

Looking for Light

Activity set 1

Activities

- Observation
- Discussion

Goals

- To sensitize students to the main principles involved in photography: light, and how light creates dimension and depth in the image.
- To provide students and teachers with a common entry point for looking at and understanding photography.

Levels

- Elementary
- Intermediate
- Senior

Curriculum connections

- Visual arts
- Language arts

Materials

- Image set A

Notes

- This activity is a good starting point for your exploration of the Byron Harmon fonds
- Questions in this discussion are designed to provoke thought and encourage observation
- There are no wrong answers
- Words underlined within the Activities are found in the *Glossary of Photographic Terms*

Background

- Fonds is a term used within the discipline of archival studies. It refers to the entire group of documents (regardless of form or medium) created and/or accumulated and used by a particular individual, group, organization or corporate body in the course of that creator's activities and kept for future reference.
- The photographs in the Byron Harmon fonds were made by Byron Harmon, a photographer in Banff from 1903 to 1942.
- Harmon set out to capture the splendour of the Canadian Rockies in photography. He travelled along the Canadian Pacific Railway, hiked and climbed with the Alpine Club of Canada, and travelled by packtrain with fellow adventurers and explorers.
- Byron Harmon's images were sent around the world as prints and postcards.

ACTIVITIES

1. Display the photograph *Ice cave, Horsethief Glacier* (Starbird Glacier, 1920) and gather the students around it. Image # WMCR-V263/NA-266
 - a) Ask students what they see in this image. Explore responses, especially those that speak about light.
 - b) Discuss what is creating the dark areas around the edges of the photograph.
 - c) Further discussion:
 - What is the light source for this photograph? (A light source is any device serving as a source of visible light. For example, the sun, the flash on a camera or a lamp)
 - Are there other shadows in the photograph? Where are they?
 - Where is the darkest shadow? What is the brightest spot? Where does your eye go first?
 - Find a tone midway between the brightest and darkest spots. (A tone is a shade of colour; eg. light grey, dark grey, medium grey.)
 - Is this a bright sunny day, or overcast? How can you tell?
 - What kind of a mood does this photograph create?
2. The word "photography" literally means "drawing with light." It is derived from the Greek words *photos*, meaning light, and *graphien*, meaning to draw. This implies that the photographer is in control of the light to some degree.

Discuss:

- How has the photographer controlled the light in this image?
 - Where is the photographer?
 - Why do you think he has chosen this vantage point?
 - How has the photographer "broken the rules" in this photograph? (Normally, a photographer will position himself so that the light source is behind him, not facing him.)
3. Display the photograph titled *Top of Resplendent* (Resplendent Mountain, 1918?) Image # WMCR-V263/NA-266
 - a) What were the light conditions on the day this photograph was taken? How can you tell?
 - b) Continue discussion along the same lines as #1 and #2 above.
 4. Have students study Image set A with the following tasks:
 - a) Choose a photograph in which the light is used in a particularly interesting way
 - Determine the source of light
 - Determine the position of the photographer
 - Decide if the photograph is high or low contrast

- b) Choose a photograph that you do not find very interesting
 - What is it that you don't like?
 - What might the photographer have done to make it a more interesting image?
- c) Have students share their findings with the large group.
- d) Continue discussion with the following questions:
 - What would different lighting conditions do to the photograph? (eg: overcast, bright sun, the sun coming in from a different angle, the sun coming from behind?)
 - How would it change the mood of the photograph?
 - Would it change your appreciation of the image?