

Video Transcript for Photography Workshop: Treasure Hunt/Scavenger Hunt
Siena Art Institute
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This workshop uses photography and gaming as a way to change our perception of our surroundings.

This photographic “scavenger hunt” or “treasure hunt” is quite fun for students and also has the chance for engaging with the public, offering many opportunities for building collaborative skills between participants.

In this activity, students gain skills in creativity and critical thinking, and the group discussions during the workshop help students gain skills in communication.

Our template workshop takes place in a natural history museum, but it could also take place in virtually any location, indoors or outdoors.

At the start of the workshop, I briefly oriented the participants to the location, and we talked about the idea of how we visit a place, what tools are often used (for example a guidebook, a map, a museum or exhibition catalog).

I then asked the participants to find intriguing details in the pieces in the museum or simply in the location, which can then become the “treasures” for others to seek.

They were given approximately 10 minutes to seek subjects and create photographs with their phones or cameras, working individually.

The key is to create images that are not so cryptic and zoomed in that they are impossible to discover where they might be, but not so zoomed out that their subject is immediately obvious.

I circled around the location to assist students with their photo-shooting, giving pointers, suggestions, and individual feedback.

In our first group discussion: the relative success of the images created in this initial phase was then discussed together.

Ideally the images would be projected on a large screen so they can be viewed and discussed together with all participants.

As a game, I asked the participants to try and guess what the subject of an image was and if they recognized it.

The discussion explored which images are more or less successful in the aim of creating intrigue, providing clues, but not being too obvious.

In Phase 2: Informed by this initial discussion, I then gave participants another 10 minutes to create a new selection of images, returning perhaps to find things they had been initially drawn to to make further studies.

The group then came back together and shared a selection of their top-pick images.

I led a group discussion about the selected images: again what was interesting about them, how could they be adjusted to be more interesting (in terms of composition, framing / cropping, scale, exposure, etc), and again quizzing the group if they could guess the location of the subject.

So, The goal is to create images that are both compelling on the level of visual composition, but are also offering clues for future viewers to determine where their location might be.

This can be a challenging balance to find, and this challenge was discussed in the group.

Time permitting, we can have a phase 3, when the group then takes another 10 minutes to more thoughtfully search and create a final selection of images for the scavenger hunt that can then be projected and discussed in one final group gathering.

In our final discussion, participants were encouraged to consider these ideas when creating images in the future:

- How can an image be made more effective using improved photographic skills?
- How can an image become more powerful when its subject is less obvious?
- How can a viewer's attention be engaged through intrigue?
- How can images be used in a game-like way to change normal ways of viewing and navigating a space?
- And how can the activity of noticing details change our standard modes of interacting with our surroundings?

At the conclusion of the workshop, the selected images from the two or three collections could be publicly shared through the school and/or a blog, and/or printed in a hand-out that can be distributed at the location to encourage others to engage with this treasure hunt as they explore the space.

In Conclusion: What skills do students gain? On a technical level, participants are working out how to photograph and frame a detail best, how to use the available light, what makes for a more intriguing angle and how close to get to the subject without losing the subject's 'truth' and relevance.

They are encouraged to work out of their comfort zones on what they may naturally be drawn to and they hopefully will explore new and exciting subjects they had never noticed or thought of looking at before.

All in all, they are encouraged to slow down, to spend more time viewing and make observations and connections with the subjects they are looking at.

In past workshops I have noticed there has been the initial excitement of a game and hunting for something not yet found, ...the desire to find and capture as many things as possible without necessarily putting enough importance on choosing an interesting subject that someone else might like to explore.

So, once the participants realize they can pick and choose from the immense variety of subjects, they are able to fine tune their exploration, go back to something that grabbed their attention and delve deeper into it in a more calm and inquisitive approach.

Using the camera more carefully to frame and zoom in or out, to play with angles and composition, exposure and focus is all part of the fun and satisfaction of selection.

Finding things which have hidden meanings and personal connections for the individual is always interesting to see occur.

This activity can very much help to boost student engagement and stimulate their creativity,

The discussion and analysis of the image collections can be a very meaningful exercise in critical thinking,

..as we seek to articulate what makes some images and collections more engaging than others,

...and how image-making and image-selection can be improved to be more conceptually and visually impactful.