



# CRAFT IN AMERICA

LOOK AND SEE: WHO IS IN THE PHOTOGRAPH? EDUCATION GUIDE

## Teaching *Look and See: Who is in the Photograph?*

### Interdisciplinary Connection

**Social Studies:** This lesson explores aspects of Native American cultures through examining Cara Romero's photographs. In the episode, Romero talks about her father wearing his Vietnam Veterans cap in his photographed portrait, and how it is important to him to represent himself that way. The Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian is raising funds to build a National Native American Veterans Memorial on museum grounds at the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Students can learn more about Native Americans' extensive contributions to U.S. military service since Colonial times. The website includes stories of Native American veterans and their military service, [americanindian.si.edu/nnavm](http://americanindian.si.edu/nnavm).

### Instructional Strategies (Video and discussion: one 45 minute class period)

Students watch the segment on photographer Cara Romero in the IDENTITY episode. Students examine Romero's series of photographs such as *Naomi* from the *First American Dolls* series, the *Jackrabbit*, *Cottontail* and *Spirits of the Desert* series, and the photo session of Cara Romero's self-portrait with her father, in which he wears his Vietnam veteran's cap. Students will look at the photos closely to look for the stories about the people in the photographs and sketch the people in their sketchbooks.

In studio work, students will decide on a character they would like to represent, what scene they will create, and then capture their work with a photo. Ask students who they would like to be in their photograph? Students may use a favorite character in a book, movie or story using the materials and fabrics provided by the teacher to create costumes, etc.

### Before Viewing

Preview the video. The sections are outlined here as you may want to start and stop the video to clarify points and answer students' questions:

- The introduction; and Cara Romero photographs a mother and daughter
- Cara Romero and curator Kristen Dorsey discuss the large photograph *Naomi* from the *First American Dolls* series
- Romero's photography session with her four young nephews for the *Jackrabbit*, *Cottontail* and *Spirits of the Desert* series
- Romero talks about using Photoshop to combine images
- The boys are shown in their everyday clothes, and then dressing in their traditional wear for another photo session
- A portfolio of Romero's photos is shown



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- She talks about her family (husband and ceramic artist Diego Romero is also featured in IDENTITY)
- Cara Romero's self portrait photography session with her father

Introduce the scope of the lesson to students, sharing the key concepts, critical questions, and objectives. Share a bit about what they will see. Show the video, stopping and starting where needed so you may clarify students' understanding, and answer any questions they may have. You may want to hand out the *Look and See: Who is in the Photograph?* worksheet so you can stop the video after each section.

### After Viewing

Hand out Worksheet: Look and See: Who is in the Photograph? Have students take out their sketchbooks and pencils. Begin a discussion of the video. What did students find interesting? Go through the questions on Look and See: Who is in the Photograph? worksheet, letting students work with a partner to share their ideas and answers, and then share their answers as a group.

### Discussion

1. It is titled *Naomi*. She is Northern Chumash and she wears traditional dance regalia.
2. One possible story is: "Naomi is a woman who got dressed in traditional clothes and a headdress of dove and goose feathers. Then she pretended to be like an American Girl Doll in a big doll box, with special accessories all around her. She has dance sticks in her hands." Cara Romero says that the image "... is a way to create visibility for those things that are still here against all odds; to be a powerful story of resilience." Remind students that many of the American Girl dolls represent girls who lived in the past. Help students understand that the Naomi "doll" represents a person living in the present and who has strong connections with the people and traditions from the past.
3. Encourage students to add the feathered headdress; later they can consider all the different headgear within the photographs.
4. The four young boys are Romero's nephews, and they are cousins. Kiyanni introduces his cousins as he points to them: "His name is P.J. but we call him Curtiss; John; and Winka."
5. When they come to Cara Romero's studio, the boys are wearing caps and shorts and tee shirts; familiar contemporary clothes.
6. Kiyanni replies to a question about what the boys are wearing: "We're wearing the Indian stuff." He then replies to the question of why they are wearing the Indian stuff: "Because we are!" Ask students to share their ideas about why the boys are wearing the "Indian stuff."



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7. The boys represent characters in the series *Jackrabbit*, *Cottontail*, and *Spirits of the Desert*; Romero's series based on traditional fables. She presents them as "...four little mythological characters [who] came back to visit Coachella Valley and responded to the landscape...time travelers from Chemehuevi."
8. Encourage students to think about the different clothes and the boys' connection to the old and the new. Help students understand the importance of props and costumes when telling a story.
9. He wears a U.S. Navy Vietnam veterans hat.
10. Cara Romero says, "It's important for my dad to let people know he's a Navy veteran. I know by wearing his veterans hat it really frames what era he grew up in, and what made him the man he is today."
11. Ask students to share their ideas about what the hat adds to the story.

### After Discussion

Hand out Worksheet: Who Will You Be in Your Photograph? Help students to think about why we make photographs of people, about photographs as a storytelling device, and help them to think about who they would like to be in their photograph. How will they show a story about the character by what they add to the photograph? Several possible themes for telling a story that relates to Romero's work include those below. However, practicing setting scenes and acting out roles may get students excited; as ideas multiply students may take many different paths. They might:

- Take a photo of themselves as artist/photographer
- Take a self portrait set in a scene that represents the place where they live or their connection to environment (whether natural or manmade)
- Represent oneself as a character in a movie, book, or story, or as an ancestor.

### Studio Production

Help students experiment with the materials available, and to try out different ideas. With a digital camera, they can take several pictures and look at them to change their idea and to eventually choose their favorite (like Cara Romero does.) Students will create their own story based on a character in a favorite book, movie, or story.

### Reflection

Print the photographs for students. Mount the photos on poster board or mat board, or help students to do so. As a class, allow students to present their work and share their stories. You might talk about: Is their work like Cara Romero's in any way? (Perhaps it is alike in that it



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features a person and suggests a story.) How is their work different from the photographs they examined?

### Assessment

In discussions with the class and with individual students throughout the lesson; by examining the students' worksheets; and by witnessing the students' studio work, it should be evident that the student:

- Can describe several reasons we take photographs of people.
- Decided on a character to represent and created a photograph in that character.
- Added details to tell a story about the character they represented in the photograph