

MoCP

Museum of
Contemporary Photography

Columbia College Chicago

FRAMING IDEAS

Street Photography

Curriculum Guide

Aimed at middle school and high school and college age students, this resource is aligned with Illinois Learning Standards for English Language Arts Incorporating the Common Core and contains questions for looking and discussion, information on the artists and artistic traditions and classroom activities. A corresponding image set can be found [HERE](#). The MoCP is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The Museum is generously supported by Columbia College Chicago, the MoCP Advisory Committee, individuals, private and corporate foundations,

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Antonio Perez

A Man Dressed as Charro on his Horse Waits for his Take-Out Food before the Start of the Annual Cinco de Mayo Parade Down Cermak in Chicago, September 2000.

Museum purchase

Columbia
COLLEGE CHICAGO

Street Photography

That crazy feeling in America when the sun is hot on the streets and the music comes out from a jukebox or from a nearby funeral, that's what Robert Frank has captured in tremendous photographs taken as he traveled on the road around practically all forty-eight states in an old used car...Long shot of night road arrowing forlorn into immensities and flat of impossible-to-believe America in New Mexico under the prisoner's moon...

-Jack Kerouac, (from the introduction Robert Frank's book *The Americans*)



Robert Frank
San Francisco, 1956
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alan Koppel



Robert Frank
Political Rally, Chicago, 1956
Museum purchase

Robert Frank's *The Americans*

In 1955-57, funded by a Guggenheim Fellowship, Swiss émigré and photographer Robert Frank (American, b. 1924 Switzerland) took multiple road trips around the US and using a small hand-held 35mm camera, photographed American post-war culture in everyday locations such as pool halls, diners, and on the street. He proposed in his Guggenheim application to capture what “one naturalized American finds to see in the United States that signifies the kind of civilization born here and spreading elsewhere.” He edited the over 20,000 frames he took down to 83 gritty, grainy, and painstakingly-sequenced black-and-white images that were published in 1958 as the book, *The Americans*. His fresh, critical, and highly influential vision examined issues such as divisions of class and race, and power in America through the use of reoccurring symbols such as the flag, jukeboxes, cars, and the road. The pervasive image and cultural narrative of 1950s America is that it was a time characterized by domesticity, complacency, and comfort. Frank's images tap into currents of 1950s counter-culture. His Americans appear alienated, bored, and restless. Many critics considered the work an indictment of American culture and Frank's “street” aesthetic haphazard and sloppy.

The Beat poets including Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac felt an affinity with Frank's outsider and radical perspective. Frank's photographs echoed some of the themes that Kerouac wrote about in his 1957 book *On the Road* and the two men became friends. In his characteristic stream of consciousness style, Kerouac wrote the introduction to the 1959 American publication of *The Americans* (see above excerpt). Today Frank's *The Americans* is considered a milestone in the history of photography and a seminal and influential use of street photography. Note: There is an extended curriculum guide on Robert Frank [HERE](#).



Garry Winogrand
World's Fair, New York, 1964 from the "Women are Beautiful" portfolio, 1981
Gift of Jack A. Jaffe, Focus/Infinity Fund



Garry Winogrand
Central Park Zoo, New York City, 1964/1974
from the *Fifteen Photographs* portfolio
Gift of Lee and Maria Friedlander

Photographer **Garry Winogrand** (American, 1928-1984) is known for making quirky, often humorous, snapshots of people in public places, mainly on the streets of New York in the 1960s and 70s. Winogrand often photographed fleeting moments surreptitiously, at times without looking through his camera's viewfinder. Known for always having a camera around his neck, he shot thousands of frames and rolls of film—in parks, zoos, of parades, public demonstrations and museum openings—which he then printed as contact sheets. Editing his work to select the best few frames to print was a central part of his practice. At the time of Winogrand's untimely death from cancer at age 56, several thousand rolls of exposed but unprocessed film were found in his home.

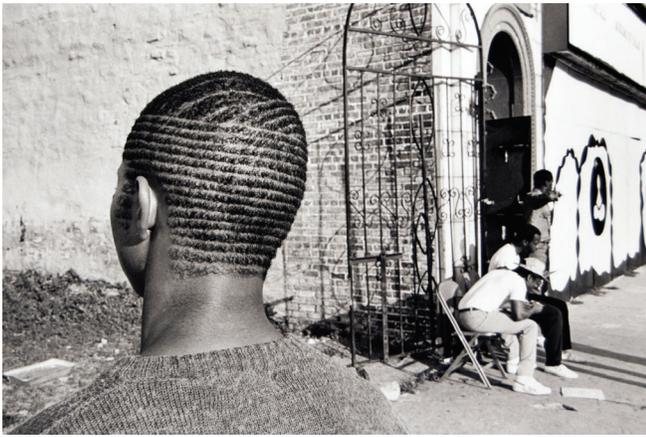


Lee Friedlander
Hillcrest, NY, 1970
Museum purchase



Lee Friedlander
Washington D.C. 1974
Museum purchase

Lee Friedlander (*American B.*, 1934) is known for composing images on the street in which fragments of elements such as street signs, light posts, buildings, pavement, and fencing interact to create a layered, at times overwhelming vision of the urban environment. Friedlander frequently includes his own reflection in a window or mirror within a scene to show us that this is his vision. Or, he shoots through objects or barriers such as from the vantage point of a car window or mirror, which positions the viewer of the image as the person doing the looking. Humor and irony are often a part of Friedlander's work such as in the above (right) image where the Washington Monument, usually depicted as a grand symbol of American power, is just visible in the background, obscured by the car's mirror.



Stephen Marc
39th and Drexel, (Channeling Multi-Part Hairstyles),
 from *Changing Chicago*, 1987
 Gift of Jack A. Jaffe, Focus/Infinity Fund



Stephen Marc
63rd and King Drive,
 from *Changing Chicago*, 1987
 Gift of Jack A. Jaffe, Focus/Infinity Fund



Antonio Perez
A Group of First Holy Communion Pass the
St. Michaels Rectory on Their Way to Church,
 May 1, 1987, from *Changing Chicago*
 Gift of Jack A. Jaffe, Focus/Infinity Fund



Antonio Perez
Michael and Maryann Shiffer Aboard a Bus
That Will Take Them to the Train Station, 1987
 from *Changing Chicago*
 Gift of Jack A. Jaffe, Focus/Infinity Fund



Melissa Pinney
Contestants for Sexiest? Women's Costume,
Halloween Dance, 2740 North Clybourn, from Changing Chicago, 1987
 Gift of Jack A. Jaffe, Focus/Infinity Fund



Melissa Pinney
Paula Moore and Her Daughter Alicia, from Changing Chicago, 1987
 Gift of Jack A. Jaffe, Focus/Infinity Fund

The *Changing Chicago* Project

In 1987, the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) documentary project, Chicagoan Jack Jaffe sponsored a project called *Changing Chicago*, for which he commissioned thirty-three photographers to capture the people and places of day-to-day urban life in the city. In her essay in the *Changing Chicago* book, historian Naomi Rosenblum speaks of the difference between projects such as the FSA that were intended to inspire social change and reform, and *Changing Chicago*, which honors past traditions but aims at a broader goal. The project had no specific mission for social change. Its premise was more open, and left specific themes and subjects up to the individual photographers. The artists were simply charged with portraying the urban fabric and daily life of the city.

Among the photographers who worked on this project, **Stephen Marc** photographed everyday life on the streets of his Southside, African American community; **Antonio Perez** who went on to become a photographer for the Chicago Tribune, documented Chicago's Hispanic community including at his home parish of St. Michaels; **Melissa Pinney** documented rituals and social situations involving women and girls. The resulting work was divided up and exhibited at five different institutions across Chicago and a book was published in 1989. The MoCP was given over 300 prints from this archive.



Installation views: 1979:1 - 2012:21: *Jan Tichy Works with the MoCP Collection* (*Changing Chicago*)
MoCP fall 2012

Changing Chicago Revisited

For the exhibition 1979:1 - 2012:21: *Jan Tichy Works with the MoCP Collection*, which was exhibited at the MoCP Oct 12–Dec 23, 2012, Tichy revisited the *Changing Chicago* project by selecting and displaying photographs by each of the thirty-three photographers. Among this cacophony of images, Tichy intersperses seven of his own original video responses to *Changing Chicago*, inspired by the project as well as by his own experience of living in Chicago for past five years. In the videos, Chicago acts as a backdrop for the unpredictable human actions that occur in front of Tichy's camera as well as for changes in light and atmosphere.

To learn more about this exhibition see [HERE](#).

In 2013-14 Tichy worked with Chicago teens, including some involved in MoCP programs, who also created short video works inspired by *Changing Chicago*. You may view some of those videos [HERE](#).

The Street Photography Tradition

Photographers working in this genre spontaneously capture candid moments in public places with small hand-held cameras. Many street photographers develop a body of work over time that expresses their subjective point of view of a subject and a distinctive visual style.

MoCP collection artists working in this tradition include: Robert Frank; Lee Friedlander; Roy De Carava; Garry Winogrand; Mary Ellen Mark; and Stephen Marc, Melissa Pinney, and Antonio Perez of the *Changing Chicago* project.

Street Photography—Questions for Looking and Discussion:

- Look carefully at the photograph and describe what you see.
- Where does your eye go first? Why?
- What is the relationship between the elements that we see? How do they work together or conflict?
- What can you tell about how this work was made? Consider factors such as framing and composition, time of day and use of light, and timing.
- Are there clues that suggest when and where this image might have been made? If so how?
- What is the mood of the image? How is that conveyed?
- What might be happening beyond the edges of the frame?
- What is this picture about? Why do you think that?
- Can you tell how the photographer feels toward his or her subject? How?
- Describing style: When you look at more than one work by this artist, how can you tell that the images were made by the same person? What themes, visual elements, and techniques characterize his or her style?

Activities

1. Photographing in the Moment

“Street” photographers are very observant of their surroundings and use their cameras to compose and quickly capture interesting scenes and fleeting occurrences that others might not notice. Go for a walk with your camera and use all of your senses to be attuned to what is happening around you.

What are you noticing? What is interesting you? How could you make a visually compelling picture of that thing or event? What vantage point or point of view might you use? What will you include or leave out of the frame? Make that picture. Practice using your camera so that you are ready to take good pictures quickly, before an interesting moment passes. Continue walking, observing and photographing.

- Edit your images.
- Share and discuss them with others.
- Which images do you think are the strongest? Why?
- What might you do differently if you were to shoot again?

Variation

While Robert Frank made the images that comprise the book *The Americans* spontaneously, he sought to photograph scenes and situations that reflected his interests and concerns, many of which were shared by others in the counter-culture of 1950s America. *The Americans* can be viewed as a document that captures the mood of a community and issues significant to a certain group within a specific generation and moment in history.

What social, cultural, or political issues and ideas are of interest to you at this moment in time? Follow the instructions for photographing in the moment (above) but like Frank seek out scenes and situations, that might illustrate your concerns and interests and those of your peers.

Frank shot many frames for this series but edited them down to the few he felt were the strongest visually and that best illustrated his ideas. He conceived of this project in the form of a book so he also sequenced his images in an order that created visual and conceptual relationships among the images and helped to move his loose narrative along.

- Edit your images.
- Which ones did you select or leave out? Why?
- Would you like your images to be viewed in a book, exhibited on a wall, in a slideshow, or?
- Organize your photographs into the type of presentation and order that you think suits them best. Share them with your peers and get feedback on the work.

2. Stream of Consciousness Writing

Jack Kerouac's, fluid, loose, and informal style is known as stream of consciousness writing or what he referred to as "Spontaneous Prose." This narrative mode presents the thoughts of a person or character as they occur, as if we could see the flow of the writer's thoughts, feelings and impressions on a given scene or idea.

Select a photograph by a photographer working in the "street" tradition. Write about the scene or situation in the picture from the point of view of someone within the photograph. Consider who this person might be and what their voice might sound like. Instead of constructing a cohesive narrative, write about the character's impressions and through free association. What might they see, smell, hear or feel in this scene? Don't stop to edit or rewrite text.

3. Activity: Set a Stage, Observe and Record

Jan Tichy says that the *Changing Chicago* project connects to traditions in street photography including the "decisive moment" a concept articulated by photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908-2004) who said, "To me, photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression."

Careful sensory observation of one's surroundings and human interaction is important to artists working in all media. Tichy says that street photographers often set a stage—they select a specific location or event and duration of time and carefully observe and record fleeting occurrences and actions that unfold around them. The video works that Tichy created for his MoCP exhibition in response to *Changing Chicago* were made in this way, but Tichy's films record a duration of time rather than freezing an instant. For this reason Tichy says these films capture a multitude of decisive moments that unfold over time, sometimes based on natural elements such as clouds moving through an area, and sometimes determined by the behaviors of the people in the scene.

To do: Set a stage by selecting a particular location. Decide on the edges of your "frame"—the visual boundaries of the area that you will observe. Eliminate distractions such as your cell phone or music. Use a sound recorder, draw, or write freely to observe that location for a set period of time.

After the period of observation, reflect on what you recorded.

- What pulled your attention? What did you see, smell, hear, think, feel?
- What elements, activities, or instances stood out to you? Why?
- How does the recording differ from your expectations of what you might experience then and there and what you ultimately did record?
- Why did you choose this particular location and time?
- What was interesting or surprising to you about this experience?

Changing Chicago: Research and Report

What types of people, places, things, and events do you see in the images in the *Changing Chicago* project? Taken as a whole, what does this project suggest about Chicago in the year 1987?

Research the City of Chicago in the year 1987. What can you find out about the city at that time? What major events occurred in that year or around that time?

- Who was mayor?
- What ethnic and racial groups comprised the city's population? What else can you learn?
- What was happening in American culture and politics at that time?
- Who was president?
- What major issues did the country face? What music and movies were popular?

What else can you learn? What references do you see to this information in *Changing Chicago*?

Jan Tichy has lived in Chicago since 2007. He says the new works he created and displayed alongside the *Changing Chicago* images were in part inspired by his own experience of Chicago.

Research Chicago today.

- What is significant in Chicago historically, politically and culturally now?
- What is significant to YOU about Chicago today?
- If you were to create new works in a media of your choice representing your Chicago in this time, what would you reference? What would you create? Why? How would you make these works?

Extend this dialogue by creating that piece and critiquing it with your peers. Variation: If you do not live in Chicago, consider these questions in connection to the place where you live.

Illinois Learning Standards for English Language Arts Incorporating the Common Core: Standards Addressed in This Guide:

CC.K-12.L.R.3 Knowledge of Language: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

CC.K-12.R.R.1 Key Ideas and Details: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

K-12 R R.2 CC.K-12.R.R.2 Key Ideas and Details: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CC.K-12.L.R.6 Vocabulary Acquisition and Use: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

CC.K-12.R.R.6 Craft and Structure: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CC.K-12.R.R.7 Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CC.K-12.R.R.9 Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

K-12 R R.10 CC.K-12.R.R.10 Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity: Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.