

Documenting Cultural Traditions: Exploring the work of Photographer Roland L. Freeman



Museum Connection: Art and Enlightenment

Purpose: In this lesson students will analyze photographs depicting traditions observed in the African American community, produce a series of photographs depicting a tradition they have experienced or observed in their own family or community, and write an explanatory essay to accompany their images.

Course: Photography or Visual Arts Class

Time Frame: 10 – 12 Forty-five minute class periods

Correlation to State Standards Visual Arts

Outcome I: The student will demonstrate the ability to perceive, interpret, and respond to ideas, experiences, and the environment through visual art.

Expectation 1: The student will identify, describe, and interpret qualities of form that affect visual perception and response.

Indicator 2: The student will use appropriate art vocabulary to describe, analyze, and interpret qualities of visual form perceived and recorded in works of art.

Outcome II: The student will demonstrate an understanding of visual art as a basic aspect of history and human experience.

Expectation A: The student will propose ways that visual art reflects significant historical, cultural, and social issues.

Indicator 1: The student will determine how works of art provide social commentary, document historical events, and reflect the values and beliefs of the society in which they are created.

Indicator 2: Inspired by selected artworks from different times and places, the student will create an artwork that explores a contemporary cultural or social issue.

Outcome III: The student will demonstrate the ability to organize knowledge and ideas for expression in the production of art.

Expectation A: The student will demonstrate competent application of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required to produce works of art in a variety of media.

Indicator 2: In reflecting on the completed work, the student will describe, analyze and interpret the meaning created and evaluate the choice and use of media, skills and knowledge in solving the art problem.

Expectation B: The student will create visual images that reflect knowledge of various subjects from observation and imagination.

Indicator 1: The student will draw upon individual experiences as the basis for personally meaningful images developed through a process that includes: using two or more strategies to generate ideas for personal work; solving intermediate representational problems by doing research, using references models or practicing different strategies; crafting a quality product demonstrating care, thought and skill in making.

Outcome IV: The student will demonstrate the ability to identify, analyze, and apply criteria for making visual aesthetic judgments.

Expectation B: The student will examine and refine a personal set of criteria for judging works of art and the visual environment.

Indicator 2: Having analyzed the work of several artists, the student will create a series of works based upon implementing

information gained from the study to address form, theme and context.

Objectives:

1. Students will be able to explain how Roland Freeman used photography to document aspects of society and culture in order to increase awareness and understanding of diverse cultures in his community and around the world.
2. Students will select and document an aspect of the cultural life in their own family or community, using photography.
3. Students will write a text that explains their photographs and create a display of their work in order to share it with the school and local community.

Vocabulary and Concepts:

Document	original or official written or printed paper furnishing information.
Documentary/documentary photography	a visual representation that provides information or supplies evidence regarding a particular historical, social, or political subject.
Journalism	the profession of collecting news, writing for, or editing a newspaper or other periodical.
Photojournalism	the profession of taking pictures that illustrate events in the news.
Culture	the social, political, intellectual, religious, and economic characteristics that characterize a particular society.
Tradition	the belief or practice that is significant to a particular group and is passed down from generation to generation.
Identity	the characteristics that define a particular person or object.
Photographic Techniques (Depth of Field, Selective Focus, Point and Angle of View, and working with available light)	various methods used to take pictures effectively.

Photographic Composition (Nine-zone grid, Position and Weighting, Line and Shape, and Visual Movement)	various methods that can be used to effectively capture the desired image.
--	--

Materials:

For the Teacher:

- Teacher Resource Sheet 1: Web Diagram for *The Arabbers of Baltimore* on-line exhibit

For the Student:

- Student Resource Sheet 1: Looking at Documentary Photographs
- Student Resource Sheet 2: Documenting Cultural Traditions in Photographs
- Student Resource Sheet 3: Look 3 Times!
- Student Resource Sheet 4: Exit Ticket – Making Choices
- Student Resource Sheet 5: Displaying Your Work
- Student Resource Sheet 6: Writing to Support Your Photographs
- Student Resource Sheet 7: Assessing Your Work

Resources:

Publications:

Freeman, R. (1989). *The Arabbers of Baltimore*. Maryland: Tidewater Publishers.

Freeman, R. (1996). *A Communion of Spirits*. Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press.

Freeman, R. (1981). *Southern Roads/City Pavements*. New York, NY: International Center of Photography.

Parks, G. (1986). *Choice of Weapons*. Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press.

Web Sites:

The Group for Cultural Documentation. Retrieved October 29, 2006, from The Group for Cultural Documentation Web site: <http://www.tgcd.org/>

Curtis, J. (June 2003). Making Sense of Documentary Photography. Retrieved October 29, 2006, from History Matters: The US Survey Course on the Web site: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/Photos>

Rebecca Reads Review of A Communion of the Spirits, by Roland L. Freeman
<http://www.amazon.com/Communion-Spirits-African-American-Quilters-Preservers/product-reviews/1558534253>

UMBC Special Collections, The Photography Collections, Slides and Digital Images
<http://aok.lib.umbc.edu/specoll/photog.php?mode=plain>

Historical Background:

Roland Freeman is a world-renowned photographer and journalist who is of particular interest especially to the people of Baltimore because this city was his home. As a child, he became extremely interested in “Arrabers,” who were street vendors that drove wagons filled with fresh vegetables, fruit, fish, and various produce pulled by horses around Baltimore neighborhoods to sell. When they entered neighborhoods, they would call out in distinctive loud voices in order to notify residents that they had arrived. People would run out of their homes and make purchases from “Arrabers” on a regular basis. Roland spent a portion of his childhood ridding with them and as a result, this intensified his interest which led him to documenting this group of hard working men and their occupation through photo journalism.

His early life in Baltimore and in Charles County, along with his military experiences, laid the foundation for his inspiration. Life overseas gave him an opportunity to view the world from a different perspective. While there, he was able to meet other African Americans, assess their views on life, gain a broader understanding of the effects of racism and most importantly, raise the consciousness of those who sought to maintain a segregated America through his photojournalism.

Roland Freeman's photographs have appeared in many publications, and he has received numerous awards. He taught in several universities, has written many books, and is the president of The Group for Cultural Documentation, Inc. This group's purpose is to increase understanding and appreciation among people of various cultures. The photographic documentation of Roland Freeman's individual experiences has played a major role in the preservation of African American culture world-wide and that of Baltimore's gone, but not forgotten, "Arrabers."

Lesson Development:

Day 1:

Motivation:

1. Discuss the following questions with the class:

What is a document?

Can a photograph act as a document?

2. Extend the discussion by displaying several photographs (snapshots and/or photographic postcards). Ask students if any of these pictures are 'documents' and have them explain why or why not.

Activities:

1. Introduce the unit of study by telling students about the life and work of Roland L. Freeman, especially his work with The Group for Cultural Documentation. Show examples of his photographs.
2. Discuss the vocabulary words.
3. Introduce **Student Resource Sheet 1: Looking at Documentary Photographs**. Use an overhead transparency of this handout to model a critique of one of Mr. Freeman's documentary photographs using the "Who, what, where, when, why and how?" questions. "Think Aloud" to model this activity.

Assessment:

1. Students are to select a documentary photograph from resources provided and independently complete **Student Resource Sheet 1: “Looking at Documentary Photographs.”** If time allows, have students share their thinking with the class.
2. Students will use this information to write a newspaper article about the photograph. This may be assigned as homework or completed in class, as time allows.

Day 2:

Motivation:

Display a snapshot of a common tradition, such as a child’s birthday party. Pose the question, “Is a child’s birthday party a cultural tradition?” Lead a whole class discussion of this question. Ask the class to list all of the components of a child’s birthday party, such as gifts, cake with candles, singing, games, etc.

Activities:

1. Use the computer lab, TV monitor, or an LCD projector to view TGCD’s web site display of Freeman’s *The Arabbers of Baltimore* photographs.

Use the chalkboard or an overhead projector to display the web diagram shown in **Teacher Resource Sheet 1: Web Diagram for The Arabbers of Baltimore.**

Use guided questioning to help students fill in the web diagram tying all the photographs to the cultural tradition “Arabbers”

2. Introduce the Photographic Problem students are going to solve (see **Student Resource Sheet 2: Documenting Cultural Traditions in Photographs**).

3. Students will identify cultural traditions in their families and communities.

Students will individually list and describe cultural traditions they participate in with their families and community groups such as school and other organizations.

Use of the word bank on **Student Resource Sheet 2** should be used to spark student thinking.

With a partner, students will compare their lists to identify similarities and differences in order to identify both common and unique cultural traditions.

4. The class will develop a list on the board, tallying how many students observe selected traditions.

Students will discuss whether or not their traditions are shared or acknowledged by the larger US society. As aspects of culture are listed on the board or overhead, ask questions to clarify the meaning of the tradition, students' personal reactions to the tradition, and what was unique about the student's particular experience of this tradition.

Assessment:

Give homework assignment on page two of **Student Resource Sheet 2**. This may also be completed in class if time allows. This assignment asks students to identify a cultural tradition they wish to photograph and to list aspects they will photograph in order to document it fully. This will form their shooting script. (Note: It is suggested that students be instructed to choose any tradition they wish EXCEPT a child's birthday party).

Day 3:

Motivation:

Check homework. Ask students to share their topic with the class. Check for duplication of topics and discuss how each student's experience of the tradition, as well as their photographs, differ.

Activities:

1. Tell students that today's lesson will focus on what choices photographers make to create good quality documentary photographs.
2. Display three photographs. One should be a good quality, successful documentary photograph; the other two should be mediocre snapshots of a similar subject. Tell students that the teacher likes one of these photographs, but not the other. Ask them to identify which one the teacher likes and explain why.
3. Use the discussion of these photographs to introduce factors that photographers consider and control to create compelling images that effectively communicate their ideas: content, lighting, composition and other technical considerations such as film type, selective focus, lens selection, etc.

Guide the class to identify these qualities in the photograph the teacher liked in the motivation activity. Students will take notes on this discussion using the Cornell Notes format on **Student Resource Sheet 3: Look 3 Times!**

4. Jigsaw activity: Divide students into groups of three. Assign each member of the group one of the factors discussed; content, lighting and composition, or technical considerations. Each student is to analyze the photograph assigned to the group, identify how the photographer chose to control their assigned factor. After a limited time (about 10 minutes), students will share their findings with their group. All students will complete **Resource Sheet 3: Look 3 times!**
5. Distribute film and instruct students to begin shooting their photographs. Set a specific due date and post it in the classroom as a reminder to students. Give separate deadlines for film development, work prints, final prints, and completed display materials.

Assessment:

Students will complete **Student Resource Sheet 4: Exit Ticket** to assess their understanding of the factors photographers consider and control when making their photographs.

Day 4:

Motivation:

Display and discuss several examples of documentary photography projects, using sources such as magazines, professional journals, artist's books, monographs and documentation of exhibitions in museum or gallery displays, and web-site displays.

Activities:

1. Review the Photography Problem on **Student Resource Sheet 2: Documenting Cultural Traditions in Photographs** and remind them that their goal is to create a group of good quality photographs to be displayed in the manner in which they choose. Review the possible choices and discuss related factors that they must consider as they take their photographs.
2. Students will complete **Student Resource Sheet 5: Displaying Your Work** in order to plan their method of display.

Assessment:

Collect completed resource sheets for teacher review.
(Note: Some students will be ready to develop their film or begin darkroom work at this time).

Day 5:

Motivation:

Write the terms lighting, composition, and technical considerations on the board. Ask students to consider how they have applied these things as they have taken their photographs. Initiate a class discussion about these topics to determine the degree to which they need to be reviewed with the class or selected students.

Activities:

Use this class period for independent activities based on students' needs. Students who need review may use this class period to review lighting, composition and technical considerations as necessary, based on the level and proficiency of the students. This review may be given in whole class or independent assignments. Students who do not require review may be assigned to investigate the work of other documentary photographers. Some students may be working independently in the darkroom at this time.

Day 6:

Motivation:

Revisit the display of documentary photo projects used in the motivation for lesson 4. Ask students what these collections of photographs include in addition to the photos.

Activities:

1. Lead the class in a discussion of the written texts that accompany the photographs. Create a list on the board of the information that is included and how it supports the photographs.
2. Revisit **Student Resource Sheet 2: Documenting Cultural Traditions in Photographs** and point out to students that they will be creating a piece of writing to support their documentary photographs.
3. Introduce **Student Resource Sheet 6: Writing to Support Your Photographs**.
4. Working independently, students will complete this worksheet in order to prepare to write an essay, detailed labels or a script for an audio recording.

Assessment:

Collect completed resource sheets for review and grading.

Days 7 – 10:

Activities:

Students will use these class periods to develop their film and/or work in the darkroom or computer lab, to create their final prints and put together their displays. The teacher will give individual help and guidance as students work.

Day 11:

Motivation:

Students will install their display in the classroom or adjacent space where it can be viewed by the class.

Activities:

1. Review the photography problem students were asked to solve.
2. Based on this problem, direct students to develop a list of criteria that they applied as they planned and created their photographs. Begin this process with a brief discussion, listing 2-3 criteria on the board or overhead. Students will list their own criteria on **Student Resource Sheet 7: Assessing Your Work**.
3. Students will post their criteria sheets with their display.
4. Students will participate in a gallery walk. As students view each body of work and read the posted criteria for assessment, they will write feed-back for the photographer on a post-it note and attach it to the criteria sheet. Feedback is to be constructive and should be related to the criteria the photographer has noted on their sheet.

Assessment:

1. Each student will rate assessment of the success of their work after reviewing peer feed-back received during the gallery walk.
2. Discuss these questions – What did you learn about documentary photography? What did you learn about cultural traditions in our community?

Thoughtful Application:

Look for photographs of cultural traditions in a variety of places: television, magazines, newspapers, textbooks, the internet, etc. Are these images documentary in nature? Why or why not? For what other purposes are photographs of cultural traditions used in our society?

Lesson Extensions:

1. Do all documentary photographs that depict cultural traditions have the same purpose? Compare and contrast the work of Roland L. Freeman, Sebastio Salgado, and Dorothea Lange. How are their purposes similar? How do they differ?
2. Take students on a field trip to the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of African American History and Culture to view Roland L. Freeman's Quilting Photographs (by special arrangement with the Collections Department) as well as other photographs on display and in the collection.
3. Plan and hold a reception for a display of students' work. Invite members of the faculty, school administration, and larger community. Provide a visitor register in which guests can write their comments on the exhibit.
4. Introduce students to the work of other African-American photographers. Compare and contrast their work with that of Roland L. Freeman.

- a. Carl Clark

<http://www.barbaraarcher.com/artists/guineahens/img/cclarklady.jpg>

- b. Ken Royster

http://www.turn2channel.com/ken_royster/

- c. Roy Decarava

<http://www.profotos.com/education/referencedesk/masters/masters/roydecarava/roydecarava.shtml>

http://www.lib.virginia.edu/small/exhibits/rec_acq/history/sweet.html

<http://www.masters-of-photography.com/D/decarava/decarava.html>

d. Gordon Parks

<http://www.pdngallery.com/legends/parks/>

http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/parks_gordon.html

5. Have students examine photos of Roland L. Freeman in the “Strengths of Mind” gallery of the Reginald F. Lewis Museum’s third floor exhibition. View Freeman’s photos *Portrait of Woman* and *Five Boys*. What stories are being communicated about these subjects and their lives?
6. Roland L. Freeman preserved cultural traditions using photography as this medium. He used Arabbers, farmers, quilters and artisans in several of his pictures. Have students examine photos of Black Maryland farmers in the “Building Maryland, Building America” gallery of the Reginald F. Lewis Museum’s third floor exhibition. How is the museum preserving cultural traditions for this community in this display?
7. Introduce students to John Ficara’s photographic images of Black farmers in his book, *Distant Echo: Black Farmers in America*. Ficara spent years documenting the experience of Black farmers whose role in farming is slowly declining. Have students compare Ficara’s work with Freeman’s work *The Arabbers of Baltimore*.

Teacher Resource Sheet 1:

Web Diagram for Roland L. Freeman's on-line exhibit *The Arabbers of Baltimore*. <http://baltimorearabbers.blogspot.com/>

This web shows the aspects of this cultural tradition selected by the photographer to document his subject.



Student Resource Sheet 1: Looking at Documentary Photographs

Name _____

Documentary photographs are created to provide factual information on a political, social or historical subject. They are often displayed or published in groups to form a series on the selected subject. Photographs that document are journalistic in nature in that they are created to inform the viewer objectively. *Questions to use for analysis* can be taken directly from the cannon of journalism: Who, what, when, where, why and how?

1. Use the graphic organizer below to analyze and interpret the photograph provided.

QUESTION	THINGS TO CONSIDER	YOUR RESPONSE
<i>Who?</i>	Who created this photograph?	
<i>What?</i>	What is the title of the photograph? Describe the things you see in the picture.	
<i>When?</i>	When was the photograph taken?	
<i>Where?</i>	Where was the photograph taken? What is the setting?	
<i>How?</i>	Analyze the photo to determine the point of view, angle of view, camera techniques and compositional strategies used.	
<i>Why?</i>	Why was this photograph taken?	

	<p>What is its purpose? What cultural tradition is documented?</p>	
--	--	--



Student Resource Sheet 2: Documenting Cultural Traditions in Photographs

PHOTOGRAPHIC PROBLEM: Plan and create a series of 6 or more photographs that document a cultural tradition. This tradition should be one that you personally participated in, or in which you have seen family or community members participate. You will write a short explanatory essay to accompany your photographs. You will plan and create a display of your photographs in order to share them with the school and local community.

DUE DATES: Exposed film: _____

Contact sheet: _____

Work prints: _____ Completed prints: _____

Planning activities

1. List and describe cultural traditions that you personally participated in, or in which you have seen family or community members participate. Use the word bank below to help you in your thinking.

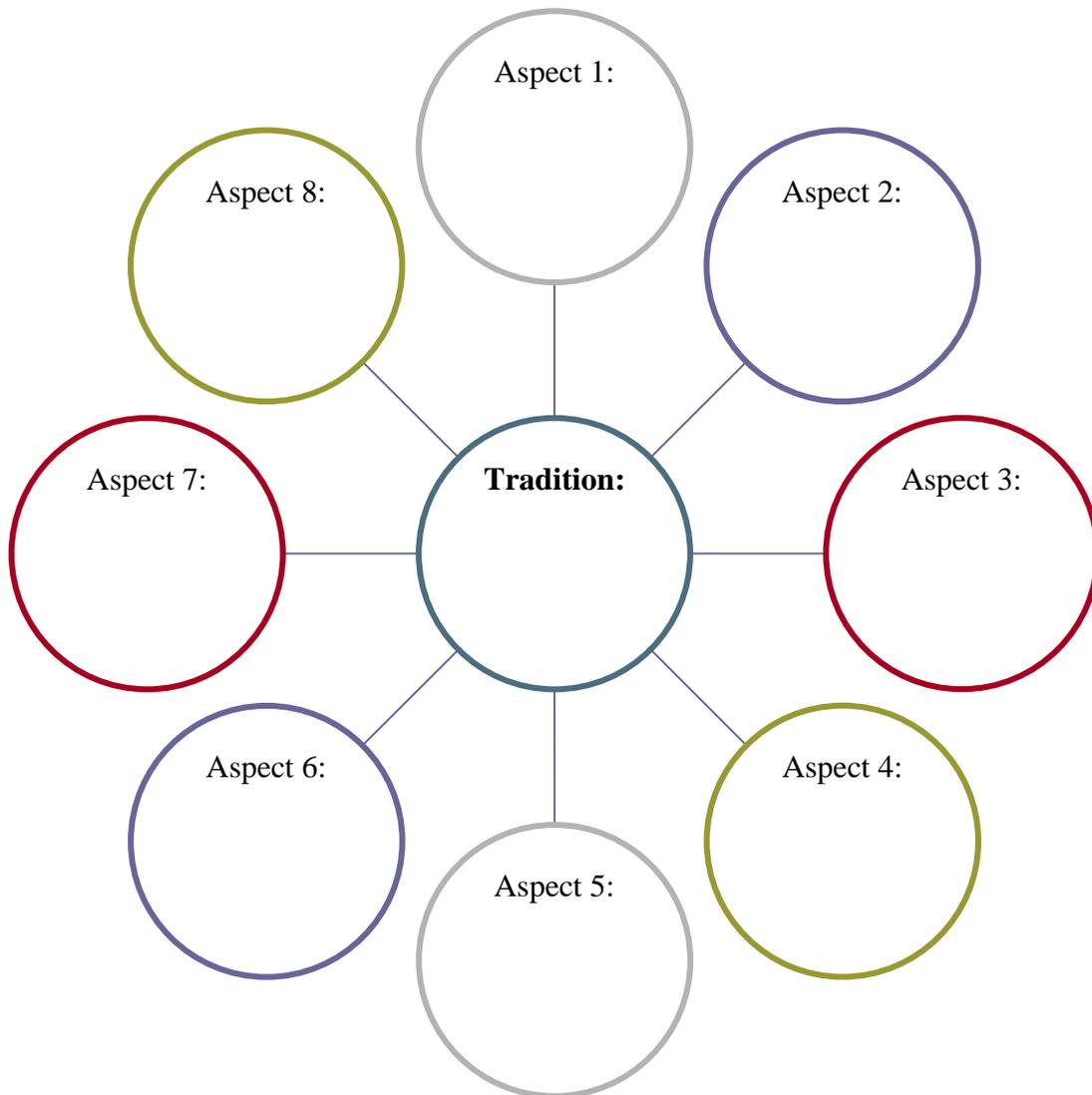
summer	holidays	garden	school
church			
sports	family	friends	work
transitions			
growing up	relationships	food	home
winter			
spring	fall	hair	clothes
shoes			

Write your list and descriptions here:

Student Resource Sheet 2: Page 2

Planning Activities continued:

2. In class, or as homework, identify a cultural tradition you wish to photograph. Write this tradition in the center circle of the web, below. In the connecting circles, write aspects that you will photograph in order to fully document this tradition. NOTE: You may not use a child's birthday party, as it was used as the example in our class discussion.



Student Resource Sheet 4:
Exit Ticket
Making choices to Control
Selected Factors in a Photograph

Name: _____

Directions: Choose three aspects of the cultural tradition you have chosen to photograph. Consider the choices you may make as you take the photographs, in relation to the factors discussed today. Briefly describe one way you could control each factor by writing in the chart, below:

Cultural Tradition:	Content	Lighting and Composition	Technical Consideration
Aspect 1:			
Aspect 2:			

Aspect 3:			
-----------	--	--	--

Student Resource Sheet 5: Displaying Your Work

Name _____

Photographers may display their work in a number of different ways. Documentary photographs are often displayed in groups or series. Some of the formats in which they appear are popular culture magazines (such as *National Geographic* or *Life*), professional journals (Aperture B & W), artist's books, monographs, web-sites, museum, institutional or commercial gallery exhibits.

Displays or exhibits of photographs are almost always accompanied by some sort of explanatory text such as an essay, detailed labels or an audio recording.

After viewing the examples provided in the classroom, think about how your photographs could be displayed to best express the cultural tradition you are documenting.

DUE DATE FOR COMPLETED DISPLAY: _____

1. Write or sketch notes in the space below to record your thinking process:

2. Place a check next to the format you wish to use:

- Popular culture magazine article
- Professional journal article
- artist's book
- monograph
- web-site
- exhibition such as those held in museums, institutions, or galleries

3. Reasons you are choosing this format:

4. Materials and technology you will need to complete this project:

Student Resource Sheet 6: Writing to Support Your Photographs

Name _____

Documentary photographs are usually accompanied by a text to help the viewer understand the meaning of the work. This text may be presented in the form of an essay, detailed labels for each image or an audio recording. Use this resource sheet to plan your text.

1. First, check the form in which you wish to present the information. Be sure that the form is appropriate to the type of display you are planning.
 Essay Detailed labels audio recording

2. Answer the journalistic questions Who, what, where, when, why and how to prepare to write your essay, labels or script for an audio recording.

QUESTION	THINGS TO CONSIDER	YOUR RESPONSE
<i>Who?</i>	Who created this photograph?	
<i>What?</i>	Create a title for your documentary series. Describe the things you photographed.	
<i>When?</i>	When were the photographs taken?	
<i>Where?</i>	Where were the photographs taken?	
<i>How?</i>	Explain the factors that you considered and controlled as you created these photographs.	

Why?	Why did you take these photographs? What is their purpose? What cultural tradition is documented? What meaning are you hoping to create in these images?	
-------------	--	--

3. On a sheet of loose-leaf paper, write your essay, label information or a script for an audio recording. Use a computer or recorder to prepare the final copy for display.

DUE DATE: _____

Student Resource Sheet 7: Assessing your work

Name _____

By documenting a cultural tradition, you made choices and used media, skills and knowledge to create meaning. Think about the choices you made and evaluate how your choice of media, skills in and knowledge of photography contributed to your success in creating this meaning. Complete the following:

1. Explain the meaning you wished to communicate in your photographs:

2. Write at least 4 criteria that you will use to assess how effectively your achieved your goal. Post this sheet next to your display for peer review.

Criteria	4	3	2	1	0

3. After reviewing peer feedback, rate your work by placing a check mark in the appropriate column for each criterion.

4 = Excellent (Meaning is easily identified, photographs are of a high technical quality, display is well crafted).

3 = Good (Meaning can be understood; technical quality is good but there may be one or two flaws; display is well crafted but may have one or two flaws).

2 = Average (Meaning can be understood with effort; technical quality is fair with frequent minor flaws; display craftsmanship is sloppy or flawed).

1 = Poor (Assignment is incomplete; meaning is not evident; technical quality is very poor; craftsmanship is not acceptable or display is not complete).

0 = Did not meet the criteria or complete this part of the assignment.