

# Our America

Based on the project **Documenting Detroit**, presented at Photoville 2017 by Documenting Detroit with support from PhotoWings

Students will show *Our America*, each defining 1 question that frames the stories they show and tell, towards a public outcome (an exhibition, a printed book or magazine, or a projection).

Students will be able to:

- Learn skills of photography, interviewing, storytelling and presentation.
- Interrogate questions of family, place and memory.
- Successfully achieve the envisioned public outcome.

## Session 1: Intro

1. Show students a few photo essays from the Documenting Detroit fellows:
  - [Faith in Action](#) by Jeremy Brockman
  - [Auntie Na's](#) by Samantha Otto
  - [Portraits of Black Youth, Ages 9-22](#) by Cydni Elledge
2. For each photo essay, ask students to identify **the questions** the photographer is asking, and **the themes** the photographer is exploring.
3. Show students photography displays to inspire them, such as [Documenting Detroit public art projects](#), [Photoville](#), or [The FENCE](#).
4. Discuss how a public display can turn a photographer's' personal questions into a community conversation.
5. Frame for students that over the course of this semester, they will be working on a photo essay exploring their own question about 'Our America.' As a class, they will work together on producing the public outcome.
6. Brainstorm as a class about potential public display in your community. Some ideas are:
  - Screening during a movie night at a local park
  - Distribution in local newspaper
  - Exhibition in a local storefront

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**Featuring photography by** Documenting Detroit fellows

**Grade Level:** 8th to 12th grade

**Subjects:** Humanities, Art, Photo

**Time Required:** 15 - 20 sessions

### Key Images:

- [Faith in Action](#) by Jeremy Brockman
- [Auntie Na's](#) by Samantha Otto
- [Portraits of Black Youth, Ages 9-22](#) by Cydni Elledge
- [Documenting Detroit Archive](#)

### Materials Needed:

- Cameras
- Phones
- Audio Recorders
- Printing Materials
- Exhibition Materials
- Notebooks
- Photoville Passport

### Standards Addressed:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.10

### Additional Resources:

[photoville.com/edu](http://photoville.com/edu)



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## Session 2 - 6: Photography 101

1. Work through a few different types of photography assignments for your students to build technical skills as well as experiment with the question/theme they want to explore.
2. Here are some sample lessons:
  - Intro to Photography Styles: The FENCE 2018 Guide
  - Portraiture & Interviewing: Who Is Here? based on the exhibition Newest Americans
  - Personal Narratives: From the Inside Out (based on the project Kin) [link TK]
  - Stories with Perspective: Sanctuary (based on the project Living in Sanctuary) [link TK]
  - Stories exploring Theme: What is Home? (based on the exhibition Finding Home)
3. During these sessions, assign students readings or photo essays to help guide their thinking.
4. At the end of each session, ask students to free write about the photographs they took for this assignment.
  - What initially drew them to photograph this topic?
  - What questions arose through reporting on this topic?
  - What photographic strategies did they employ to capture this story? What worked? What didn't work?
  - Looking at their photographs all together, what themes surface?
  - What ideas does this inspire for their semester-long project?

## Session 7: Defining Your Project

1. Now that students have learned photography and reporting basics, it is time to decide the project they'll be working on for the remainder of the semester.
2. Ask students to define their question through free-writing. Have students share back their questions to the class. If there are overlaps or similarities in questions, you may want to group students into reporting teams so they can support one another.

## Session 8: Production Plan

1. Ask each photographer, or photographer team, to make a list of the people, places and events they want to photograph. Have them set a plan to make contacts and organize each of these shoots.
2. Work together as a class to set a production timeline and deadlines for shooting, interviewing, editing and sequencing. Discuss strategies for time management, and thinking ahead about photo shoots (i.e. taking advantage of a family vacation to take photos).



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## Session 9 - 12: Personal Projects

1. Set aside time each week for a class critique. Ask students to bring in one photograph that represents their work, and to talk about what they've learned, and what their next step is.
2. During these sessions, you may want to schedule field trips to take students to see exhibitions and public art.

## Session 13 - 16: Defining Your Project

1. Depending on format for the public display, determine the deliverables needed from each project. (5 image edit, captions, a multimedia piece etc.) Work with each reporting team to produce these deliverables.
2. Divide your class into production teams
  - Production/Installation: These students oversee printing and the installation of the public display
  - Curatorial: These students oversee the sequencing, and write an artist statement about the exhibition.
  - Promotion: These students design the invite, and spread the word about the exhibition. (See Lesson Plan: Mobilizing - Social Justice & Social Media)
  - Engagement: These students design a strategy to collect audience feedback and responses from the public display.
3. Ask each production team to define their goals and assign work roles. Review each team's plan and guide them to help accomplish their goals.
4. After the public exhibition goes up, conduct a class debrief discussion.
  - How did the reporting project and the exhibition go?
  - What were some challenges? What were some surprises?
  - How did their personal questions impact the community?
  - What are some future stories, or future exhibition opportunities they can identify?