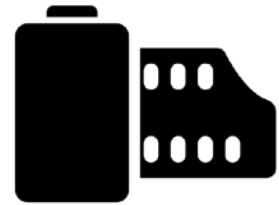


## MEMBERSHIP

# EVERYDAY HUMANS



## About this activity

In this activity, students select and present an image from the school of humanist photography.

- ▶ **Language level:** B2 – C2
- ▶ **Main task:** Listening; picture-telling; talking about a photograph
- ▶ **Topics:** Photography; humanism & empathy
- ▶ **Language focus:** Language used to describe and talk about photographs of people

For this activity, you will need the following:

- **The worksheet** on page 5 (one for each student)
- **The task sheet** on pages 6 & 7 (one for each student)
- **The YouTube video** (see below)



**Note:** For all materials and discussion, go to the corresponding page in the Resources section:

<https://membership.lessonstream.com/resources/everyday-humans/>

## The YouTube video

In this activity, students have to choose an image that they like from the school of humanist photography and prepare to present it, either live or by creating a talking-head video. To provide a model for this, I have created a short video in which I “picture-tell” an image by the French photographer Robert Doisneau.

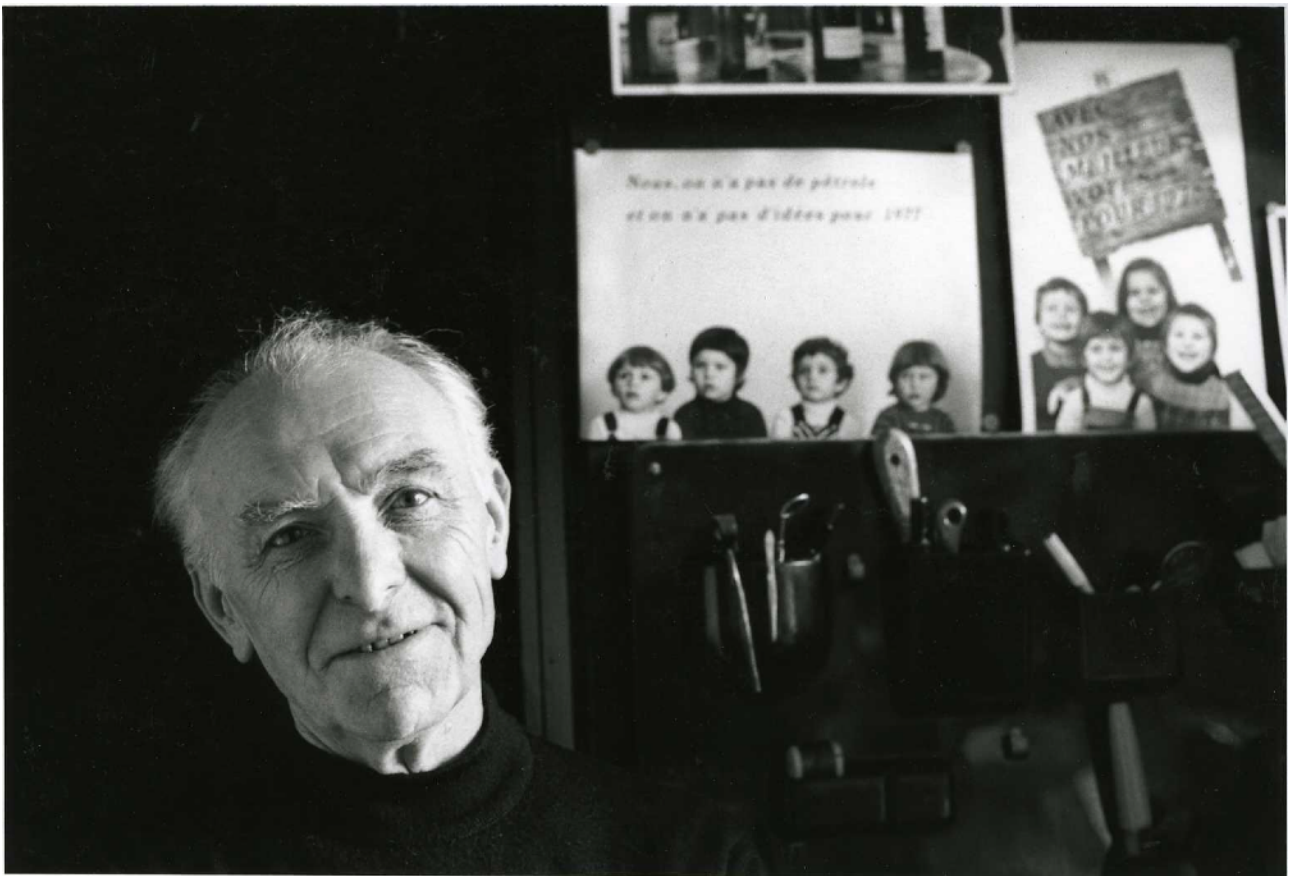


## Humanist photography

Humanist photography is about capturing truthful representations of the human experience, often in public spaces. In the early to mid-20th century, European photographers like Henri Cartier-Bresson and Robert Doisneau set out to document and celebrate the ordinary and extraordinary aspects of daily life, and create a universal understanding of the shared human condition.

For teachers and students, humanist photography offers enriching experiences for the classroom. If we slow down and take the time to look, think and appreciate the visual stories, we can find ourselves connecting emotionally and compassionately with the people in the frame.

In this lesson plan, students watch a video in which I present a photograph by the French photographer Robert Doisneau. After that they choose a similar image that they like and prepare to present it in a similar way.



Robert Doisneau in his studio in Montrouge, 1992 (Creative Commons photograph by Bracha L. Ettinger)

**Note:** Although it is not essential that you do so, I suggest that you use this activity as a follow-up to *Pont des Arts*, another lesson plan in the Resources section. This will allow you to introduce students to the photographer Robert Doisneau.



## Activity outline

1. On the board, write: **Humanist photography**

Ask students the following questions:

- What is humanist photography – can you guess?
- Where and when did it originate – any ideas?
- Do you know any examples of humanist photographers?

### Notes:

- A **humanist** is someone who believes that we are all united by a shared human condition. Humanists place importance on reason and ethics and seek harmony without relying on religion.
- Encourage students to guess answers, especially to the first question. But don't say whether they are right or wrong at this stage.
- If students have already done the activity *Pont des Arts* (see previous page) you can provide some context by telling them that Robert Doisneau is an example of a humanist photographer before asking the questions.



2. Tell students that they are going to watch a video in which a man called Jamie (that's me!) talks about humanist photography and then shows an example photograph. After watching the video, they are going to answer some questions.

3. Give out copies of the **worksheet** on page 5 and ask students to complete the gap fill and familiarise themselves with the questions before watching the video.

4. Go over the answers to the gap fill (see below) and also make sure that students understand all of the comprehension questions before continuing.

- If you are in a state of **delight**, something has made you very happy.
- The **gutter** is the channel between the pavement and the road.
- If something **unites** people, it brings them together.
- **Empathy** is the ability to imagine what it is like in another person's situation.
- **Humanity** is the condition of being human.
- The **subject** of a photograph is the most important person, object or thing in it.

5. Play the video and stop it at 03:55, just before the photograph is shown.

6. Ask students to compare their answers to the questions and also compare their rough sketches. Then go over the answers with the whole class.

7. Play the video a second time. This time play it all the way through and let students see the photograph at the end. Ask the following questions:

- Is the photograph similar to the way that you imagined it?
- What do you think of Jamie's interpretation of the photograph? Is there anything that you would add or disagree with?

**Optional:** You can play the video a third time, this time with subtitles. Ask students to listen and watch, making a note of any words or phrases that they are unfamiliar with or unsure about. Afterwards, encourage students to compare their notes, collaborate to pool knowledge where possible, and seek clarification for meanings when necessary.

8. Tell students that it is their turn to find a similar photograph and prepare to present it. All instructions are included in the task sheet on pages 6 & 7.

**Note:** The portfolio section of <https://www.robert-doisneau.com/> contains a particularly good selection of Robert Doisneau photographs. You could direct students to this resource for the task.

## Decisions

There are several decisions to make when setting a picture-telling task. Some of these are described below. In some cases, you might want to present the options to your students and involve them in the decision-making.

### To withhold or not to withhold the image?

The simplest and most standard way to present an image is to display it for everyone to see and then start talking about it. The advantage of this approach is that it offers visual support for the audience. Personally, however, I prefer to withhold the image until the end, as demonstrated in the video. This can be an effective way to make an audience curious, focus on language, and get their imaginations to do the work. However, it can be a more challenging task for the communicator. Please note that it doesn't have to be one way or the other; students can choose to withhold their images for part of the presentation only.

### Live or recorded presentations?

My guess is that most teachers will want students to present their images in the classroom or during live online video sessions. In this case, you will need to decide whether they should present plenary style or to each other in smaller groups. However, don't forget the video option: students can submit their presentations as talking-head videos, similar to the one that I created for this lesson plan.

### Spoken or written?

Although this activity focuses on spoken language, you might prefer to turn it into a written task or assignment and ask students to submit written image descriptions.

## Humanist photography

You are going to watch a video in which Jamie talks about humanist photography and refers to an example photograph by the French photographer Robert Doisneau. Before you watch the video, fill in the gaps below with the following words:

empathy

subject

unites

delight

gutter

humanity

- If you are in a state of \_\_\_\_\_, something has made you very happy.
- The \_\_\_\_\_ is the channel between the pavement and the road.
- If something \_\_\_\_\_ people, it brings them together.
- \_\_\_\_\_ is the ability to imagine what it is like in another person's situation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ is the condition of being human.
- The \_\_\_\_\_ of a photograph is the most important person, object or thing in it.

After watching the video, answer the questions below. You can make notes or write your answers on a separate piece of paper.

1. What is humanist photography? Can you explain it in your own words?
2. Where and when did humanist photography originate?
3. Where did Jamie find the photograph that he describes?
4. Where and when was the photograph taken?
5. According to Jamie, what is unusual about the photograph and what effect does this have?
6. Why is the little boy in a state of delight?
7. Jamie mentions something else that happened in the same year that the photograph was taken. What was that thing?
8. Draw a rough sketch of the photograph as you imagine it.

Scan this code to see the video



## Present a humanist photograph

Find an image that you like from the school of humanist photography. There are many names to explore online. Try Googling any of the following:

Diane Arbus

Lewis Hine

Henri Cartier-Bresson

Robert Doisneau

Helen Levitt

Mary Ellen Mark

Sebastião Salgado



Once you have found an image, prepare to present it. Think carefully about what you are going to say. Here are five things to remember:

### **i. Take your time and let the story develop**

Spend time looking at the image and thinking about it. The more you do this, the more details you will notice. Become aware of the questions that you ask about the people in the picture. Also become aware of the imaginary stories that you create about them. Remember that there are always different ways to interpret an image. There is no correct answer.

### **ii. Focus on the people**

You will have to talk about some basic compositional aspects of the image. But you don't have to give too much detail. It is more important to focus on the people in the picture.

### **iii. Avoid too much information**

You don't have to describe everything that you see. Some things in the image will not be important. For example, in his video, Jamie chose not to mention the car in the background of the photograph. Perhaps he felt that it was not important to the story.

### **iv. Make connections**

Become aware of the personal connections you make with the image and the people in it. Why do you like it? Why did you choose it? Perhaps it reminds you of someone you know or a personal experience you have had.

### **v. Borrow from Jamie's script**

On the next page, you will find Jamie's picture-telling script. Read it carefully and underline any words, phrases and sentences that you would like to use in your own presentation.

## Jamie's picture-telling script

This is a photograph of a little boy and his new world  
He's only about three or four years old  
And he is in a state of delight

The photograph was taken in 1934  
It's a street scene somewhere in Paris  
And the little boy is standing on the pavement

He is actually quite far away from us which is unusual  
Because you would normally expect the subject of a photograph to fill the frame  
But not in this case  
And this has the effect of drawing attention to his size – he's very small  
But more importantly, it draws attention to his environment  
All the space around him  
His new world with so much to discover

So what has he just discovered?  
Well he's standing near the edge of the pavement  
And he's looking down at the gutter  
Because flowing through the gutter is a little stream of water

We can't actually see where the water's coming from – it's not raining  
Perhaps someone's been washing windows  
And they've just emptied the bucket of water into the gutter  
And now it's flowing past the little boy  
And he's leaning forward to have a good look  
His arms are straight by his side  
And he's watching the water flow past  
With big surprised eyes  
And his mouth open in amazement

He's all alone  
There's no one else in the photograph  
Perhaps his parents are close by  
But we can't see them  
It's just the little boy and his new world

Unfortunately, that world would soon change  
Because in Germany that very same year, a certain party was democratically elected into power  
And five years later, the world would descend into the most brutal war it has ever seen

I wonder how this little boy's life was affected

Scan this code to  
see the video

