Reflecting on Advocacy Actions

*Untitled*, Michael Valenzuela, 2018

**Grade levels:** 9–12

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

unshuttered.org
Learning Objectives

How can photography prompt reflection?

Message to Educators

In the words of education reformer John Dewey, “We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience.” And so, this lesson turns our attention from action to reflection, using photography to consider our advocacy actions.

Reflection requires careful observation, listening, and thinking to hear what your advocacy actions communicate. This lesson allows us to see where we have been successful, where we failed (and we will), and what the future might hold. Photography helps spark our collective memories to adequately reflect on Advocacy Action.

Reflection can make us feel vulnerable at times, but it is that vulnerability that helps create the greatest bonds between us and makes us more courageous individuals and community members. The 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 illuminate students’ reflections on advocacy 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.

And, as you and your students unfold the elements of dominant culture and community, you may find yourself in deeper dialogue with each other around questions like, “What did you learn? How did this process change you? In what future advocacy action might you take part? How did photography help your efforts toward positive change?”
About This Exploration

Advocacy Action Plan

Advocacy Action in Motion

Reflection

Future Action

Ideally, students will come to this lesson with photographs they have created as part of their own social justice advocacy.

Reflection is as important to service learning as taking action. Research shows that guided reflection results in better synthesis of experiences, course content, and personal development. Here, reflection enables students to integrate their experiences into their understandings of social justice advocacy, their skills as photographers, and their own self-knowledge. If possible, make space for this full lesson on reflection, as well as the following lesson on sustaining advocacy.

To start the process, the group considers the idea of reflection and how photography can guide direction for future action. Following a discussion of the factors that contribute to deep reflection, students then reflect on their own advocacy actions and share with the group. Next, students continue to practice reflection through a photographic memorial of their action, set up by a teaching artist who discusses their own advocacy. Throughout, students are encouraged to think about whether they want to dig deeper into their initial advocacy action, what role photography played, and if there are different advocacy opportunities they would like to address in the future.

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Associated Standards

- Getty SJA LO (Getty Social Justice and Advocacy Learning Objective): Describe the issue addressed, the impact of the advocacy action, and who benefited.
- Getty SJA LO: Describe obstacles and how they were addressed.
- Getty SJA LO: Report on how an advocacy action was leveraged by journalists or social media, to amplify its impact.
- Getty SJA LO: Describe learnings from the advocacy action, including leadership skills gained.
- Getty SJA LO: Consider how an advocacy action might be improved.
- 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, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence, and to add interest.

Materials

- Projector
- Photographs from Getty Unshuttered community
- Photograph from Getty Museum collection
- Student-created photographs from their advocacy actions
- (optional) Student-created Advocacy Action Plans from Lesson Seven
- Reflection on Advocacy Action Organizer
- A digital camera or smartphone
Vocabulary

Advocate, Advocacy
Someone who publicly supports and speaks up for an idea, a cause, or members of an identity group.

Community
A network or group of people, sometimes living in a particular place, who share interests, values, characteristics, responsibilities, or physical spaces.

Culture
A social system of meaning and custom, developed by a group of people to assure the group’s continuity. The system has unspoken rules that shape values, beliefs, habits, patterns of thinking, behaviors, symbols, and styles of communication. Consider using instead: Social identity group, social group

Discrimination
Actions stemming from conscious or unconscious prejudice, which favor and empower one group over others based on differences of race, gender, economic class, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion, language, age, national identity, and other categories.

Ethnicity
A social construct, used to group people based on shared cultural heritage and characteristics such as values, behaviors, language, political and economic interests, history, geographical base, and ancestry.

Intersectionality
An approach coined and theory developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, scholar of critical race theory, which holds that characteristics such as gender, race, class, and others must be examined in relation to each other, rather than in isolation from each other.

Justice, Injustice (see also: Restorative Justice)
In different contexts, “justice” refers to both moral correctness and fairness, and also the rule of law. By contrast, “injustice” usually describes unfairness.

Marginalize
Treatment of a person, group, or concept as insignificant or powerless; placing them outside of a group, society, or community; and enforcing prejudice through societal institutions.
Privilege
Unearned social power granted by societal institutions to members of a dominant group, based on the nature of their identities. Often invisible to those who have it.

Race
A term used to identify individuals as part of a distinct group, based on physical characteristics and heritage. Though, at one time, the term purportedly was based in biology, race is now understood as a social construct that is not scientifically based.

Religion
A system of beliefs, usually spiritual in nature. Often advanced in the context of a formal institution.

Restorative Justice (see also: Justice, Injustice)
A theory of justice that focuses on repairing or mitigating the harm caused by a crime. As a cooperative, in-person process with all willing stakeholders, its goals for offenders include taking responsibility, understanding the harm caused, redemption, and discouraging further harm.

Stereotype
Attitudes, beliefs, or assumptions about a person or group that are oversimplified and unsupported, but may also be widespread and socially sanctioned. Stereotypes can be positive or negative.

Unconscious Bias, Implicit Bias, Hidden Bias
Negative stereotypes regarding a person or group of people, which influence individuals’ thoughts, attitudes, and actions without their conscious knowledge.

Instructional Plan

Introduction
As we reflect on our advocacy actions in motion, we start to see change and consider future action.

The questions for inquiry at the center of the lesson include: What did you learn? Did this process change you? If so, how? What future advocacy action might you take part in? How can photography aid what you do as an advocate for social justice?
and help shape our future? And by extension, how do professional artists use photography to the same ends?

Set the Stage

Project the image shown below. Initially, do not include the caption. Discussion can begin by simply asking students what they notice about the photograph.

Untitled, Melissa Barales-Lopez, 2018

Questions for discussion:

- What do you notice first about this image? (It shows people in traditional indigenous American clothing assembling and dancing, with other people in street clothes watching.)
- What compositional and photographic elements do you notice, and why? Include:
How is the photo framed? (The photo is horizontally oriented; two people in the near foreground frame the scene on either side of the image.)

The position of the subjects—what is the physical relationship of the people? (They are standing far enough apart to dance but close enough to be connected through the dance; the other people seem to be observing; the dancers appear to be in a circle, a shape that conveys connection and unity.)

What does the background tell you about where this might have been taken? (It seems to be a public place in an urban setting, given the paved ground, streetlight, and tall building in the upper right background.)

Expressions (The dancers look at each other or appear to be reflecting inward, as in a ceremony; the observers seem to be respectful; are there other expressions?)

Lighting (A strong light comes from the sun above and creates striking shadows on the concrete where the people dance; the light also gently illuminates the rest of the scene, rather than throwing it into darkness.)

- What do you think the photographer is trying to show or explain?
- Do you get a sense of whether the photograph is advocacy or mere documentation?

Discuss: Advocacy Action Reflection

Now that we’ve looked at how a student photographer communicates about their culture, let’s look at another example from the Getty collection. Here we will ask, how do photographers use their work to help bring about or document advocacy action?

Project the image shown below. Share the caption, to situate the photograph in time and place.

Download the image: https://www.getty.edu/art/collection(objects/329499/bruce-davidson-freedom-riders-montgomery-alabama-american-1961/

Questions for discussion:

- What do you notice first about this image? What is this space and location? (Some may have their eyes drawn to the scene outside the window first, others may comment on the scene in the foreground. There, the interior space seems to be the inside of a bus [the leather seats in rows, the shape of the window, and the ceiling vents all suggest this]. The exterior space seems to be a road, as shown by the row of vehicles outside the window.)
● How did the photographer compose the photograph? (The face of a young woman is at the center of the image; it is a focal point within an otherwise very busy scene. The photographer and the viewer are in a space with the main subject and others, but we have a view of the world outside our immediate space. The interior space is relatively dark, while the outside is brightly illuminated.)

● What do you feel are some of the messages of this photograph? (The relative calm of the scene in the foreground of the photo notably contrasts with the busy, teeming street outside. The subjects are clearly in the middle of some kind of momentous event. Our subject seems pensive, with her hand touching her face and her gaze directed not at the busy street outside but somewhere else, ahead of her. Her mouth is open in a way that suggests she is either speaking or singing. Once we turn our attention to the others on the bus we see that the man behind her and the woman next to her also have their mouths open, suggesting that they all may be singing together. So while the world outside their space seems chaotic and violent—with police cars and men in military uniforms—the space within is calm, forward facing, and pensive.)

● How does your reading of the photograph change once you learn the title? (Freedom Riders, Montgomery, Alabama; Freedom Riders were activists who rode buses through the American South over a period of seven months in 1961 to test the 1960 Supreme Court decision that interstate bus depots were to be desegregated. They wanted to see the laws upheld. The Freedom Riders were met with extreme violence on their journeys, including beatings, entire buses set on fire, and often imprisonment. The riders came from all over the country. The National Guard, visible in uniform, were assigned to some buses and locations to prevent violence. The Freedom Riders forced the greater national public to pay attention to the issue, and enforcement of the law came through political channels.)

● Do you think the photographer was undertaking advocacy with this work? (By photographing from inside the bus, alongside the Freedom Riders, the photographer is documenting the scene from their perspective. The space and the riders seem calm and steady in the midst of the intense scene outside their windows. The photograph manages to document the threat of violence and intense scrutiny that these activists faced on their journeys, as well as the determination of the riders themselves.)

● Do you think the photographer is showing that this topic is important, or not? Do you think the photographer is simply documenting an event, or making a social comment? Why?
Bruce Davidson

Bruce Davidson’s photography centers on people and communities. He has often chosen subjects deemed to be outside mainstream society. In 1961 the New York Times assigned him to cover the Freedom Riders, civil rights activists who rode buses in the American South to protest the lack of enforcement of the Supreme Court decision declaring segregated public busing unconstitutional. This led Davidson to undertake his own documentary project about the civil rights movement.

View Bruce Davidson photographs in the collection: https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/artists/28634/bruce-davidson-american-born-1933/

Exercise: Reflecting on Your Advocacy Action

Using the group’s discussion of photography and advocacy actions, let’s take some time to explore our own advocacy actions.

Now is the time for students to pull out the photographs from their advocacy actions. If students took part in Lesson Seven, Inspiration to Take Action for Advocacy, they should also produce their Advocacy Action Plans.

In this exercise, students are invited to reflect on their advocacy actions. Share the Reflection on the Advocacy Action Organizer. [See Resources section]. Pass out the organizer, and have students choose to work individually or in small groups. You may wish to assign the class groups, or allow students to self-select. You may wish to let students know that their reflections will be shared, so that they can determine what they want to highlight about their advocacy action. Looking at their photographs and responding to the prompts, students document their actions and begin the process of reflection.

With the Reflection on Advocacy Action Organizers complete, students begin to synthesize their experiences into their mental models of social justice advocacy, photographic skills, and self-image. If time allows, have students come back together as a class to share their reflections on advocacy action.
Practice: Using Reflection on Advocacy Action

In this practice, students continue the practice of reflection by using photography to further reflect. Using their Reflection on Advocacy Action Organizers, students are challenged to create a photographic memorial of their own advocacy action.

Related photography skills videos listed under Other Resources can serve as quick skills refreshers. Ask how they will apply these skills and understandings in their own practice.

Encourage students to undertake this practice at their homes and in their neighborhoods. Assigning the reflection on advocacy action exercise as homework, if possible, affords students time to work on the assignment, and the opportunity to use contexts from their daily lives.

Reflect

Sharing of reflections can take place in the group setting or individually. Ideally, have students share their responses to the photography challenge detailed in the practice exercise. They can each choose to speak further about their reflection, or not. 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 reflection and photograph?
- What is the artist explaining, or perhaps, highlighting, about their advocacy action?
- What did you discover about yourself, your advocacy action, and others, in the course of the project?
- What was challenging, and why?
- 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 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?
- Make copies of the completed graphic organizers. Check for understanding and completeness, and to assess students’ understanding of how artists use reflection to shape further action.
- In the Reflection, assess student feedback for clarity and thoughtfulness.
- Encourage students to share further advocacy action photography on the Unshuttered platform, and collect and display that work.

Thank You…

…for your commitment to using photography 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

Reflection on Advocacy Action Graphic Organizer [See pages 14 and 15]

Related photography skills videos:

Long Shot: https://youtu.be/fxk_h8MHV_g

Extreme Long Shot: https://youtu.be/KE6T_BvoYkE
**Unshuttered: Reflection on Advocacy Action**  
**Journal Entry, Speech, and Performance Prompts**

Using the idea of a journal as a way to reflect, think about what you learned and what you want others to know about your advocacy action. Use the questions below to make notes for your reflection sharing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions for Reflection</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why did you choose this image(s)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What advocacy action do we see here?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is this topic important?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the important things to know about this advocacy action? (location, organizations, people, emotions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did you learn about this advocacy action?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What went as planned?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What didn’t go as planned?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What could you have done differently? Were there other approaches that might have worked better?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What part did your photography play in the action?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What photography skills were most helpful in the action?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do photographs like this help or hurt the cause?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did this make you feel?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the advocacy action have the desired effect?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What happened after the advocacy action?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is there room for future advocacy action?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other thoughts? Ideas?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>