

BY DASHA PEARS

STORYTELLING WITH PHOTOGRAPHY

practical
exercises for
the online
course



I HAVE NO SPECIAL
TALENT. I AM ONLY
PASSIONATELY CURIOUS.

Albert Einstein



LESSON 1: IMPORTANCE OF STORYTELLING

Ex. 1: Understanding how a conceptual photo is different

Find 3 examples of conceptual images and try to describe the concept behind them. Give your interpretation: what do you think the photo is about, what kind of story does it tell? **Upload your 3 images with your interpretations in comments to this task.**

Ex. 2: Understanding how a conceptual photo is different

Find 3 examples of photos that are not conceptual, but still tell a story. They can be a travel, wedding, documentary, family or food photos. Summarize the story in one sentence. **Upload your images with short summaries of the stories told in them in the comments to this task.**

LESSON 2: 5 RULES OF GREAT VISUAL STORYTELLING

Ex. 1: Understanding emotions in photography

Take the 6 basic emotions (anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise) and find one image that illustrates each of them (6 images all in all). The image can be anything: documentary, reportage, advertising, wedding picture, whatever, but it has to really convey the emotion. Point out the elements that communicate that emotion to the viewer. Is it the color palette, is it the location, the expression on the subject's face? Write all of those elements out next to the picture. *Upload your 6 images in the comments to the posts with the names of emotions in Unit 2 in our Facebook group and add your notes in the comments to each photo. I'll be checking the assignments and giving feedback.*



BETTER TO BE WITHOUT LOGIC THAN
WITHOUT FEELING.

Charlotte Bronte

Ex. 2: Understanding the structure of the story in a photo

Find 3 photos that in your opinion tell a compelling story. Try to see the structure of the visual story and write out:

Who is the character? What is he/she like?

What's the setting of the story: when and where is it happening?

What is the character doing/what is happening to him/her and how?

What is the story about? What is it really about?

Is there an element of surprise in this visual story? What is it?

Write it out. Upload your 3 images with notes in the comments to Understanding the structure of the story task in Unit 2 in our Facebook group.

Ex. 3: Communicating emotions with your images

For this one I want you to shoot images that evoke emotions in a viewer but do it without a human being present in them. Take two basic emotions - happiness and sadness. Think about how you can create an image that will touch your viewer. What colors come to mind when you think of happiness? What kind of light comes to mind when thinking about sadness? Think through what elements help you introduce the emotion into your image and put them down, after creating the actual photo.

As a result, you need to have at least one image per emotion: one for happiness, one for sadness. They don't have to be technically perfect, they can be phone pics even, as the primary goal is to convey the emotion.

Upload your images to the Our works: Happiness and Our works: Sadness photo albums commenting in what ways you tried to convey these emotions. Looking forward to seeing what you'll create!

LESSON 3: STYLE OF A PHOTOSHOOT. ELEMENTS OF AN IMAGE

Ex.: Breaking images into elements and understanding the connection of these elements

Select 3 images of your favorite photographers and write down all the elements that you can find in them. Not all of the elements might be present, that's ok too. The point of the exercise is to learn how to break an image into elements and understand how all of them are connected to tell a story.

Which of these elements represent the character, the setting and the narrative of the story told in the image? Answer the questions:

Who is the character? What he/she is like?

What's the setting of the story: when and where is it happening?

What is the character doing/what is happening to him/her and how?

What is the story about? What is it really about?

Is there an element of surprise in this visual story? What is it? Write it out.

Upload your 3 images with comments to our Elements of an Image photo album. I'll be checking the assignments and giving feedback.

LESSON 4: USING SYMBOLS TO CREATE MEANINGFUL STORIES

Ex.: Finding symbols and their meanings

Choose 3 items that you see in your room. Take objects that you find interesting: a box, bottle, candle, lamp, clock - something that is easily accessible, but not obvious. Come up with symbolic meanings for all of them: think what can they symbolize and how viewers can interpret them. Write down at least 3 meanings for each item. Then think again and try to come up with 3 more meanings and/or associations. Digging deeper and discarding the first things that come to mind will help you create more original stories in the future.

Post images of those items in our Symbols photo album with comments on what symbolic meanings they might have. Your photos don't have to be nicely shot at this point, they simply need to give an idea of what type of an object that is.



LESSON 5: BUILDING A STORY FROM A “STARTING POINT”

Ex. 1: Generating ideas from a single starting element of an image

Choose one of the objects from the previous exercise. This will be your main prop. Now try to create a story around it, building the whole picture from the initial element. You can play with either one or several symbolic meanings, that you have written out for the previous lesson. Answer the questions: Who? What is he/she like? When? Where? How? What is he/she doing? What's this all about?

If you're finding this hard, try this simple trick: write a list of things that you won't have in your image. What can't you create with this item? Often, things that will get you unstuck will show up.

In most cases, you'll be conditioned by the size, color, and use of the object, or by its additional symbolic meaning. For now, you don't have to care about the depth and actual meaning of your story, try to select all the other elements for the image so that you understand the process first. If you don't have them at hand, which is natural in most cases, try to imagine them. You need to make a list of how your location, model, wardrobe and other elements will look. Draw a sketch to illustrate your idea. Define the character, the setting and the narrative for your story. What emotion will it convey?

As a result, you will have a sketch of that you can later use for your photo. Take a pic of your sketch and upload it to our Single Starting Point photo album. If you have time for creating an actual image, go ahead! We'd love to see the actual photos even more!

Ex. 2: Generating ideas from several starting elements

As I mentioned before, we rarely only have one starting element of an image in real life, usually, we need to combine several elements from the very beginning. This exercise will help you to learn how to do it. Below are the lists of 3 categories of image elements. Your task is to come up with an image idea which has one element from each list so that no elements are repeated. Write down short descriptions of your images and sketch them out.

Color:

- blue
- red
- green

Object:

- scissors
- light bulb
- chair

Location:

- field
- street
- room

As a result, you will have 3 sketches of images that you can use for your future shoots. If you have time, try to shoot at least one of the images with those elements right away. Upload either your sketch photos or your final images to the Several Starting Elements photo album. Don't forget your description: which elements you've used and what is the story you are trying to tell! Use examples from the lesson.

LESSON 6: FINDING INSPIRATION

Ex. : Understanding what inspires *YOU*

Below are a few exercises that will help you develop your inspiration-sourcing muscle.

1. Create a list of 10 photographers you admire the most (whose images you look at and think "I want to shoot like this!"). For each photographer, write out at least 3 things that make you like their work. Is it the composition? Colors? Post-processing? It will also be helpful if you create collections of their photos for your personal reference: you can do it as boards on Pinterest or as folders on your computer. Later on, to develop your personal style, you can try to imitate the works of those artists and after you have done it multiple times there will be some particular things that will stick with you. Those will be the features of your personal style when you combine them.
2. Watch a movie/music video and make screenshots of the episodes you really liked. Think about why you liked them: is it the visual component? Is it the emotional one? Write down your answers.
3. Think of the 3 major attractions in your city. Why do you like them? Is it the visual component? Is it the story connected with them? Is it some sort of feeling that you connect with them? Write out your answers.

4. Read a fairy tale or a short story. How would you describe the plot in one short sentence? Write it out.
5. Take an interior design magazine. Doesn't matter if it's old or new. Look through the trends. What are their basic features? What can you apply to your photography and turn into a concept? Write down your answers.
6. Pick 3 natural objects. You can pick them up from the park nearby or from a grocery store - doesn't matter. What did you like about these objects? What are the most prominent features (texture, color, shape, something else)? Take a close look at them and write down your associations. What do those objects remind you of?

Your answers to the questions 3-6 are the ideas you can use for your future images. Use the appropriate worksheets for 1 and 3.

Ok, I know that's a lot, but if you don't have time, pick 3 exercises from the 6 mentioned above and complete them. You can get to the other 3 later when you'll have more time. But if you're good on time, do all 6! I highly recommend doing the #1 in any case. Create your own photo album with and name it "Your NAME's inspirations" upload images illustrating your answers to at least 3 questions. Put your written answers in the comments to the images. I'm intrigued to see what inspires you!



LESSON 7: WHAT IS YOUR STORY REALLY ABOUT? CREATING CONCEPTS

Ex. 1: Coming up with inward concepts

Inward concepts include everything connected with your personal life. Searching for them, you'll need to be thinking over questions like:

- What are/were your biggest struggles in life?
- What challenges you've had to overcome?
- What was your emotional reaction to them?
- What did you learn from them?
- What was the worst/best thing that ever happened to you?
- What are your biggest fears?
- What are the things you're most grateful for?
- What are your dreams and aspirations?
- What are your goals in life?
- Why did you choose these goals?

Another set of questions would be connected with the work you have done before:

- What type of things, objects, people you like to have in your images?
- Why do you think they are present in your work?
- What do you want the viewers to feel when they see your work?
- Which of your works you're connected the most emotionally and why?

List (one of the options, up to you):

- *3 things that you value most in life,*
- *3 of your biggest challenges,*
- *3 of your biggest fears*

You can also choose to list 3 other things answering one of the questions above. Look at your lists. Which one triggers you the most emotionally? Choose one of them. This can be the basic concept of your future project. For example, if you chose fears, in your future project you can explore the topics of:

Types of fear and that fears play an important role in the development of every human being

Ways of overcoming fears

What fears can do to people, etc.

Don't be afraid to be unoriginal with the concept. Remember that good stories are universal and your viewers will need something to root for in your work.

Ex. 2: Coming up with outward concepts

Outward concepts are connected with everything that's going on in the world and how it affects people and you personally. This will include global processes that we are witnessing: political, economical, technological, psychological and ecological trends and tendencies, transformations that are happening in everyday life around you.

Take a newspaper or go to the latest news page of any popular news site. Look through it and find 3 topics that touched you the most emotionally. Think them over and try to put each of them in one short sentence.

These sentences can be the basic concepts for your future project. Pick one of them which speaks to you the most and try expanding the topic. For example, you can list several problems within one big issue. Say, if you are thinking about environmental pollution, you can break it into types of pollution, or into effects of pollution in different areas of the world. That's just an example with a rather negative concept. You can also take some positive trends and break them into more detailed pieces.

As a result, you will have 2 lists: #1 for inward concepts and #2 for outward ones. You don't have to share those lists, but if you want to you are more than welcome to post them on the group timeline with a heading - Lesson 8 Concept Lists

LESSON 8: GENERATING IDEAS

Ex. : Matching your previous ideas with surprise elements

Take the concepts lists that you prepared for the previous lesson. Pick one concept from each list and match the concept that you found with the surprise elements we talked about in Lesson 3.

To remind you: here are my favorites, but you can add yours!

- Many objects
- Unusually big or small objects
- Levitation/Flying hair/levitating objects
- Miniature world
- On-Stage Effects
- Animals
- Unusual MUAH
- Composition
- Unconnectable things
- Metaphors and idioms

You should have two sketches as a result. Take pics of both and share them in the Matching Concepts photo album at our group. If you have time, create images according to your sketches, we'd love to see the final work even more!

LESSON 9: THINKING IN SERIES

Ex. 2: Developing your concepts into series

Get back to your concept lists (outward and inward). Now you'll need to come with idea variations for both of them. To find the variations and ways to explore your main concept you'll need to do some extensive brainstorming first.

Some basic tips for brainstorming to help you out here:

- Write everything down on paper. Drawing individual elements of your future pictures also helps. Give every idea and image a voice and a place on the page, just thinking things through in your head is not enough, you have to see the ideas on paper
- Play "word association": come up with a sequence of words each of which is an association from the previous one. You'll be surprised how far you can go from the initial word, while still staying within the limits of your topic. This exercise will help you find original ideas, that very fresh combination of everything that you've seen or heard before that we were talking about in the very beginning.
- Divide your brainstorming over several days. This allows you to return to your ideas with a fresh eye. Avoid marathon sessions.
- Talk out your ideas with a friend. Having to verbalize your ideas out loud to someone else will motivate you to distill your ideas in a coherent manner.
- Turn off the Internet. Music is fine, but otherwise, brainstorming should be: you, a piece of paper, a pencil, and your thoughts.

Once you are done brainstorming, you should have some amount of pure, unedited content to select from. This content is the raw material from which you can create sketches for your future photos. Now choose from 4 to 7 variations of your both topics that you find the most interesting and working best together. This will be the plan for your future series of work. Sketch them out, writing down all that you need for completing the project, all the elements of an image, including, but not limited to: models, props, collaborators, makeup, wardrobe, colors, locations, gear, etc.

As a result, you should have 4-7 ideas for images related to one topic and telling a more detailed story about it. This is the outline of your future series. Sketch all the images out and take photos of your sketches. Now you have an idea and outline for your future series. Create a photo album in our community and name it "YOUR NAME series - NAME OF SERIES". Don't forget to tell us about the theme of the series. Looking forward to seeing your brand new series ideas!

LESSON 10: MINDSET FOR BECOMING A BETTER ARTIST

Ex. 1: Roadmap for artistic development

Go back to the list of 10 photographers whose work you admire and underline 1 thing that you like the most in their work and would love in some way introduce to yours. Make a separate list of those 10 (or fewer) things. It can include things like "learning to shoot underwater", "study studio lights", "learning to work with colors", etc. These are the things that need to be improved in your work. This list will be the basis for your future development roadmap.

Number the things in the list according to their current priority for you and your work. Write down what your actual actions will be to get better in this or that. For example, to get better at using studio lights, you need to find a studio with equipment where you can practice with those. Set time frames for your 2 main priorities. For example, I'll do 7 studio portraits in the next month. Define what you can do to begin getting better in those areas in the next 48 hours, so that your plans are actionable, and not just on paper.

**"DO ONE THING EVERY DAY
THAT SCARES YOU."**

Eleanor Roosevelt



Ex. 2: Dealing with fear

Think of your creative work and what's stopping you from taking it further. What's your biggest fear connected with it? Are you afraid of sharing your actual thoughts and opinions? Are you afraid of people judging your future work? Are you afraid to fail your experimental project and waste time and resources? Write down your biggest fear and try to explain why you have it.

Then imagine the worst thing that could ever happen connected with that fear and then the best possible thing. Let's say, you're afraid of sharing your new photo, which is very different from what you did before. What would be the worst thing that can happen if you shared it? And what would be the best possible outcome? Now create a scale for your future action that causes your fear. #1 will be the best possible outcome. And #10 will be the worst thing that could possibly happen. After that, come up with the missing 8 scenarios, #2 being very good, but not ideal, #3 - still good but a little worse and so on. #9 will be very bad, but still not as bad as #10. Now take a look at your list and realise that you're most likely to end up with some option in the middle and not the extremes. The whole process of working on your fear makes it less stressful and allows you to actually start taking action in the right direction.

**I HOPE YOU ENJOYED
THE COURSE!**

**I'D REALLY
APPRECIATE ALL THE
FEEDBACK THAT YOU
HAVE!**

**WAS IT HELPFUL?
PLEASE SHARE YOUR
OPINION WITH ME!**

