This print viewing introduces students to a range of photographs with a focus on portraiture where visual information such as setting, clothing, body language, and facial expression speak to the identity of the subject. Choices made by the photographer such as use of **vantage point**, lighting, **framing**, timing and **composition** also impact the viewer’s perception of the subject.
Julia Margaret Cameron's subjects were almost always family members or friends from a social circle of prominent cultural figures. Sir John Frederick William Herschel was a famous Victorian astronomer whose contributions to photography include the invention of the cyanotype "blue-print," inventing photographic fixers, and even coining the term “photography” in 1839. Cameron was a lifetime friend of Herschel, whom she met in South Africa while visiting the Cape of Good Hope in 1835 and later photographed on multiple occasions. While Cameron rigorously sought to maintain the distinction between art photography and "professional" photography (she proudly saw herself as part of the former), she was not unconcerned with the market for her work. That she obtained a copyright for "Herschel" (on April 9, 1867) suggests that she thought the image was especially marketable. The glow of Herschel’s hair and his bright eyes are meant to convey his great intellect, while they also exemplify Cameron’s novel use of lighting and focus in portraiture. At a time when flat lighting and long depth of field were standard, Cameron pushed the expressive power of photography with strong contrast of light and shadow, varying qualities of light, and a very shallow focus.

Sir John Herschel, from Camera Work, Issue No. 41, 1867; printed 1913

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

- What can we learn about the subject by looking at this photograph? What details reveal that information?
- Compare this portrait to the other photogravures printed in Camera Work by Edward Steichen. How does it differ in lighting, focus, and framing? How do these choices impact your sense of the identity of this subject?

DEEPER READING:

CAMERA WORK

In 1902, the photographer Alfred Stieglitz founded Camera Work, a quarterly publication of photogravures that was printed and distributed until 1917. Camera Work became the public image of the Photo-Secessionists. Stieglitz had a critical understanding of the various printing techniques used to reproduce photographs. Through this endeavor, he became the first to outline a standardized mode of publishing art photographs and exhibiting them in a gallery setting.
A photographer, painter, gallerist, and curator, Edward Steichen tested the boundaries of different artistic media and disciplines. In all roles, Steichen displayed intellectual rigor, characterized by his use of progressive photographic techniques and abstract design to engage with artistic movements of his time.

Shortly after Steichen’s family immigrated to the United States from Luxembourg in 1880, Kodak introduced the **handheld amateur**, which both popularized the medium and jeopardized its prestige. Following his training in the United States and France, Steichen joined forces with other New York based art photographers, together known as the **Photo-Secessionists** (1902–1917), to champion a **Pictorialist** sensibility in hopes of legitimizing photography’s fine art status. With Steichen as a primary collaborator, Alfred Stieglitz acted as the figurehead of this group. Alongside his fellow **Pictorialists**, Steichen achieved a romantic, painterly effect by way of soft-focus lens and manually alternating negatives and plates during the printing process. By brushing emulsion and pigment onto his negatives, Steichen translated the moody, saturated atmospheres of Tonalist painters, such as George Inness and James McNeil Whistler, into a photographic format.

**QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING**

- Steichen and his colleagues were establishing themselves as the Photo-Secessionists only 63 years after the invention of photography in 1839. What purposes might photography have had before Steichen and Stieglitz worked to integrate the medium into the fine arts? What other barriers has photography overcome in its acceptance as a “true” artform?
- Steichen famously stated: “A portrait is not made in the camera but on either side of it.” Considering all the portraits presented in this print viewing, do you think this statement is true? Why or why not?
- Consider the props present in his self-portrait. Why would he choose to model with these objects? What might they symbolize?
In 1916, James Van Der Zee established the Guarantee Photo Studio in Harlem, New York. The studio brought him immediate commercial success as a portrait photographer, and over the next two decades he photographed numerous members of the community during the height of the Harlem Renaissance. Van Der Zee portrayed his subjects as they chose to be represented and remembered through photography, often working with them to select clothing, objects, props, and elaborate backgrounds that reflect among other things fashion trends, religious and political affiliations, and social standing. In addition to capturing individuals and families, he also photographed weddings, funerals, clubs, school groups, and celebrities. As the official photographer for Black activist Marcus Garvey, Van Der Zee captured numerous Universal Negro Improvement Association members posing in their military-like garb. His work prominently shows the emergence of an African-American middle class in the early 20th century.

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

- This portrait was made in 1924. How might it differ from other forms of representation of African Americans during this time?
- Compare these prints with Steichen’s created just 10-20 years earlier. How might have photography changed in technique and in stature over these years?
- Think about today’s ease of taking portraits and self-portraits with new technologies. What power does a portrait have in representing larger aspects of a society?

DEEPER READING:
THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

Taking place in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City largely in the 1920s, the Harlem Renaissance was an artistic, intellectual, and social movement that produced some of the most prolific writers, musicians, and artists of the 20th century. The movement developed shortly after the beginning of the Great Migration (1915–1970) when six million African Americans left the South to find new opportunities in the North. Harlem attracted the largest concentration of African Americans at the turn of the 20th century. Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Josephine Baker, and James Van Der Zee—among countless others—were all part of the Harlem Renaissance community, placing black artists into the larger cultural narrative and pushing against racial stereotypes.
From 1936 to 1958 Louise Dahl-Wolfe was a staff fashion photographer at Harper's Bazaar. During that tenure, her photographs featured in the magazine included 86 covers, another 600 published in color, and thousands in black-and-white. While working for Harper’s, Dahl-Wolfe pioneered the use of natural lighting in fashion photography and shooting on location. Her innovations and modernist touches kept her widely celebrated in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, and she is remembered as an influence on a generation of photographers including Horst P. Horst, Richard Avedon, and Irving Penn.

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

- Where does your eye first go in these images? How did the photographer draw your attention to that area first?
- Consider this quote by Dahl-Wolfe:
  *Photography, to my mind, is not a fine art. It is splendid for recording a period of time, but it has definite limitations, and the photographer certainly hasn’t the freedom of the painter. One can work with taste and emotion and create an exciting arrangement of significant form, a meaningful photograph, but a painter has the advantage of putting something in the picture that isn’t there or taking something out that is there. I think this makes painting a more creative medium.*
  Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
- Do you consider these images to be fine art, commercial, or fashion photography? Does categorizing them matter? Why or why not?
SALLY MANN
American, b. 1951

Sally Mann has used her 8 x 10 view camera to capture in fine detail, among other subjects, images of her children as they mimic and act out social and familial roles in the lush landscape of their rural Virginia home. For the *Immediate Family* series, Mann’s children, who often appear nude, are posed or simply arrested in their activity to convey both primal and playful aspects of human behavior. The images in her later monograph *At Twelve: Portraits of Young Women* (Aperture, 1988) capture the confusing emotions and developing identities of adolescent girls. *Candy Cigarette* (1989) is a striking example of Mann’s distinctive combination of careful planning and serendipity. In this work, Mann’s daughter, Jessie, suspends her activity and gracefully balances a candy cigarette in her hand, appearing to be the innocent miniature of someone much older. Mann’s expressive printing style lends a dramatic and brooding mood to all of her images.

**QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING**

- Sally Mann received both praise and criticism for this work, due to the subjects being her own children and often pictured nude. Considering what you can see in these images, do you think her subjects had any agency in how they are portrayed? What importance does agency have in representation of human subjects?
- How are these images different than typical images of children in the media? Why would the artist choose to picture her subjects in this way?

**TOP TO BOTTOM:**
*Candy Cigarette*, 1989
*Emmet and the White Boy*, 1990
*Eyeless in Col Alto*, 1994
Dawoud Bey is interested in the portrait as a site of psychological and emotional engagement between the photographer and his model. In The Birmingham Project, Bey responds to tragic events in the history of Birmingham, Alabama. On September 15th, 1963 the Ku Klux Klan bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, killing four African American girls. The same day, two African American boys were subsequently killed in an act of racial violence. In 2012, Dawoud Bey was commissioned by the Birmingham Museum of Art to create portraits in memory of the tragic and seminal day that became a pivotal point in Civil Rights history, nearing its 50th anniversary. Each diptych features a portrait of a child at the exact age of one killed in 1963 paired with a portrait of an adult at the age the child would be in the year 2013. Bey photographed in two significant places: Bethel Baptist Church, which served as the headquarters for the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (1956-1961), and the Birmingham Museum of Art, where African Americans in the 1960s were only allowed to visit on one day per week, designated “Negro Day.” The images call attention to the injustices of the past while also evoking the lives of the victims could have developed.

**QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING**

- Without knowing anything about these two individuals, how do you think they relate to one another? Why do you think Bey choose to photograph them? Explain.
- Consider the body language and gaze of each figure. How does body language add to the narrative of these images?
- What value do images have in understanding historical events?
- Dawoud Bey was inspired by the work of James Van der Zee when he saw the 1969 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Harlem on My Mind*. Can you see any formal relations between the two artists, such as choices in posing, *depth of field*, lighting, etc.?
In her series, *Natural Deceptions* (2011–2016), Natalie Krick explores femininity, sexuality, age and societal standards of beauty. Krick takes self-portraits and creates portraits of her sister and mother, adopting glamorous styling and sensual poses from fashion magazines and advertisements. Impersonating each other and emulating imagery of idealized beauty, their three identities begin to merge. Emphasizing both the façade of glamour and the physicality of the aging body, Krick is interested in what can be revealed through these surfaces.

**QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING**

- What do you think the subjects’ relationship is to one another? Why?
- What can you tell about how this picture was made? Consider the visual strategies used by the artist such as use of light, vantage point, framing and composition, and scale.
- Krick is inspired by fashion magazines and advertisements. Do you see this influence on the images? How or how not?
- Consider the artist’s choices in color. How does color add to the overall mood or story?
Destiny (2004–2009) is comprised of portraits, still lifes, interiors, and landscapes taken in various locations in the United States and Russia. The title derives from the official motto of the city of Des Plaines, Illinois, a Chicago suburb where Shteynshleyger lived for five years. While living in Des Plaines, Shteynshleyger was actively practicing her faith in the local and close-knit Orthodox Jewish community. The images—documenting her own life as well as those in her community—retain an aura of questioning detachment and quiet observation informed by Shteynshleyger’s felt status as an outsider: first as a Jew in Russia, and later as a Russian émigré in the United States. Shteynshleyger began photographing shortly after immigrating to understand and connect with the new environment around her as well as a way of controlling it: “I was attempting to edit the world by composing various elements and components within the frame. It is as childish as magical thinking. As if placing things on the ground glass of a camera changes their status. As if reducing the world to two-dimensional flatness changes its impact on me.” For Shteynshleyger, the camera separates her from the world while also allowing her to contemplate it.

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

- Shteynshleyger began photographing shortly after she moved to the United States from Russia when she was sixteen-years-old and could not yet speak English. How would you use a camera if you were in a similar circumstance? What potential does photography have in connecting or separating a person from their surroundings?
- Consider each image separately and then together. How does reading the images in a sequence change your reading of each individual picture?
- Compare the images to the other portraits in the room. Is it easy to identify when a work is a self-portrait or not? How is the relationship between the photographer and subject communicated?
People have been creating images of their own likeness throughout human history. The stencils of hands, seen on left, were found in caves in Indonesia and believed to have been created approximately 40,000 years ago. Consider these early markings with the ways we document and share our lives now with technology and social media. Why are human beings compelled to trace their existences? What will the selfie look like in the future?

DEEPER READING: THE SELFIE

People have been creating images of their own likeness throughout human history. The stencils of hands, seen on left, were found in caves in Indonesia and believed to have been created approximately 40,000 years ago. Consider these early markings with the ways we document and share our lives now with technology and social media. Why are human beings compelled to trace their existences? What will the selfie look like in the future?
Shizuka Yokomizo, Stranger series (1998–2000) centers on a brief confrontation between observer and observed. At its core it is a collaboration of sorts: Yokomizo sends her subjects an anonymous letter proposing they stand in the front window of their home at a specified date and time, at which point the artist arrives outside, sets up her tripod and camera, exposes her film, and then leaves. The subjects are instructed to turn on all their lights, wear their usual clothing, and remain still—or if they choose not to participate, to signal this by drawing their curtains. Because the hour selected is during the night, Yokomizo’s subjects can discern the photographer only as a dark silhouette.

Photography, with its special capacity for identification, observation, and implication, allows unprecedented access to and evidence of otherwise private and restricted moments. In this case, the barriers Yokomizo often includes in the foreground of her pictures—window moldings, curtains, and security gates—clearly articulate layers of distance and enhance the feeling of voyeurism. Asked to perform, her subjects acquiesce, while their body language ranges from suspicious to hostile to amused to nervous. Yokomizo, for her part, could have taken her photographs from a concealed location or simply pointed her camera through the window when the person inside least expected it, but she purposefully enters the realm of her subjects and allows herself to be seen, if only as a shadowy figure. In a sense she is performing for them as they are performing for her: while making a photograph she is also acting out the role of the anonymous, voyeuristic photographer—a familiar but persistently disconcerting trope that Yokomizo brings to life for her subjects in the comfort of their own homes. To look at one of Yokomizo’s pictures is to adopt her vantage point, staring in through the window, but Yokomizo’s pictures make it difficult to slip into the detached position of viewer-as-voyeur since they unremittingly imply the photographer’s presence, wedged between the viewer and the posing stranger. Even though they depict a solitary person, her photographs in this way are less conventional portraits than highly charged records of an encounter.

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

• Dawoud Bey probes the inherent hierarchal relationship between the photographer and their subject. Do you think the photographer has more power than the sitter in the making of a portrait? How does Yokomizo’s work challenge that relationship?
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

FRAMING or COMPOSITION
How one composes an image in the camera’s viewfinder. Framing can also refer to how an image is finished for final presentation.

DEPTH OF FIELD
The distance from the front (nearest the camera) to the back (furthest from the camera) of the plane of focus, wherein a subject appears sharp.

FOCUS
To manually adjust a photographic device until a given subject appears acceptably sharp.

CONTRAST
A quality denoting the difference in proximal elements in an art piece, such as texture, color, and size.

POINT OF VIEW (or VANTAGE POINT)
Where a photographer stands in relation to the subject he or she is photographing. It can also refer to the photographer’s view or opinion of that subject.

SCALE
The relative size of an element within a composition. Scale can also refer to the size of the finished work.

HANDHELD AMATEUR
A photographic or film camera designed to make tripod use optional, in that the operator may hold the device in their hands.

PICTORIALISM
An art style popular in the late 19th and early 20th century in which the artist embellishes photographs in the darkroom or more currently, using or through digital processes, in the interest of foregrounding the emotional intent of the work ahead of its technical aspects.

TONALIST PAINTERS
Artists working after the American Tonal style of the 1880s, whose practitioners applied an overall tone or mist to their landscapes in the interest of expressing and emphasizing a mood.

PHOTO-SECESSIONISTS
A photographic movement begun in 1902 and led by Alfred Stieglitz and F. Holland Day. Working to elevate photography as an accepted art form, the Photo-Secessionists manipulated their images with soft focus, oiled lenses, or alternative printing processes to achieve a soft, painterly effect.

Illinois Learning Standards Addressed in This Guide
Visual Arts Standards
VA:Re7.2.K-12
  - **Responding**: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
  - **Enduring Understanding**: Visual imagery influences understanding of, and responses to, the world.

VA:Re8.K-12
  - **Responding**: Construct meaningful interpretations of artistic work.
  - **Enduring Understanding**: People gain insights into meanings of artworks by engaging in the process of art criticism.

VA:Re9.K-12
  - **Responding**: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.
  - **Enduring Understanding**: People evaluate art based on various criteria

VA:Cn11.K-12
  - **Connecting**: Relate artistic ideas and works with social, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.
  - **Enduring Understanding**: People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.