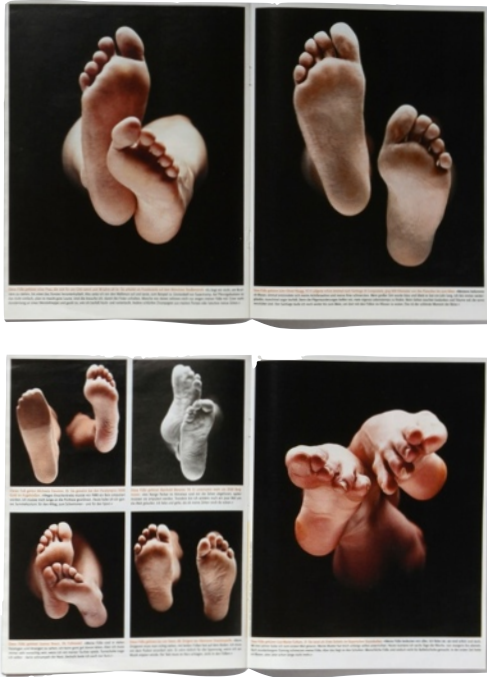


# PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY



A photo essay is a series of photographs that are intended to tell a story or evoke a series of emotions in the viewer. Photo essays range from purely photographic works to photographs with captions or small notes to full text essays with a few or many accompanying photographs. Photo essays can be sequential in nature, viewed in a particular order, or they may consist of non-ordered photographs that may be viewed all at once or in an order chosen by the viewer. All photo essays are collections of photographs, but not all collections of photographs are photo essays. Photo essays often address a certain issue or attempt to capture the character of people, places, or events. Used by world class photojournalists such as Lauren Greenfield, Bruce Davidson, Jan Sochor, Peter Menzel, James Nachtwey, and Joachim Ladefoged to name a few, the photo essay takes the same story telling techniques as a normal essay, translated into visual images.

## OBJECTIVE

Students will use proper camera techniques, digital imaging and/or darkroom procedures to shoot at least 50 photographs (equivalent to 2 rolls of film) and present at least 6 photos (color and/or b+w) in a presentation that tells a story. The photographic essay should tell the story of a **person** or people, a **place**, an **object** or collection of things, an **event**, or an **issue** and include images that thoroughly explore aspects of the student's chosen topic. The final images will be chosen where each photograph works independently as well as part of a whole.



Your final images will be edited and turned in as well as composed into a printed "magazine spread" with text of some kind from your research, interviews, or other sources related to your photo essay. You must turn in a brainstorming page, a master example, contact sheets, and your final work all in a page on Mahara.

## DUE DATES

**2/1:** Brainstorming Page and Master Example on a Mahara page titled Photo Essay

**2/13:** Contact sheet analysis of roll #1 (film or 24 Digital images)

**2/27:** Contact sheet analysis of roll #2 (film or 24 Digital images)

**3/11:** Final edited images and Photoshop spread of photographs on Mahara and turned in to print



# TIPS

## Choosing a topic

Photo essays are most dynamic when you as the photographer care about the subject. Whether you choose to document the first month of a newborn in the family, the process of a school drama production, a birthday party, or the contents of a woman's purse, make your topic something which you find interesting.

## Do your research

If you document a newborn's first month, spend time with the family. Discover who the parents are, what culture they are from, what their

traditions are. If you cover the process of a school's drama production, talk with the teachers, actors and stage hands; investigate the general interest of the student body; find out how they are financing the production and keeping costs down. If you photograph a birthday party explore the party's theme, the decorations they plan on using, what the birthday kid hopes to get for his or her gifts, who is attending. If you photograph the contents of a purse, document the objects in a specific way, tell the story of where they came from, what purpose do they serve, show her using the objects throughout her day. All of these factors will help you in planning out the type of shots you set up for your story.

## Find the "real story"

After your research, you can determine the direction you want to take your story. Is the newborn the first son of a wealthy family on whom the family legacy will continue? Or does the baby have a rare heart condition? Is the drama production an effort to bring the student body together? Or is it featuring a child star? Is the birthday party for an adolescent turning 13, or the 90th birthday of the oldest family member? Is the purse a tool for keeping her day efficient or a chaotic collection of her life? Though each story idea is the same, the main factors of each story create an incredibly unique story. Dig deeper and discover what is below the surface!



## Plan your shots

Whether you decide to sit down and extensively visualize each shot of the story, or simply walk through the venue in your mind, you will want to think about the type of shots that will work best to tell your story. I recommend beginners first start out by creating a "shot list" for the story. Each shot will work like a sentence in a one-paragraph story. Typically, you can start with 8-10 shots. Each shot must emphasize a different idea or emotion that can be woven together with the other images for the final draft of the story.

# A PHOTO ESSAY IS

a photographer's way of showing a more complete story than is possible with one image. It is a collection of images that work together to tell a story. Generally, there are between 5 and 15 images, although more or less images are sometimes appropriate. Sometimes these images have captions, other times they do not. While there are no concrete rules for how photo essays must be created, there are common topics or approaches to photo essays.

## **PERSON**

A common essay is to profile a person, to create a pictorial biography. This is a portrait of a person or group that goes way beyond a simple photograph of their face. The essay may not even contain a photo of the person or people at all, instead telling us who she/he/they are through the contents of a purse, or bedroom, or where they live. Explore not only the person but her environment, her daily life, what is it you want us to learn about the person. How can we get to know someone's personality, goals, aspirations, fears, passions through your photos? How will you make us care about this person in the end?

## **PLACE**

Location photo essays seek to capture the feel of a location through glimpses of people and places within a set location. Locations can be compact such as a school or garden, or vast such as a country. This type of photo essay is often non-linear from a chronological standpoint but does not have to be non-linear. Location essays often start at one physical point and travel outward, much like a tour of the area in question would progress. Consider what is significant about this place in the past and present, who uses this place, what is the story you want us to know, and how will you make us care about this place in the end?

## **OBJECT**

A photo essay about an object often uses the object as symbolism for some larger story or idea. Consider an object that is overlooked but is significant or has an interesting history, consider collections that you or someone you know keeps, consider objects that have sentimental value or family significance. You might explore all the hats your dad has and this leads into a story about his different jobs, or places he has lived. You might focus on your grandmother's spoon collection and how they have been passed down through generations. Maybe the seashells you collect when you go on family vacation to the beach and end up telling the story of your summers off from school. How can you bring in a larger story, make us care, and then have us think about the objects in our life that are important?

## **EVENT**

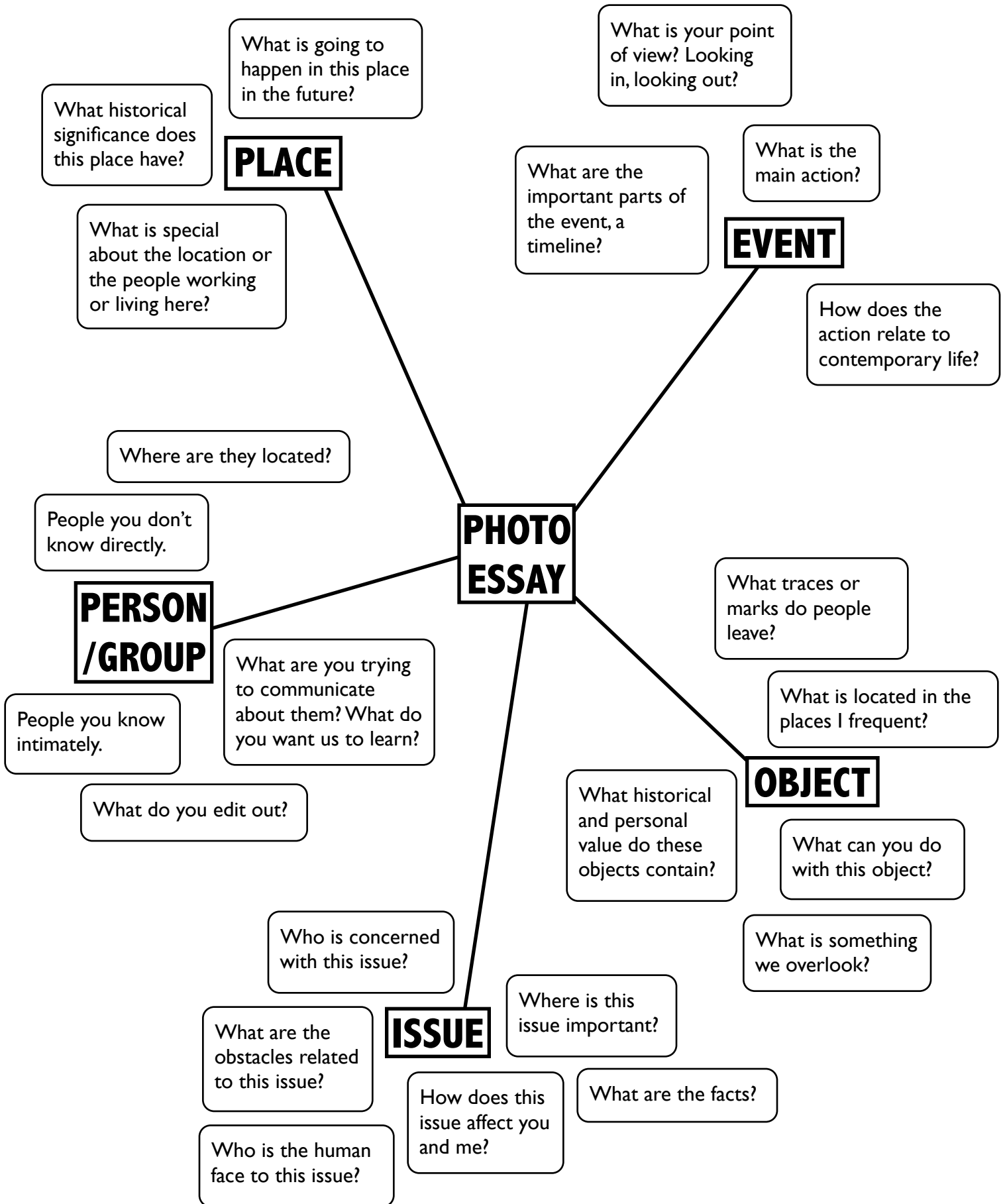
Event essays tend to incorporate ideas from the other categories. Event essays cover a specific happening (such as a building fire or a wedding) but are not bound to a specific method of image sequence. Many event essays follow a time sequence outline but some are more fluid in their presentation. Event essays should at least show the major parts critical to the event: location, participant, action, conclusion. For example, a wedding essay without a bride or groom would not be complete. Ask yourself if there is a path of time to the event, is chronology important? Larger concepts such as from a crime to capture of criminal or a life from birth to death can be covered in this type of essay, and are more ambitious. Focus on trying to put the viewer in the event, rather than just an onlooker.

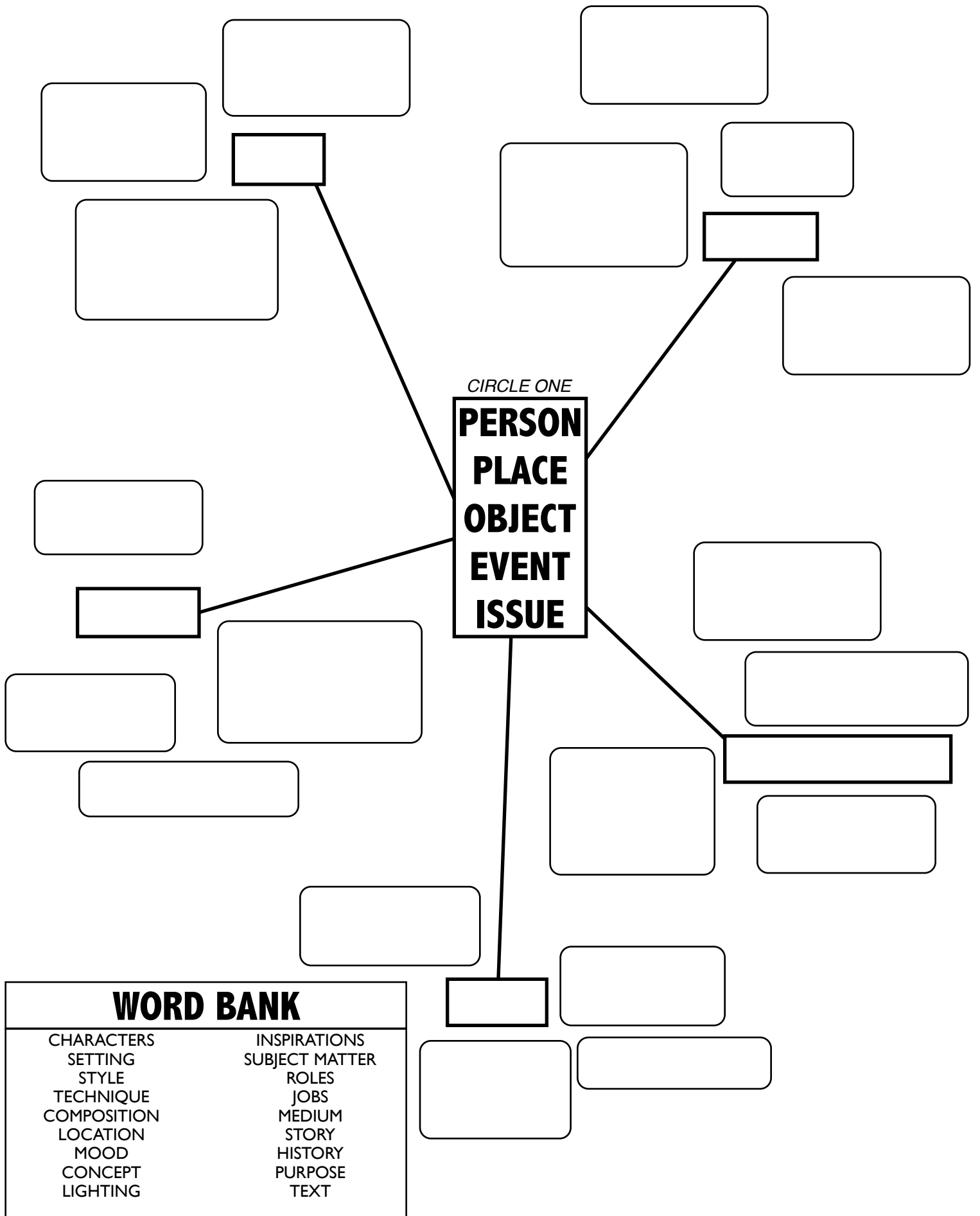
## **ISSUE**

Idea essays often feature very diverse images that all have a common thread of one theme or idea. Topics such as hope, love, and work can be covered under idea essays. Because idea essays do often feature diverse subjects it is a good idea to have a common thread travel through the images. Using a common prop, following a color scheme, a specific compositional technique can help to visually bond the images together. An essay on work might tie images together by focusing on hands of people doing different jobs: seamstress, computer programmer, etc. You could also have the images flow one into another: the first image might be a ditch digger with a restaurant in the background. The second image would then be a cook. From there the third image might continue the food service theme and show a waiter serving the meal to a man in a nice suit. The fourth image could then pick up on the customer in the previous image and move to a lawyer in a courtroom. Each image suggests the next.

Like any art, photo essays have basic guidelines but some very successful pieces deviate drastically from the "normal" rules. A photo essay basically puts a photographer in a director's chair. The story is there, the photographer must creatively decide how to best convey the story to others.







# Photographic Essay

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

A photo essay, or picture story, is a photographer's way of showing a more complete story than is possible with one image. It is a collection of images that work together to tell a story. Generally, there are between 5 and 15 images, although more or less images are sometimes appropriate.

My story:

Consider where your approximately 50 images (equal to 2 rolls of film) will come from and exist as part of your essay. Consider location, sequencing, and don't forget to consider where your audio element will come from.

Circle One: **PERSON/GROUP** **PLACE** **OBJECT** **EVENT** **ISSUE**

Characters in your story:

Visualize your shots below and what part of the story they serve. Let's start with thinking about 8-10 shots. Sketch or describe at least 3 main shots that can anchor each part: a wide angle shot to show the scene or more information, a detail or close-up shot to describe more or have a shorter depth of field, and then another shot. Also, consider possible text sources throughout the story. Each shot should be a specific emotion, idea, or part of the story. Use these shots to expand the story, more photos can describe and elaborate these core shots.

	wide	detail	other	text
Beginning:				
Middle:				
End:				