

# Memoryscape: Art & Memory

**Teacher / Location:** Julie Fisher / Mechanicsville, VA

**Course / Level:** Photography II / Grades 11-12

**Length:** 4 class periods (1.5 hours each) for Introduction, Research & Planning + 4 class periods (1.5 hours each) for Artist Production

**Assignment:** Create a Memoryscape by combining history and photography to reveal a specific memory. The past event can represent either a personal or cultural experience. A Memoryscape should ultimately address the passage of time and remind us of our shared humanity. You will conduct either physical research (digging through actual materials) and/or online research (exploring digitally archived materials) to find primary sources that can deepen your understanding of an event that transpired. This chosen source (document, drawing, photograph, or recording) should be displayed alongside your final project or be incorporated within it. You must use one or more of the photo manipulation techniques to alter your image(s) to allude to a memory. You will write an artist statement to accompany your work in the final exhibit that expresses the reasoning for your visual and conceptual choices.

## **Learning Objectives:**

- Students will describe and discuss personal and cultural memory
- Students will differentiate between how events actually happened and how they are remembered
- Students will reference physical and digitally archived materials to gain new perspectives about people, places, and events of the past

## **Previous Learning:**

- Students experimented with manipulating their photographs by layering negatives, objects, and text, which would distort their imagery and force their viewers to further evaluate the deeper meanings conveyed

### Darkroom Techniques:

- **Sandwiching Negatives:** Place two negatives into the negative carrier to expose the images simultaneously.
- **Photogram:** While exposing the negative lay objects or text directly onto the photo paper or into the negative carrier to hold back the light.
- **Cliche Verre:** Painting or drawing on a transparent surface that is layered while printing.
- **Handmade Negative Carrier:** Use glass or paper negative carriers with textured edges.
- **Manipulating Negatives:** burn, scratch, distress, bleach, cut, glue, or paint negatives.

### Camera Techniques:

- **Multiple Exposures:** While shooting, expose two images onto a single negative.
- **Lens Filters or Diffusers:** Place a textured material around the edges of the lens, shoot through a semi-transparent surface to blur and abstract forms, or work with cutouts to block a portion of the exposure.

## **Visual Arts Standards of Learning:**

### **Visual Communication and Production**

All.6 - The student will use historical subject matter and symbols as inspiration to produce works of art.

All.7 - The student will employ visual problem-solving process in the production of original works of art.

All.9 - The student will select and prepare two-dimensional and three-dimensional works of art for display.

### **Cultural Context and Art History**

All.11 - The student will identify artists and visual arts resources within the community.

All.13 - The student will identify works of art and artistic developments that relate to historical time periods and locations.

All.16 - The student will identify and examine works of art in their historical context and relate them to historical events.

All.17 - The student will describe symbols present in works of art in relation to historical meaning.

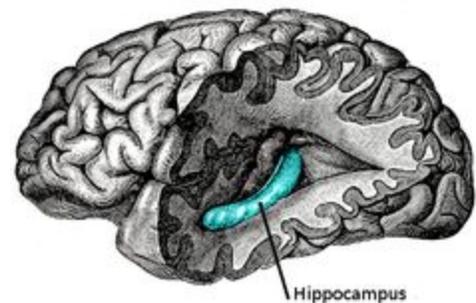
### **Judgment and Criticism**

All.20 - The student will describe, analyze, interpret, and judge works of art, using an expanded art vocabulary.

All.22 - The student will demonstrate orally and in writing, the ability to interpret and compare historical references found in original works of art.

## **Discussion Questions:**

- What is a memory?
- How do you define the past?
- How is the past remembered?
- What memories do we leave behind?



## **Human Memory and the Photograph**

Memories of our experiences connect with one another and they are the basis of who we are as individuals. Memories of our experiences are called autobiographical memories and they rely on a brain region called the hippocampus. If the hippocampus were to be taken out of your brain right now, you would be stuck in time and memories of new experiences would rapidly fade away. The hippocampus functions to create a seamless story of the self. It's pretty clear that there is a connection between human memory and the photographs we take. Simply put, a photo is information about past light that we can perceive in present time. Similarly, memories are the affects of our past experiences on our present self. Photographs can serve as memory storage and, when viewed, can activate memory recall.

The basis of our autobiographical memory is what happened, where it happened and when it

happened. Similarly, the photos we take can store information of what, where and when. In this regard, a photograph is very much like a memory of a life event.

Source: <http://petapixel.com/2013/07/20/memories-photographs-and-the-human-brain/>

To say that what we see in photographs is gone is to state the obvious. At the very least that particular moment is gone, never to come back, just like any other moment (whether we photograph or not). The person in the photo might be gone, in all kinds of ways. Gone from our life maybe, either by our choice or their choice or maybe by nobody's choice (in the case of death). The fact that something is gone makes photographs so poignant, and it is what makes photographs memories. This, again, is obvious, because memories concern the past. Photography is not THE past. More accurately it is A past. To look at a photograph is to look at the past. In the case of photographs, we have more power over the process of retaining and forgetting. The process here involves the decision to take a photo or not, and then later whatever is later involved in the editing. Seen in this light, photographs are more perfect memories, because we are given more power to control our past (if we had that power with our actual memories, most therapists would be out of work). Conveniently, we tend to ignore the fact that photographs are manufactured memories. Photographs are also expressions of our desire to hold on to something. As such expressions, they can take on their own life, essentially becoming something completely different. Source:

[http://jmcolberg.com/weblog/extended/archives/photography\\_and\\_memory/](http://jmcolberg.com/weblog/extended/archives/photography_and_memory/)

## What role does memory play in art?

Article: Tate, Khan Academy - Archives, Memory, and Conservation

Source: <https://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/tate/archives-memory/art-and-memory/a/what-role-does-memory-play-in-art>

Some artists try to document things exactly as they are in order to create a record for future generations. But others deliberately frame the past in different or unexpected ways to change the way we think about history. So how does art shape our collective memory of the past? And how might it inform our experience of major events in our own time?

There will inevitably be tension between an object invented by a subjective mind and the objective fact or event it is meant to depict. Many artists use art to tell stories about personal and cultural memory that are open to interpretation, that reframe the past not as a fixed narrative but as a multiplicity of voices from diverse points of view. This allows us to think twice about our history and how it has been shaped, and how we might best document things to come.



*Figure: Untitled #9, Antietam  
Sally Mann, 2001  
Gelatin Silver Print, 50in x 40in  
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*

### **Activities:**

#### **I. Critical Investigation:** Sally Mann's Untitled #9, Antietam

Complete steps 1 & 2 by reviewing the image without the artist's name or the title of the artwork.

1. **Description:** Begin by describing what you see occurring in the photograph. What details stand out to you? What objects are in the photograph?
2. **Analysis:** How is the photograph composed? How is the use of light, shadow, perspective, or framing used?

Step 3 should be completed after revealing the accompanying text.

3. **Interpretation:** What role does the title/caption hold? Why do you think the photographer chose this subject to photograph? What is the significance of the historical event being photographed? What story do you think is being told? What details support your interpretation? How does this image inform our understanding of the aftermath of war or conflict?

Complete step 4 after reading the following statement about Mann's image and background information on the significance of Antietam

#### **Sally Mann Untitled #9, Antietam, from the series Last Measure**

"This image belongs to Virginia photographer Sally Mann's Last Measure series, titled after a line in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and based on her visits to Civil War battlefields. Untitled #9 shows a cornfield beside "Bloody Lane," the sunken road where thousands of men lost their lives on this most deadly day in American history. Although clear at the left edge, the field dissolves across the surface into an abstract cloud of photographic emulsion that conveys something of the strife and anguish described in eyewitness accounts. Mann's bold experiments with the nineteenth-century collodian wet-plate process—in which she pours photosensitive emulsion onto a glass plate shortly before exposure—help her transcend photography's realist conventions to achieve a heightened level of expression."

Source: <https://vmfa.museum/connect/antietam-and-the-civil-war-another-artists-perspective/#c4hsSCxt3eqWaA2x.99>

### **Battle of Antietam: September 17, 1862**

150 years ago and 160 miles north of Richmond, a horrific battle near Sharpsburg, Maryland, and Antietam Creek marked the turning point in the Civil War. It was the first major confrontation in the conflict to take place on Union soil and remains the single deadliest day in American history with over 23,000 casualties on both sides (comparable to 230,000 in contemporary numbers). While not a decisive victory for either North or South, it gave President Lincoln the political incentive to issue just five days later the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation—freeing enslaved people in the rebellious states.

Source: <https://vmfa.museum/connect/anniversary-of-antietam/#4upvt4PitYsG86HC.99>

4. **Judgement:** How did your perspective of the photograph change or shift after learning the artist's perspective? After learning more about the site photographed, what questions would you like to ask the photographer?

### **Discussion Questions:**

What role does memory play in history?

- What is history?
- What is a collective memory?
- How do cultures share their collective histories?
- How can people who experience specific events remember them differently?
- What is an archive?
- What role does photography play in archiving the past?
- Can we trust an image?
- How do historians distinguish between true or false narratives of the past?

**“What do and should Americans remember from the nation’s past as the defining experiences that shape our present?”** – David Thelan: Memory and American History, 1989

(Brainstorm a list of events with the class)

**Further Investigations:** For students that have time to extend their learning, they can critique one or more of the following images.

VMFA’s Civil War Collection: <https://vmfa.museum/connect/category/civil-war/>

Sally Mann’s Battlefields: <http://sallymann.com/selected-works/battlefields>

### **Further Reading:**

[New York Times - Art In Review: Sally Mann’s Last Measure Series](#)

[National Park Service: Antietam: The Bloodiest One Day Battle in American History](#)

[National Park Service: Photography at Antietam](#)

[Historic Photographs Taken by Alexander Gardner at Antietam National Battlefield](#)

[Library of Congress: Civil War Glass Negatives and Related Prints](#)

[NPR: Antietam - A Savage Day in American History](#)  
[CivilWar.org: Animated Map of Antietam](#)

**II. Contextual Investigation:** The student will conduct either physical research (digging through actual materials) and/or online research (exploring digitally archived materials) to find \*primary sources that can deepen your understanding of an event that transpired.

**\*PRIMARY SOURCES:** In the study of history as an academic discipline, a **primary source** (also called original **source** or evidence) is an artifact, a document, diary, manuscript, autobiography, a recording, or other **source** of information (like a photography) that was created at the time under study. (A secondary source is an interpretation of a primary source)

When evaluating primary or secondary sources, the following questions might be asked to help ascertain the nature and value of material being considered:

- How does the author know these details (names, dates, times)? Was the author present at the event or soon on the scene?
- Where does this information come from—personal experience, eyewitness accounts, or reports written by others?
- Are the author's conclusions based on a single piece of evidence, or have many sources been taken into account (e.g., diary entries, along with third-party eyewitness accounts, impressions of contemporaries, newspaper accounts)?

Ultimately, all source materials of whatever type must be assessed critically and even the most scrupulous and thorough work is viewed through the eyes of the writer/interpreter. This must be taken into account when one is attempting to arrive at the 'truth' of an event.

**HISTORIC RESEARCH LINKS:** (You must find a primary source - either physical or digital evidence of a past event)

[Hanover County Historical Markers](#)

[Hanover County Historic Sites](#)

[National Historic Landmarks in Virginia](#)

[Search the Virginia Historical Society collections](#)

[Virginia History Explorer - Search by Category](#)

[Virginia Historical Society Papers: Family Search](#)

[Library of Congress: Prints and Photographs](#)

[Library of Congress: American Memory Project](#)

[Richmond Times Dispatch Genealogy Bank: Search Newspaper Archives](#)

[Library of Virginia Document Bank](#)

[Virginia Memory: Multiple Exposure - Catalog of Prints and Photographs @ the Library of Virginia](#)

[National Park Service: Virginia](#)

[Digital State Archives: Virginia](#)

[Family History Center: Richmond, VA](#)

[Our Family Tree: Collaborating to Connect Family to History](#)

## LIFE: Photography Archive

**RESEARCH AND PLANNING RECORD** - Student will create a new Google Doc titled "Memoryscape" with the headings outlined below:

**Visual Qualities:** subject matter, compositional techniques, photo manipulations - sketch, photograph, and upload using camera phone)

**Conceptual Qualities:** description of memories, events, people, and places of interest - explain your purpose for choosing this direction

**Historical Context:** provide research w/ citations - include primary source material (save documents/images online or scan and upload)

**III. Artistic Production:** This chosen source (document, drawing, photograph, or recording) should be displayed alongside your final project or be incorporated within it. One or more of the photo manipulation techniques should be used (including Sandwich Negative, Photogram, Cliche Verre, Handmade Negative Carrier, Manipulated Negative, Multiple Exposure or Lens Diffuser/Filter) in order to allude to your specific memory. Students will write an artist statement to accompany their work in the final exhibit that expresses the reasoning for your visual and conceptual choices.

**III. Reflective Response:** Write an artist statement that explains your choices.

- Why did you choose that particular object or image?
- What personal or collective memory does this represent?
- How did this influence the development of your work?

**IV. Curatorial Experience:** Hold a gallery opening with the final projects, all corresponding exhibition texts and artist statements. Have a formal critique so students can introduce their works and their classmates can respond to the visual and conceptual qualities of the work.

**V. Assessment:**

A. Content - the memory is symbolically expressed in the work (20pts)

B. Craftsmanship - the work itself is made with skill to achieve a photo montage (20pts)

C. Creativity - the visual and conceptual qualities are inventive, original, and distinctive (20pts)

D. Communication - the visual message conveyed to the viewer (20pts)

E. Composition - there is a purposeful arrangement of the elements & principles of design (20pts)

[National Endowment of the Humanities - Legacy of the Civil War](#)