

VISUAL NARRATIVE LESSON 4

# Information and Visual Narrative



*un día en la coleadero*, Anissa Murillo, 2018

**Grade Levels: 9–12**

**Duration: One 45-minute to one-hour classroom period**

## MESSAGE TO EDUCATORS

How does a photograph become more than documentation? When we empower student artists to draw on techniques from writing as well as visual arts, we prepare them to create compelling, persuasive, purposeful narratives through the use of visual tools.

This lesson plan includes photographs to spark discussion, a list of materials, and cues to help you foster a brave space and lead confidently, as students create and present their visual narratives. The Getty Museum is committed to supporting meaningful dialogue through art, and the lesson plan was created with educators to carefully walk you through the steps.

## ABOUT THIS EXPLORATION

In the first section, this lesson sets up a shared understanding of narrative nonfiction structures and techniques in both writing and photography. The lesson begins by evaluating a photograph from an Unshuttered student artist, which leads into a brainstorming session on the elements of informational text and narrative nonfiction in writing. Narrative nonfiction is a type of informational text that focuses on weaving facts and observations into stories, much as photojournalists do not merely document but also tell stories. Following the brainstorm, the group analyzes how narrative nonfiction elements are found in photography, using examples from the Getty collection, and how photographs that document can become photographs that tell stories.

Following the discussions of the two works of photography, students create their own mind maps of nonfiction narratives, applying the structures discussed to stories of real-life events, people, and ideas. Finally, they practice turning mind maps into visual storyboards.

## Getty Visual Narrative Learning Objective

Analyze how informational narratives convey messages and tell stories.

Getty Visual Narrative Learning Objective: Create the outline of an informational narrative.

Prep Time: 2–3 hours

**Notes on group discussions** Good classroom discussions can take different directions. It is important for students to make observations and construct their own knowledge in a way that connects to principles of photography or art history. It is equally important for students to go down new paths and support their ideas using their own powers of observation. We are committed to the idea that both directions, and many in between, are valid and worthwhile.

After each work of art, the lesson provides further context. We encourage you to use the context provided when and as needed to further classroom discussions. When possible, the context provided is in the artist's own words. Even so, art histories carry bias and are rarely the complete story, so please use them with that knowledge in mind. There are times when a classroom discussion doesn't need context because it is fueled by student responses, observations and interpretation of the works. These conversations, especially when ideas are well supported, are as much the goal as those that make use of more context.

## ASSOCIATED STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2 Write informative/ explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

## MATERIALS

- Projector/ Screen sharing abilities for remote classrooms
- Photo from the Unshuttered platform
- Photo from the Getty photography collection
- Graphic organizer: Mind Map
- Colored pencils or marker for the Mind Map exercise (optional)
- Graphic organizer: Storyboard
- A digital camera or smartphone

## VOCABULARY

**Cause and Effect** In writing, when an author explains something that has happened, and gives reasons for the event or circumstance.

**Chronology, or Sequence of Events** The order of the key things that happen in a text. Events typically proceed logically from each other to provide a clear beginning, middle, and end.

**Compare and Contrast** A technique that explores similarities and differences between two or more things.

**Detail** A word, phrase or sentence that is unique and memorable. Good details activate the senses, to help the reader see, hear, smell, touch or taste what's being described. A detail can convey information about any story element, and ideally supports the theme as well.

**Informational Text** nonfiction text written with a form that is not story-driven is called informational text. Examples include lists, directions, textbooks, and how-to books.

**Main Idea** A summary of the major thought or point of a written passage. A text may have multiple major ideas; readers infer the main idea of the entire passage by looking for the most repeated or referenced ideas of the text.

**Narrative Nonfiction** Text about true events written using the form of a story is called narrative nonfiction. Narrative nonfiction often uses a chronological structure.

**Pacing** Classic story structure begins with an inciting event, followed by rising action, a crisis, a climax, and resolution.

**Point of View** The perspective of the author; and how they convey the story events.

**Problem** The conflict that is central to a story. Conflicts in nonfiction are most often external, meaning a subject vs. outside forces.

**Sequence** A sequence of photographs is intended to be viewed in a particular order. To build the story, the viewer begins with the first image and continues in the order prescribed by the artist.

**Series** In contrast to a sequence, a series denotes multiple images related by a theme or idea, which may be viewed in any order.

**Subject** The people in the story. The key character is the protagonist (or main character), who embodies, experiences and/or drives the central conflict of a story. A protagonist usually needs an antagonist, which is the person or thing the main character is contending with. Secondary characters support the events of a story.

**Text Features** In writing, added design elements that convey further information. Examples include photographs, captions, maps, timelines, charts, and infographics.

## INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN

### Introduction

Some photographs seek to document an event, object, place, or person. It is important to remember that photos primarily created as documentation also tell stories. By examining documentary photographs that tell stories, and relating them to works of traditional journalism, students can begin to connect elements of informational text with features of photography. Thinking structurally about the idea of "story" can influence and strengthen students' photography and their reading or interpretation of photographic works. The questions for inquiry at the center of this lesson include:

- What are some common elements of informational text and narrative nonfiction?
- How do the elements of informational text and narrative nonfiction relate to the content and visual features in photography?
- How is photography similar to informational text, and how is it different?
- How can the elements of narrative nonfiction inform photography?

### Set the Stage

Begin by projecting the image here, created by Anissa Murillo, an Unshuttered teen artist. Include the caption and ask the students to look at the photo and caption quietly. The discussion can begin by simply asking students what they notice about the photograph. Listen for responses that focus on what the photograph documents, as well as responses that reveal how the photograph tells its story.



*un día en la coleadero*, [a day at the coleadero]  
Anissa Murillo, 2018

### Suggested questions for discussion, with possible answers and points of discussion for reference

- What do you notice first about this image?
- How would you describe the subject of this photograph? (Riders on horseback, lined up under a canopy structure)
- What do you think is going on in this photograph? What do you think the main idea is? What story is it telling you? (The photograph seems to show an event or gathering with many riders on horseback assembled together. There is a lot of action or movement in the photograph that creates a feeling of anticipation. The title tells us that the riders are at a coleadero, a sporting event in which a charro or cowboy rides a horse next to a bull and tries to bring the bull down into a roll by grabbing its tail.)
- What aspects of the photograph are showing you that story? For example:

What is the photographer's point of view or perspective? (The photograph is taken from above and so captures the many horses and riders, helping the viewer understand the moment as a sporting event, and the size of the event.)

Who are the subjects of the photograph? How are the subjects framed or positioned? (The subjects, both horses and riders, are shown from the back or side, angles that remove their individual details and focus the viewer on the ritual of preparing and waiting, the close partnership of horse and rider, and the shared experience of competition.)

Are there telling details from the subjects or their surroundings? (The dust and trampled dirt, and the blurred motion of the horse tail, give an impression of hard work, speed, and dynamism.)

Does the scene's lighting tell aspects of the story? (The strong contrasts of light and dark, and the long shadows, seem to suggest either early morning or late afternoon. Do we see the beginning of a big day of potential victories, or the end of a long day of hard rides?)

Are there noticeable visual elements such as patterns or leading lines? (The leading lines of the walls, fences and canopy structure take the viewer's eye into the distance. The repetition of the charros' hats from foreground to background emphasizes their numbers and their shared identity)

- What is the effect of the title? (The title puts the image in context; much as an illustration can illuminate a written text, so can text illuminate an image. Because the title of the work is in Spanish and most riders wear Mexican sombreros, the photo could have possibly been taken in Mexico or in a community with a strong link to Mexican culture and tradition)

The group discussion should bring forth responses about what the photograph shows, as well as what the artist thinks about the work. Narrative nonfiction writing often does the same thing as photography, giving the reader facts but also shaping those facts into a story. So next, let's look at the elements of narrative nonfiction text, and discuss how those elements might be present in photography. Create a list of the essential elements of narrative nonfiction, and define terms as you go. Sample terms and definitions are found in the Vocabulary section.

### As the group creates the list, further questions can be posed

1. In photography, what features are parallel to the elements of narrative nonfiction?

2. Are some of those elements easier to address with photography? Are some of them more difficult? (For example, subjects, comparisons, and visual details might be shown more clearly in photography, while cause and effect, chronology, and identification of the central conflict might be easier to explain in text.)

## Discuss: Informational Narratives from Photographs

With some shared understanding of how photographs and narrative nonfiction can both reflect facts and also tell stories, it is time to apply those ideas and questions to photographs from the Getty collection.



*Midnight Reykjavik #5; Midnight Reykjavik #8, negative 2005; Soo Kim, layered, hand-cut chromogenic prints. The J. Paul Getty Museum. Gift of the artist and Sandroni Rey Gallery. © Soo Kim*

Project the images shown. Share the captions, to situate the series of photographs in time and place.

Begin by taking a few quiet minutes to simply look at the Getty collection photographs, from the series, "Midnight Reykjavik." A framing question connected to the lesson's learning objectives may provide direction for contemplation:

At first glance, these photographs may appear to be traditional landscape photography; do they go beyond documentation and become stories?

### Suggested questions for discussion

- What do you notice first about these images?
- How would you describe the subject of the photographs? (The city of Reykjavik, Iceland.)
- What do you know about the chronology and setting of the images? (The titles and the lack of people in the photos tell us that the photos were taken at midnight during the summer.)
- **Point of view/perspective** Where do you think the photographer stood to take the photographs? Why those angles? (It appears the photographer took the photographs from a location within the city, from a high position, perhaps a building roof)
- How do you think the photographs were made? (The artist hand-cuts and layers multiple prints of a photograph, making walls appear less solid and "exposing" their frames and underlying structures.)
- **Composition** How do the different layers relate to each other? Do you see a relationship between the photographic technique and text features in informational text? (The sequences of layers in each photograph may suggest chronology or change over time; and may also be the artist's response to

the phenomenon of seeing quickly and superficially when consuming photography. The layers work to convey additional information, in some ways like text features in books; they also offer an opportunity to compare and contrast versions of the same scene.)

- How do you feel when you look at these photographs?
- What do you think the photographer's main idea was in creating this series? What story do you think the photographer is telling? Or, what story do you interpret from these photographs?
- What questions do the photographs pose for you?

## FURTHER CONTEXT

The photographer, Soo Kim, wanted to photograph the experience of the midnight sun. She says, "The series makes up a panorama of a city, but a humanistic view where horizons rise and drop rather than a complete but mechanistic panoramic view."<sup>1</sup>

About the layering technique, Kim explains, "I see the excision of photographic material from the picture plane as a subtractive method that lets me insert a range of different information with each body of work I make... I wanted to make an image of a city that highlights urban experience as being an indeterminate one both physically and psychologically. In both cases the focal point of the work is not what you can see, but instead what the viewer can add to the scene suggested by the absence, collision, and fantastic reconstruction given by the photograph..."

The photographs were made in 2005, and finished in 2007. During this time, Iceland, and the world, experienced a global economic crash with the housing market becoming iconic of that crash. This body of work, in hindsight, also speaks not just of the city and of ideas of home and community, but can also be considered as a picture of this economic crisis, of the housing market where the stability of home as idea and investment underwent a radical shift and alteration."<sup>2</sup>

Regarding the larger question of her artistic process, she says, "Each body of work starts with an idea that sometimes deals with seeing, photography, representation. I have in mind a structure, or system, for what information gets removed from each photograph that makes up a body of work, but that could change over the course of the making of the series. I don't use rulers, or assistants, and I don't adhere to a system that is absolute. I learn while I make the work, and I consider my practice mistake-driven. The mistakes I make often lead me to new ideas."<sup>3</sup>

[View Soo Kim photographs in the collection](#)

## EXPLORE FURTHER

### Exercise: Mind Map

*How do writers begin creating narratives?*

One tool is a mind map, which is a visual tool for recording, organizing and connecting ideas. A mind map can take different structures, but one useful metaphor is a tree that branches in every direction. The central idea of the story is the trunk and the related ideas serve as branches. Details are tree shoots that continue to branch off. Branches can turn back on themselves, and tangle or connect with other branches.

In this exercise, students mind map their own works of narrative nonfiction about real-life events, ideas, or individuals, using the elements of narrative nonfiction. Share the Mind Map handout [See Resources section] and ask each student to create their own mind maps. Have them start with the central idea, person, or event of their narrative. Write related ideas, key words and phrases. Using colored pencils or markers can help track disparate idea strands and see new connections. If time allows following the exercise, bring the group back together to share mind maps.

## Practice: Informational Narrative Storyboard

With mind maps complete, students turn their tools for writing into storyboards that bring together visuals and text. If possible, assigning this practice as homework affords students time to work on the assignment. Having spent time on their narrative nonfiction mind maps as a writing exercise, this culminating project brings back visuals. Here, students use their mind maps to create storyboards.

Traditionally, a storyboard is a set of sequential drawings that tells a story. Storyboarding is a tool for planning and sequencing a visual narrative. Storyboards allow visual presentation of information, and, at the same time, reveal the arc of a story. When creating visual narratives with photography, "storytelling" can refer to single photographs, series, or sequences. With the storyboard format, students may choose to create a single frame, a series of related frames, or a set of sequential frames. The key is to both "tell" and "show" a story.

Share the Storyboard template [See Resources section], and briefly define and describe the purpose of a storyboard. Be sure students understand that drawing ability is not necessary. Storyboard visuals can be anything from stick-figure drawings to detailed illustrations to photography to collage. Some students may find they need more frames than the six on a single page of the template, so you may wish to have many copies available, and encourage them to use as many (or as few) as they like. Showing a cross-section of narrative nonfiction storyboard examples from your own work, previous student work, or examples found online can help get across the wide range of possibilities, and focus students on what aspects are most useful for their own creative processes.

## Reflect

Initial constructive critique and reflection can take place in the group setting, and be followed by individual reflection. Ask students to introduce, show and describe their narrative nonfiction storyboards. Have them set up their storyboard presentation with information from their mind maps. This step will open the later discussion to how those elements translate into the storyboards.

Having the viewers provide positive feedback is key to the exercise. However, critique can be a vulnerable moment for students. Use your best judgement about whether a group share-out is appropriate, and enlist the support of your students to create a brave space.

**Students may be ready to discuss and have their own questions for the artist. If prompting is needed, some possible questions might be**

- What is the first thing you notice about the storyboard?
- What is the main idea of the story?
- How did the artist communicate the main idea of the story, both visually and in text?



- What elements of narrative nonfiction do you observe in the storyboard?
- What aspects of the story would you like to learn more about?
- Are there any further opportunities to add major ideas or telling details to the story?

### Questions for individual reflection

- What did you discover about yourself and others, in the course of the project?
- What was challenging, and why?
- What detail are you most proud of, and why?
- Is there anything you would do differently?

## ASSESSMENT

- Observe the group discussion during Set the Stage and Discuss. Assess contributions to the group dialogue. 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 Mind Maps to check for understanding and completeness, and to assess students' understanding of the elements of narrative nonfiction.
- Observe and evaluate student presentations of their Storyboards. Did the presentations use the elements of narrative nonfiction? Did they make effective use of the format and media available?
- Collect Storyboards to evaluate how students told their stories, and showed their facts and evidence. Are the events in the stories logical and well-paced? Do they use techniques of narrative nonfiction, such as cause and effect, compare and contrast, problem-solution, and/or chronology? Do they use telling details?
- In Reflect, assess student feedback for clarity and thoughtfulness.

---

## THANK YOU...

...for your commitment to inspiring young people to create art and tell their stories.

Please adapt and improve upon this lesson plan to meet the needs and age range of your group.

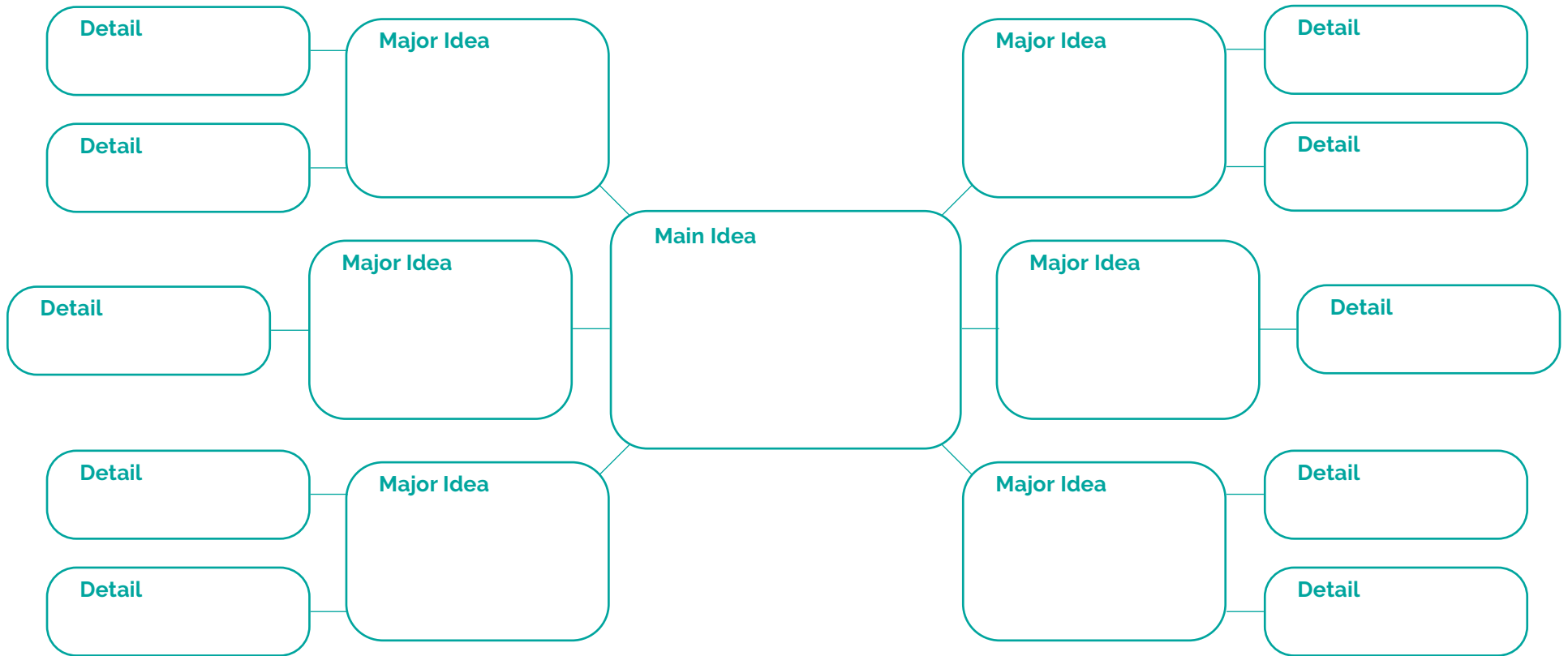
## RESOURCES

- 1 Griffith, Lesa. 2013. "[Artist Soo Kim: I Consider My Practice Mistake-Driven.](#)" Honolulu Museum Of Art.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.

Mind Map and Storyboard worksheets [See following pages]

# Mindmap

Complete the mind map below by including information in each bubble. Examples include: chronology, cause and effect, compare and contrast, problem-solution, telling details, pacing, point of view, subjects, characters, and text features.



# Storyboard

Traditionally, a storyboard is a set of sequential drawings that tells a story and is a tool for planning and sequencing a visual narrative. Storyboards allow visual presentation of information, and, at the same time, reveal the arc of a story. When creating visual narratives with photography, "storytelling" can refer to single photographs, series, or sequences. With the storyboard format shared here, you may choose to create a single frame, a series of related frames, or a set of sequential frames. The key is to both "tell" and "show" a story. Your storyboard visuals can be anything from stick-figure drawings to detailed illustrations, to photography to collage.

<b>Scene</b>	<b>Scene</b>	<b>Scene</b>
<b>Description</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Scene</b>	<b>Scene</b>	<b>Scene</b>
<b>Description</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Description</b>