

50 GREATEST PHOTOGRAPHS



Learning to Look: A Format for Looking At and Talking About Photographs

Describe the photograph in a sentence or two. Include size, black-and-white or color, and subject.

Read through the **Visual Elements** on the following page. Looking carefully at the photograph, and discuss the visual elements you observe. Choose your favorites, you don't need to discuss all of them!

This exercise works best when responses relate to something specific you see in the work.

What You See: Visual Elements within the Photograph

Light and Shadow: Is the light natural or artificial? Is it harsh or soft? Where is it coming from? Describe the shadows. Is the contrast subtle or strong?

Value: Squint your eyes, where is the darkest part of the photograph? What is the lightest? Is there a range of tones from dark to light?

Focus: What parts of the image are clearly in focus? Are some parts out of focus?

Space: Do overlapping objects create a sense of space?

Shape: Do you see geometric or organic shapes? Are there positive shapes, such as objects or negative shapes that represent voids?

Line: Are there thick, thin, curvy, jagged, or straight lines?

Color: What colors do you see?

Texture: Do you see visual textures within the photography? Is there an actual texture on the surface of the photograph?

Angle: From what vantage point was the photograph taken?

Framing: Describe the edges of the view. What is included? What does the framing draw your attention to in the photograph? Can you imagine what might have been visible beyond the edges of the picture?

Dominance: Close your eyes. When you open them and look at the photograph, what is the first thing you notice? Why is your attention drawn there? Are there other centers of interest? What aspects of the photograph draw your eyes there?

Contrast: Are there strong visual contrasts?

Repetition: What elements are repeated? Do they contribute to a sense of unity?

Variety: Are there a variety of visual elements such as values, shapes, textures, etc.? Does variety create interest?

Balance: Is the visual weight on one side of the photograph about the same as the other? How about top to bottom and diagonally?

Now You Try: Visual Elements within the Photograph



Photo by Thomas J. Abercrombie

The photograph of Mecca pictured here was taken by National Geographic photographer Thomas J. Abercrombie in 1965. Although Abercrombie had official permission, it was still considered a risk to photograph at the site. This view of the Great Mosque (or Haram Mosque) was so unique that it became iconic, and the photographer and his wife Lynn often encountered it on later travels to the Mideast adorning walls and even restaurant place mats.

See the Teacher's Guide at <https://muzeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Learning-to-Look-at-Photographs-Nat-Geo-Mecca.pdf>

Now You Try: Visual Elements within the Photograph



This extraordinary photograph of the Titanic shipwreck in the North Atlantic Ocean by Emory Kristof was taken in 1991. Kristof had been part of the 1985 expedition that found the Titanic. In 1991, Kristof had the opportunity to return and capture even higher quality photographs with the help of a new type of lighting and high-tech Russian submersibles. Kristof spent approximately 50 hours diving deep beneath the Atlantic in these subs to capture images of the ghostly wreck.