students to choose one (or more) social justice issue, and then show or describe examples of each type of service around that issue. Students can work on this organizer individually or in a group. You may wish to assign the class groups, or allow students to self-select. If you are going to ask students to share out, you may wish to let them know that at the outset, so they can choose an issue they feel comfortable discussing in the group. Use your knowledge of the group when assigning work on the organizer.

Have students come back together as a class to share their issues, examples of service, and responses to the reflection questions. This discussion may also encourage students to be honest about their feelings regarding service and advocacy, to envision themselves in service, and to confront and assess the obstacles to service. It would also be an opportunity for each student to consider in hindsight service they have done in the past.

---

## Practice: Spotighting Service

Students use photography to shine a light on types of service they observe in their communities. If time allows, this can be a good point to call out additional photo and narrative skills for the students. In the earlier photography discussion, we mentioned elements such as framing, foreground and background, and position and pose of the subject(s). The related photography skills videos listed under Other Resources can also serve as quick skills refreshers. Ask students how they will apply these skills and understandings in their own practice.

---

## Encourage students to continue their practice at their homes and in their neighborhoods.

Assigning the spotlight exercise as homework, if possible, affords students time to work on the assignment, and the opportunity to use contexts from their daily lives.

---

## Reflect

Reflection can take place in the group setting or individually. Ideally, have students share one to three photographs with their peers. They can each choose to speak about their experiences taking the photo(s), or not to do so. Having the viewers provide positive feedback is key to the exercise. However, sharing can be a vulnerable moment for students. Use your best judgment about whether a group reflection is appropriate, and enlist the support of your students to create a safe space.

### Questions for discussion:

- What is the first thing you notice about the photograph?
- What is the photographer showing about service?
- Is the photographer documenting or advocating?
- Where do you see yourself, among the types of service? Do you think that might change over time, or depending on circumstances?
- What part are you most proud of, and why?
- What would you do differently next time?

Alternatively, individual reflection can be useful using the same framework of questions.

---

## Assessment

- Observe the group's discussion of the lesson. Assess contributions to the discussion. Did students pose thoughtful questions? Did they respond to questions with reasons and evidence? Did they listen to different points of view? Did they clarify and challenge ideas and conclusions when appropriate? Did they synthesize evidence and ideas?
  - Collect the graphic organizers, to check for understanding and completeness, and to assess students' understanding of the different types of service.
  - In the Reflection, assess student feedback for clarity and thoughtfulness.
  - Encourage students to share photographs of service on the Getty Unshuttered platform, and collect and display that work.
- 

## Thank You...

...for your commitment to using art to inspire youth creating social change in their communities. Please adapt and improve upon this lesson plan to meet the needs and age range of your group. Now is the time! We are grateful for educators like you who listen, learn alongside their students, and inspire action.

---

## Resources

Service Ideas Organizer [See page 12]

Related photography skills videos:

Candid Portrait: <https://youtu.be/FebvMZWsqww>

Environmental Portrait: <https://youtu.be/7G35Tl8Wjyl>

**Unshuttered: Identifying Types of Service  
Service Ideas Organizer**

Choose a social justice issue to describe in the left-hand column, and then describe examples of each type of service around that issue. This can all be written; or, see if you can find or create a photograph that you feel symbolizes each type of service.

	<b>Social Justice Issue:</b>	<b>Direct Service:</b>
		<b>Indirect Service:</b>
		<b>Advocacy:</b>
		<b>Research and Documentation:</b>