

# TEACHER GUIDE

THEY'VE  
GOTTA  
HAVE  
US

## BEHIND THE LENS

Video Lessons, Teacher Guide, and Student-Led Activities

Created with the Ron Clark Academy (Atlanta, GA)

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ARRAY 101

## THE POWER OF PERSPECTIVE

LESSON

2

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Whether on television or in movie theaters, people of color and other underrepresented groups are not always in control of their own likeness or narrative. In *They've Gotta Have Us*, director John Singleton reflects on inspiration derived from iconic photographer and filmmaker [Gordon Parks](#).

Gordon Parks, one of the greatest photographers of the twentieth century, was a humanitarian with a deep commitment to social justice. He left behind an exceptional body of work that documents American life and culture from the early 1940s into the 2000s, with a focus on race relations, poverty, civil rights, and urban life.

### OBJECTIVES:

The participant will learn about the life and work of photographer and film director Gordon Parks while developing basic photography skills to capture images of the people, places and things that make up their lived experiences.

### DIRECTIONS:

Follow the steps below and produce one image of your everyday life that reminds you of the word [power](#) or the word [perspective](#). Use the things around you as inspiration: a walk in your neighborhood, Saturday morning errands, fresh cuts at the barbershop, buying snacks at the bodega, or your work day.

### Gordon Parks Activity and Discussion Questions:

- Visit the Gordon Parks Foundation website. [www.gordonparksfoundation.org](http://www.gordonparksfoundation.org)
- On the website's photography archive, click on the gallery labeled "[Fort Scott Revisited](#)" and view the gallery of images.
- Knowing that these images were taken in 1950, how might they have [pushed back against stereotypes/archetypes of Black people](#) in the media?
- Gordon Parks grew up in Fort Scott, Kansas and was excited to chronicle the stories of his hometown. [Parks' photos from "Fort Scott Revisited"](#) were originally slated to appear on the cover of *LIFE* magazine, but were later shelved altogether and never published. Have you ever been denied the chance to tell your own story?
- What, if anything, did this exercise teach you about representation?

Discuss with other participants using this lesson as a guide.

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### PHOTOGRAPHY ACTIVITY

#### Step One: Analyze Photos.

Participants will answer the following questions and choose one photo to analyze.

1. Who are the people in your life?  
(aunt, godfather, cousin, teacher, mentor, best friend, coach, etc.)
2. Do you have photos of these people? If not, how would you photograph them?  
(What background would suit them? Or what are poses that might show their character?)
3. What is the story behind this photo?  
(ask who, where, what, when — the basic storytelling elements)
4. Why did you choose this photo?  
(What caught your attention? Is there something special about this image?)
5. Share the story of your chosen photo with the other participants. Use the word power or perspective (or both) in your explanation.
6. What type of camera was used to take the photo? Has mobile photography (using cell phones and tablets to take photos) [democratized photography](#)?  
If you aren't sure what kind of camera was used, ask an adult, or take a guess.

#### Step Two: Capture an Image.

Now that you've chosen your topic, let's learn about what types of photography we'll need to help convey the different elements of our stories. Once you know this, you can capture an image that celebrates one or more of the following aspects of storytelling: character, setting, plot and theme.

Filmmakers tell stories visually. Through photography, students get the opportunity to document the people, places and things that shape their perspectives and tell their own stories.

#### Character:

Who we are...  
Who is in the story?

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**PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY**

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#### Setting:

Where we have been,  
the importance of  
time and place.

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**LANDSCAPE | STREET  
PHOTOGRAPHY**

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#### Plot:

Our triumphs,  
challenges, and what's  
happening.

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**DOCUMENTARY  
PHOTOGRAPHY**

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#### Theme:

The ideas or lessons  
that come up  
throughout the story.  
Examples of themes  
include love and  
honor.

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**FINE ARTS PHOTOGRAPHY**

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### Step Three: Skills.

Time to learn some basic photography skills.

**LIGHTING:** Did you know that many photographers love cloudy days? Clouds [diffuse the light](#) and soft light is easy to work with.

You may have seen someone using a ring light — or even used one yourself — to get your photograph or video call looking a certain way. The direction and softness of light can be used to create different effects and moods in a photograph. Hard side lighting creates lots of drama, while a soft front light creates a softer mood.

**RULE OF THIRDS:** The [rule of thirds](#) is a “rule of thumb” or guideline, which applies to the process of composing visual images. Imagine the photograph is divided evenly into thirds, both horizontally and vertically, and the subject of the image is placed at the intersection of those dividing lines, or along one of the lines itself, creating an image that’s pleasing to the eye.

**BACKGROUND:** Support your subject with a background chosen to advance meaning and set the tone. A well-chosen background has a major impact on the composition of a photo.

### Step Four: Take the Photo!

Time to take your photo. Remember, it should evoke a feeling of power or perspective. No camera or phone? Use your computer’s built-in camera to take a self-portrait.

Discuss your photo choice with other participants using this lesson as a guide.

1. Which word did you choose? Power or perspective?
2. Who or what is the subject of your photo?
3. What style is your photo (portrait, street, landscape, documentary or fine art)?
4. Did you focus on lighting, background, or the rule of thirds?
5. Do you prefer photographing people or objects? Why?

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### GLOSSARY

**PORTRAITURE:** Portrait photography, or portraiture, is a type of photography aimed toward capturing the personality of a person or group of people by using effective lighting, backdrops, and poses.

**LANDSCAPE:** Landscape photographs typically capture the presence of nature but can also focus on man-made features or disturbances of landscapes.

**DOCUMENTARY:** Documentary photography refers to a popular form of photography used to chronicle events or environments significant and relevant to both history and everyday life.

**FINE ART:** Fine art photography is photography created in line with the vision of the photographer as an artist, using photography as a medium for creative expression. The goal of fine art photography is to express an idea, a message, or an emotion.

### RESOURCES:

Gordon Parks Foundation: [www.gordonparksfoundation.org](http://www.gordonparksfoundation.org)

Sankofa Read-Aloud of Gordon Parks: [How the Photographer Captured Black and White America](#)

## BEHIND THE LENS



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The Ron Clark Academy (RCA) is a highly-acclaimed, nonprofit middle school located in Southeast Atlanta. The Academy has received both national and international recognition for its success for creating a loving, dynamic learning environment that promotes academic excellence and fosters leadership.

