

The Power of Images in Storytelling

How do storytellers use images to move people to care?

Overview

Students will explore the integral role of images in storytelling. They do a gallery walk of Photo Ark images and reflect on the emotions they experience. Students write personal essays in response to photographs of animals.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/power-images-storytelling/>

Directions

1. Activate background knowledge about the purpose of storytelling.

Ask: *What is storytelling and why do people tell stories?* Have students turn and talk to a neighbor about the questions you posed. After a couple minutes, invite students to share their ideas with the class. During the discussion, ask:

- *How do people tell stories?* (Storytellers use not only written and spoken words but also visuals, like drawings and photographs.)

Have students turn and talk again after you ask:

- *What method of storytelling might a storyteller use if he or she wants the audience to do or feel something?* (Answers will vary. Possible answers:

Storytellers might use visuals, real-life examples, personal anecdotes, or ask listeners to put themselves in the story.)

2. Introduce the use of photographs in storytelling.

Do an informal poll by asking students to raise their hands if they think telling stories requires words. Ask students for examples of storytelling that do not include words. (Student responses might include video without words/narration, photo collections that tell a story, storytelling through dance or music, etc.)

Explain that some storytellers use photographs to tell a story or as part of a storytelling method.

Click through [this photo essay](#) by Ami Vitale. Ask and discuss the following questions.

- *What story does this series of photographs tell?*
- *Does it tell one story or more than one?*
- *What does using only photographs to tell a story add to the story itself?*
- *How would this story be different if the storyteller only used words and no photographs? Would it add to the story if the storyteller used both words AND photographs?*

3. View video clips of Joel Sartore speaking about photographing animals.

Introduce the video clip "[Grizzlies, Wolves, and Koalas: Conservation Photography](#)" by explaining that Joel Sartore is a storyteller and photographer for National Geographic. Ask students to think about the following focus questions as they watch the video:

- *How do good photographs help conservation efforts?* (Photographs are engaging, make people ask questions, and lead people to care. They also help people make a personal connection with the animals.)
- *Why does Joel Sartore use photographs to tell stories?* (He believes that photographs motivate people to care and hopefully make positive changes, like the Australian government passing legislation to protect koalas.)

After viewing the video clip, have students talk to a neighbor about their ideas on the focus questions.

Introduce the second video clip, "Saving Animals Through Photography," by telling students that Joel Sartore is working on a project called the Photo Ark. He is taking photographs of animals in captivity. Ask students to consider the following focus questions while watching the clip:

- *What is Joel Sartore's goal in creating the Photo Ark?* (He is taking photos of all animal species in captivity as a way to document them, especially endangered ones, for future generations and to encourage people to care about them and take action now, before it's too late.)
- *What techniques does he use to get people to care about the animals, and why does he want them to care?* (He photographs the animals on black or white backgrounds so they are viewed equally and without any distractions, such as natural backgrounds. He wants to bring people's attention to the animal extinction crisis.)

After viewing the clip, facilitate a short class discussion about the focus questions. Have students discuss the role of Sartore's photographs in the stories he tells.

4. Invite students to interact with Sartore's photos during a gallery walk.

Tell students they will walk around the room and observe several of Sartore's photographs from the Photo Ark. Give each student several sticky notes. Ask students to pause at each photo and write or draw how the photo makes them feel. Encourage them to document their reactions, emotions, and questions and leave the sticky note next to the photo. After they have looked at all the photos, invite students to share what they felt and what themes they noticed in the sticky notes left by their classmates.

5. Ask students to write essays in response to a Photo Ark photo.

Tell students to choose a photo with which they feel a strong connection. Ask students to write a short personal essay in response to the following questions.

- Why does this photo interest you?
- What story does this photo express to you? Why? How?
- The goal of Photo Ark is to get people to care about species and want to protect them. In what ways does this photo inspire those feelings in you?

6. Assign a final “exit ticket” question.

As students finish their personal essays, give them little slips of paper and ask them to respond, with a sentence or two, to the question: How do storytellers use images to help people care?

Modification English Language Learners (ELL)

To support ELLs, pre-teach vocabulary from the videos, such as *conservation*, *species*, *captivity*, and *extinct*.

Modification Teacher Tip

If printing the Sartore photographs in color for the gallery walk is not possible, project the images, one at a time, giving students enough time to write down their feelings before moving to the next photo. Prepare a handout with the animals’ names in the order of presentation and have students write their responses next to the name as you project them.

Tip Teacher Tip

If you have access to several laptops or tablets, display the Photo Ark images digitally and create stations around the room so students can leave their sticky notes on the table next to the device.

Alternative Assessment

Have students respond to this “exit ticket” question: How do storytellers use images to help people care?

Extending the Learning

Extend the writing portion of this activity over the course of a few days by including draft, self-edit, peer-edit, and final draft stages to the essay.

Objectives

Subjects & Disciplines

Arts

- Photography

Educational Technology

- Educational media

Informal Education

- Photography/Digital Arts

Language Arts

- Storytelling
- Writing (composition)

Social Studies

- Human behavior

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- reflect on the power of photography—how it can evoke emotions and inspire us to care
- articulate the role images play in storytellers' work
- interpret information from photographic and video sources

Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

Teaching Methods

- Discussions
- Visual instruction
- Writing

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
 - Information, Media, and Technology Skills
 - Information Literacy
 - Learning and Innovation Skills
 - Communication and Collaboration
 - Life and Career Skills
 - Social and Cross-Cultural Skills

National Standards, Principles, and Practices

IRA/NCTE Standards for the English Language Arts

- **Standard 11:**

Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

- **Standard 3:**

Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

- **Standard 4:**

Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1:**

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.2:**

Analyze the main ideas and supporting details presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how the ideas clarify a topic, text, or issue under study.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.10:**

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.4:**

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.9:**

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Preparation

What You'll Need

Materials You Provide

- Pens
- Sticky notes
- Writing paper

Required Technology

- Internet Access: Optional
- Tech Setup: 1 computer per classroom, Projector, Speakers

Physical Space

- Classroom

Setup

Ensure there is enough space for students to move around the room to engage with the images during the gallery walk.

Grouping

- Large-group instruction

Resources Provided: Images

- The Power of Images in Storytelling

Background & Vocabulary

Background Information

The interaction of animals with their environments is the engine that keeps the planet healthy for all of us. But for many species, time is running out. National

Geographic, along with photographer Joel Sartore, is dedicated to finding solutions to save them.

The Photo Ark project is documenting every species in captivity with the goal of inspiring people to care and help protect these animals. National Geographic photographer Joel Sartore started the Photo Ark in his hometown of Lincoln, Nebraska. Since then, he has visited 40 countries in his quest to create this photo archive of global biodiversity. To date, Joel has completed portraits of more than 6,000 species, most photographed on either a plain black or white background. No matter its size, each animal is treated with the same amount of affection and respect. The results are portraits that are not just stunningly beautiful, but also intimate and moving. “It’s the eye contact that moves people,” Sartore says of the animals’ expressions. “It engages ... feelings of compassion and a desire to help.”

This multiyear effort will create intimate portraits of an estimated 12,000 species of birds, fish, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates. Once completed, Photo Ark will serve as an important record of each animal’s existence, and a powerful testament to the importance of saving them.

For more information about Photo Ark and Joel Sartore—plus links to many photographs in the Photo Ark collection, visit the Photo Ark website.

Prior Knowledge

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Recommended Prior Activities

- None

Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
captivity	<i>noun</i>	confinement or imprisonment.
conservation	<i>noun</i>	management of a natural resource to prevent exploitation, destruction, or neglect.
endangered species	<i>noun</i>	organism threatened with extinction.
extinct	<i>adjective</i>	no longer existing.
mammal	<i>noun</i>	animal with hair that gives birth to live offspring. Female mammals produce milk to feed their offspring.
photography	<i>noun</i>	art and science of producing still or moving images using the chemical reaction of light on a sensitive surface, such as film or an electronic sensor.
species	<i>noun</i>	group of similar organisms that can reproduce with each other.

For Further Exploration

Articles & Profiles

- [Photo Ark: capturing endangered wildlife before it's too late](#)
- [Photo Ark Latest Updates](#)
- [Joel Sartore, Photographer](#)

Images

- [Of Cats and Dogs](#)

Websites

- [National Geographic: Photo Ark](#)



