



# Seasons of Life and Land

## THE ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

### Lesson #2: Landscape Photography

#### Focus Questions

1. What roles do photographers play in our society?
2. How do photographers interpret a landscape for their viewers?
3. What is the role of perspective in understanding a landscape?
4. Do you respond differently to different visual features?

#### What students do in this activity

Students will work in groups to photograph their school ground landscape. They will be introduced to the possibilities of landscape photography through two observation activities: writing their responses to a sampling of photographs and becoming a "human camera." Each student group will then create a photographic display of their school's landscape. Groups will interpret the work of others, culminating in a discussion on the visual characteristics of their school ground.

#### Estimated teaching time

Two or three classes

#### General supplies to complete this lesson plan

- Photographs, magazine pictures or online photographs of landscapes (15 – 20)
- Disposable cameras (one for every three students)
- Display boards

#### Each student group will need the following

- Pencil and paper
- Disposable camera

**Teacher's Note:** You may want to have the students look at the Web sites of Subhankar Banerjee ([wwbphoto.com](http://wwbphoto.com)) and Arctic Power ([anwr.org/photo.htm](http://anwr.org/photo.htm)) to compare how photographs are used to illustrate the Refuge.

#### Learning goals

Students will:

1. Learn to collaborate in creating a landscape photography exhibit.
2. Learn to compose a photograph to achieve a desired effect.
3. Learn to interpret the landscape photographs of others.

#### Advance preparation

Have students read background on Landscape Photography. Locate photographs, magazine pictures or online photographs. Purchase the cameras and make arrangements to have them developed. Consider any unsafe or "off limits" areas of the school grounds. Decide where you would like the exhibits to be; if in a school hallway or entry, reserve and clear the space.

#### Introducing the activity

1. Display photographs, magazine pictures or online photographs of landscapes in your classroom. Have students individually observe and write their reactions and responses to each picture. As a class, share these reactions and responses.



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2. Introduce the guiding questions: What roles do photographers play in our society? How do photographers interpret a landscape for their viewers? What is the role of perspective in understanding a landscape? Do you respond differently to different visual features?
3. As a class, define landscape, perspective and interpretation.

### Facilitating the activity

#### Human Camera

1. Outside, have students arrange themselves in pairs. (If odd numbers, allow one group of three.)
2. Explain to students that one person will be a camera and the other a photographer. The camera will have his or her eyes closed and will only open them for one second each time they feel a tap on their head (or shoulder or elbow). This represents the shutter opening and closing; the camera should observe and memorize as much of the "photograph" as possible. The photographer composes these photographs by leading the camera by the arm and then positioning him for a certain perspective. The photographer can use auditory directions, such as "Now tilt your head upwards" or "crouch down just a little." After the photographer has taken three photographs, the partners switch roles.
3. Back inside, have each student draw the three photographs that he or she was asked to take by the photographer. Beside or beneath each drawing, the student should write any reactions or responses to the photograph she saw. Partners should share their drawing and writing with one another.

4. As a class, list some of the subjects of the photographs. Did certain features of the school landscape capture more attention than others? Why? What are ways that the composition of a photograph could be adjusted to highlight or diffuse these features?

#### Real Camera

1. For the second class, tell students that they will now be using real cameras to create exhibits on their school landscape. Have students organize themselves (or assign them) into groups of three or four.
2. Groups should create a list of features or perspectives they would like to photograph using their allotted 24 exposures.
3. Student groups should take all of their photographs, being sure that each member shoots the same number. Groups should record the photograph number, subject, photographer, date and time. (They may also want to write down what they are seeing or hope to emphasize with this photograph.) If time is left, groups can plan how they will display and introduce their landscape photography exhibit.
4. The third class should allow students to review their photographs and create their exhibits. The students might choose to write a label or title card for each photograph (e.g. title, location, photographer, artist's statement). Each exhibit should have a title.
5. When the exhibits are set, the students should tour them. Having students complete comment cards for each exhibit or take notes in a journal would help them to think critically about images. These photography exhibits could be opened to other classes and the school administration.



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### Summarizing and reflecting

1. As a class, close the lesson by revisiting the guiding questions and expanding on them to include their new experience as landscape photographers. How has taking landscape photographs and displaying them for others affected your perspective on your school landscape? What did you learn about how you see from this project? If you could use another form of communication to interpret your school's landscape, what would it be? What would you do?

### Extensions

1. Take a class field trip to tour the "Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: Seasons of Life and Land" exhibit at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture. This photography exhibit features the work of Subhankar Banerjee to document the landscape and seasons of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. To learn more, visit the Burke Museum Web site: [www.burkemuseum.org](http://www.burkemuseum.org). To register for a tour, please call the Burke Education office at 206/543-5591.
2. Have the students create new interpretations of their school landscape through writing. In the medium of poetry, essays, journal entries or song lyrics, students could revisit and revise their views on landscape.
3. Organize a trip to another landscape for a photography exhibit. Possibilities include a trip to downtown Seattle, a ferry ride in Puget Sound, or a walk along the shoreline or in the forest. How do different landscapes spark their curiosities as photographers? What other features, themes and perspectives are possible?

### Additional Resources

"A Terrible Beauty," Vicki Goldberg, ARTNews, Summer 1991, pg. 106 – 111. Focuses on the changing world of landscape photography. Available at UW library and Seattle Public Library.

"Aperture 120: Beyond Wilderness," (New York: Aperture, 1990) — A special feature of Aperture magazine that includes several thought-provoking essays by writers and photographers about landscape photography and wilderness. Also includes photographs. Available at UW library and Seattle Public Library.

[thirdview.org](http://thirdview.org) — A Web site that documents a project to re-photograph places in the American West. Project leader Mark Klett has chosen photographs from the 1800s and returned to these places between the years 1997 – 2000 to shoot from the same vantage point in an attempt to duplicate as closely as possible the original photograph.

[edelmangallery.com/misrach.htm](http://edelmangallery.com/misrach.htm) — Photographs by Richard Misrach, who often shoots atypical landscape shots.

#### Books by photographer Richard Misrach

- "Bravo 20: The Bombing of the American West" (Creating the North American Landscape)
- "Desert Cantos"

#### Books by photographer Robert Adams

- "The New West: Landscape Along the Colorado Front Range"
- "Turning Back: A Photographic Journal of Re-Exploration"

#### Information on Ansel Adams

[anseladams.com](http://anseladams.com)



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### TEACHER BACKGROUND

## Background on Landscape Photography

In January 2001, Alaska Senator Frank Murkowski stood on the Senate floor and held up a piece of white cardboard and said about the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, "This is what it looks like. Don't be misinformed." Two years later, on the same Senate floor, California Senator Barbara Boxer used Subhankar Banerjee's photos of the Refuge to show the beauty and diversity of the landscape. The Senate eventually voted against drilling.

Banerjee's work continues a long tradition of using photography as a tool to promote landscape protection. In the early 1860s, prints made from Carleton Watkins 18" x 22" glass plate negatives helped promote the protection of Yosemite Valley. A decade later, William Henry Jackson traveled west with Ferdinand Hayden and became the first photographer to record the geologic marvels of Yellowstone on film. Many people credit Jackson's photographs with influencing Congress in making Yellowstone the world's first national park.

Photographers in the 20th century continued the tradition. Ansel Adam's spectacular black and white images of the Sierra Nevadas helped educate people about the importance of wilderness and, in 1960, the Sierra Club produced the legendary "This is the American Earth," which launched an influential series of coffee table books, dubbed "battle books" by one contributor. The books were key in the fight to protect the Grand Canyon from being dammed. They also led to spin-offs, such as calendars, used by numerous organizations in numerous battles for landscape protection.

What united and still unites these ubiquitous books and calendars was and is stunning photographs of beautiful places. Often shot at sunset or sunrise, in what photographers call the "golden light," the photographs depict nature at its best. Rocky canyons seem to glow with an internal light. Rivers flow free, clear and wild. Flowers open in resplendent perfection. Rainbows arc over mountains. Birds fly through crystalline skies. Mothers caress their babies.

Some people, however, have complained that this calendar photography did nature a disservice. In a special issue of *Aperture* magazine devoted to Wilderness, writer Charles Hagen quotes Colorado-based photographer Robert Adams, who says "It just seems to me that that style is not particularly accurate. I see pictures of untrammelled nature as so freakish."

For Adams and others, this idealized vision of the land fails to convey the damage and destruction that has occurred in the Earth's wild places. He wants to know what's left out of the photographs, what is just outside the frame. Is it clear-cutting, a nuclear waste site, a dam, mine waste or sprawl? What is the impact of man on the land? He wants photography to tell "as broadly accurate a truth as possible."

And yet, few can doubt that "pictures of untrammelled nature" have made a major contribution to the environmental movement, in part because the photographs have brought to light many places that few knew about or had visited. Subhankar Banerjee's work in the Arctic Refuge perfectly illustrates this aspect of photography.

Only a handful of people live in and visit the Refuge, and no one had photographed it in winter or in as great of detail as Banerjee. When Senator Murkowski held up his white cardboard and said "It's flat, it's unattractive..." few could argue because few knew the truth. Banerjee changed the debate by showing the land through the seasons. We see a polar bear and cubs, long-tailed ducks paddling before rafts of icebergs, thousands of snow geese flying across tundra, lakes and streams, and caribou grazing in a haunting purple mist. We also see frozen mountains, lakes and rivers, lakes surrounded by trees, shrubs and herbs, and tundra teeming with wildflowers.

But Banerjee also shows what is outside the typical landscape frame. People live on the land. They hunt moose, ride in motorboats, kill whales. They are



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part of this place. Not all of what Banerjee's shoots is aesthetic and beautiful, but it gives us a sense of the land, the people and the animals. His work tells a story, perhaps the ultimate goal and challenge of any photography.