Perhaps you will be taking your students to the 2012 exhibition of World Press Photo. At the exhibition, students set to work on their own using the workbook, which is called My Album. Whether or not you grade the answers to the questions is up to you; the questions are formulated so as to stimulate discussion among the students as a group while they are viewing the photos. By working on the questions, the students learn things such as: what news is, what press photography is, and what press freedom means. They also learn how to look at photography with great care.

More accomplished students will work through the questions in an hour. Students at a lower level will probably need more time to complete the work.

To help you answer questions at the exhibition, and to help you plan any class discussions before or after your visit, you’ll find more information below about press photography, news, the winning photo, and the work that World Press Photo does.
News is an event or situation that:

1) Is unusual
2) No one - or hardly anyone at all - knew about beforehand
3) Is relevant to the reader or the viewer
4) Feels like it has taken place close by (distance-wise)
5) Deals with a topic of current interest
6) Has major impact
7) Aroused emotion and/or interest
8) Involves celebrities.

The definition of News has been simplified in the lesson for the students. The lesson says:

News is something which hardly anyone knows yet, or has recently happened. A bomb has exploded for example, or Michael Jackson is dead.

A lot of press photographers who work in difficult circumstances like war zones, famines and natural disasters are motivated by the desire to let the rest of the world know what's going on. Because then the world might just be able to do something about the situation.

A press photo almost always depicts news. If it doesn't deal with "spot news" - something sensational that just occurred which hardly anyone knows about or has seen anything about - then the subject of the photo is likely to be something that only a very few people are aware of. The series of portraits in the interrogation rooms in the Ukraine, at this year's exhibition, is a good example of that. Another possibility is that the photo takes a fresh new look at a familiar subject, such as the series about rhinoceros or the stylistic photos of the world swimming championships.

Press photos are photos taken by photojournalists in accordance with journalistic codes of conduct. A press photo shows the reality as it existed when the photo was taken - nothing in the photo may be manipulated. Press photographers limit themselves to documenting the world around them, and in this way they distinguish themselves from fine art and commercial photographers. One exception to this is the portrait. When shooting a portrait, the photographer is permitted to get more involved in the situation and render the subject of the portrait in the way he or she wants to.

A press photo shares the state of the world with the viewer and makes the viewer a witness.
conflict, and a photojournalist should also show that there are multiple sides to the story. When there aren’t so many photojournalists available on site to cover a story, this responsibility is even greater. He or she is then the only one that can tell the world what’s happening, and the viewer or the reader has to be able to trust that the journalist that the journalist is not being biased, and is telling the full story.

A photojournalist should constantly be looking at things with a critical eye as well. For just as you would rather look good than look bad in a photo yourself, so would everyone else. Everyone would like to keep bad things about themselves secret, and could set out to ruin someone else’s reputation by spreading lies about them. Sometimes people will put on a dramatic show for photojournalists in the hope that the photo will appear in the newspaper and end up making the other side look bad. In this case the photo wouldn’t depict reality, but would instead be a lie. It’s the press photographer’s responsibility to figure out whether what they are shooting is true or not. This is why press photographers should thoroughly familiarize themselves with the place that they are working in, and with the circumstances and the people that they are covering.

However, press photos are often rather subjective. His view of the world can sometimes be recognised in the photos. A photographer who believes the president to be a dictator is likely to opt for the photo which depicts him as one, making it easier for the reader to recognize him as one too.

The photos of child brides in Yemen are a useful example in explaining this subjectivity. The photos were taken by an American photographer who is often involved in human rights and gender issues. Her view of child brides is a Western view. Photographers from the Middle East may have a totally different attitude towards the subject and would probably create a different series.

Often it’s the case that a regime or an organization doesn’t want journalists and press photographers documenting what’s going on. They are often afraid of things being revealed that will end up making people angry - people who might then choose to interfere with the status quo. Some countries require press photographers to be registered before they can enter the country. In this way the authorities can keep track of what they might be investigating. Sometimes press photographers get deported from the country, and sometimes they are imprisoned. It can also happen that a journalist or a press photographer is murdered because they are on the trail of something that others would prefer to keep secret. Freedom of the press means that journalists and press photographers have the freedom to report on any significant event without being restricted in their efforts, and without being taken prisoner or murdered.

A good way to illustrate freedom of the press is by telling the story behind the iconic photo above. In 1989, Charlie Cole traveled to China to report on protests that were being held there by students demanding democratic reforms. The protests ended up being crushed in a bloody crackdown by the army. Cole took the now renowned photo of a young man standing opposite a column of People’s Liberation Army tanks in Tiananmen Square (Gate of Heavenly Peace).

At that time, China was a country that was very closed-off from the rest of the world. News that did manage to make it out of the country came for the most part from the ruling Communist Party. This photo changed that. It showed the world how dissatisfied the Chinese people had become with the situation in their country. Cole took the photo from a window of his hotel room that looked out onto the square. Agents of the Chinese secret police later raided his hotel room,
seizing his rolls of film as well as his passport. But Cole had managed to hide the roll with the images of the man standing in front of the tanks in a plastic container, and stash it in the toilet tank. Later he sent the roll to the Associated Press and to the American magazine Newsweek.

In 2011, it was not easy for journalists reporting on the Arab Spring in some countries. Those in power often attempted to obstruct them, by making internet access difficult or even impossible, refusing access to journalists or even worse: detaining or even attacking journalists. The Egyptian regime took an Al Jazeera satellite from the air for example and temporarily imprisoned journalists working for the network. The station’s office in Cairo was set on fire, probably by supporters of president Mubarak. The regime in Syria hunted down journalists, imprisoned them and deported them from the country. Some people claim that the regime used physical violence to do so. Photographer Rémi Ochlik, whose series on the uprising in Libya can be seen at this year’s World Press Photo exhibition, was killed in Homs on 22 February 2012. He was there to report on the Syrian uprising, and was killed in a bombardment on a small media centre set up by rebels next to the hospital. British journalist Marie Colvin was also in the centre and she too died on the spot.

Landline telephones were no longer operational in Homs. Government troops apparently searched for signals from mobile phones, and then carried out an air attack on those positions. The bombardment of the media centre was therefore very probably a conscious attack on journalists by the media.

The media publish photos to help illustrate the news and to prove that something actually happened. But they also do this to draw attention to something, or to evoke an emotional response. Press photos should offer us a view of (a portion of) reality. When publishing a photo, newspaper and magazine editors need to be confident that the photo is an accurate representation of the event. After all, any journalistic medium derives its right to exist from the credibility of the news that it delivers.

News media are increasingly using amateur photography to cover the news. More and more people are carrying mobile phones equipped with cameras, which allows amateur eyewitnesses to document events as they happen, often even before a photojournalist can get to the scene. This has led news agencies such as Associated Press (AP) and Reuters to strike deals with amateur photo websites like iStockphoto or Flickr. This year’s Special Mention at the World Press Photo is the image of Muammar Gaddafi being pulled onto a military vehicle. The picture is a still from a video filmed using a mobile phone.

The use of amateur-produced images, however, does entail risks. How can a newspaper or news website determine the reliability of these images? What if someone staged the photo in order to damage someone else’s reputation? This is why the source of these photos needs to be thoroughly checked out by the editors. And you should keep a critical eye to this as well: In what publication am I seeing this photo? Is this a reliable medium? Is this photo telling the whole story, or just a part of it? This is why it’s also good to read the caption and any news copy that accompanies the photo as well; don’t limit yourself to just looking at the photo.

World Press Photo is an independent nonprofit organization, founded in the Netherlands in 1955. Its main aim is to support and promote the work of professional press photographers internationally. Each year, World Press Photo invites press photographers throughout the world to participate in the World Press Photo Contest, the premier annual international competition in press photography. There were 101,254 photos entered this year, by 5,247 photographers from 124 countries. All photographs were judged by an independent international jury composed of professionals recognized in the field of photojournalism. They awarded prizes to 57 photographers from 24 countries.

Winning images are displayed in an annual exhibition that visits 100 locations in some 45 countries, and is seen by around 3 million people worldwide. The yearbook featuring the prize-winning entries is published annually in seven languages. Educational projects also play an important role in World Press Photo’s activities. The annual Joop Swart Masterclass is aimed at talented
photographers at the start of their careers, and seminars and workshops open to individual photographers, photo agencies and picture editors are organized in developing countries. For more information on World Press Photo and the prizewinning images and photographers, and for an updated exhibition schedule, please visit: www.worldpressphoto.org.

The World Press Photo of the Year 2011 is the portrait of Fatima al-Qaws and her son Zayed, taken by Spanish photographer Samuel Aranda (1979) for The New York Times.

Fatima al-Qaws cradles her son Zayed (18), who is suffering from the effects of tear gas after participating in a street demonstration, in Sanaa, Yemen, on 15 October. Ongoing protests against the 33-year-long regime of authoritarian President Ali Abdullah Saleh escalated that day. Witnesses said that thousands marched down Zubairy Street, a main city thoroughfare, and were fired on when they reached a government checkpoint near the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Some demonstrators retreated, others carried on and were shot at again. At least 12 people were killed and some 30 injured. Ms Qaws - who was herself involved in resistance to the regime - found her son after a second visit to look for him, among the wounded at a mosque that was being used as a temporary field hospital. Zayed remained in a coma for two days after the incident. He was injured on two further occasions, as demonstrations continued. On 23 November, President Saleh flew to Saudi Arabia, and signed an agreement transferring power to his deputy, Abdurabu Mansur Hadi. Saleh’s rule ended formally when Hadi was sworn in as president, following an election, on 25 February 2012.

Jury chairman Aidan Sullivan wrote as follows about the selection of the winning photo:

“...and the judges enjoyed the space to evaluate and debate the images. As we moved closer to the final rounds, we began to discuss the Arab Spring, the tsunami, and the other major events that defined 2011. Despite all the tragedy and grief, we hoped we might find an image of hope, an image that might not only reflect the events of the year, but also inspire, and offer solace.

It seemed to us that the Arab Spring was about the people - the courage of ordinary, brave people who helped create an important chapter in the history of the Middle East. Much has already been written and said about the winning image by Samuel Aranda and its resemblance to the Pietà. And the photo does evoke pity - it shows a poignant, compassionate moment, the human consequence of an enormous event. A timeless image of a mother cradling her courageous son. It is a photograph that will be remembered, and one that, when we look back at this book and the events of 2011, will remind us of the people who risked all to strive for what they believe in.”

How did you become interested in photography, and in photojournalism?

“When I was a teenager I did graffiti, and I started to take pictures of my work. So the move into photography happened almost by accident. I went on to photograph the suburbs of Barcelona, where I was born. I’d always been involved with social movements and squatters, and there were lots of immigrants in my neighborhood. I began documenting the neighborhood, and sold the photos to newspapers. So photojournalism was there from the beginning. For me, it was a way of documenting issues that I thought needed to be brought into the open and noticed.”

You grew up in Barcelona, and are now based in Tunisia. How did that move come about?

“I’m attracted to the social culture of the Arab world. People seem more open and friendly. It’s a society with a sense of community. In January 2011, I went to Tunisia to photograph the revolution. While I was there, I visited a small village called Sidi Bou Said. It’s a beautiful place near the sea, a good base in the region, life’s...
less expensive there than in Barcelona, and the situation is calm now. So I discussed it with my girlfriend, and we moved.”

How did you come to be in Yemen?
“The New York Times needed a photographer there, but it was really difficult getting press visas at the time. So I worked for a few weeks on a way to get into the country, and managed to find a ‘back door’. But it was important to me to feel that I had the support from my editors, and it really wouldn’t have been possible without the work of the photo team at The New York Times. In the end, I spent almost three months in Yemen - between October and the end of December 2011. As far as I know, there were very few other foreign photojournalists working in Yemen at the time, maybe only four or five. Local photographers helped me a lot during my time there. It was challenging, not only getting into the country without official permission, but remaining there and working. But that’s not really relevant. As photojournalists we know that taking risks is part of the job. The important thing is the people we photograph, the people who suffer every day.”

Can you describe the circumstances around the winning photo?
“I took the photo on 15 October. That morning, things were calm. Almost every day, anti-government protesters had been marching in the capital Sanaa, calling for democracy and demanding that President Ali Abdullah Saleh step down and be prosecuted. Suddenly, the mood changed, as pro-government snipers started to shoot at the protesters. Also, tanks were firing missiles near ‘Change Square’, where the protesters were based. I went to take shelter at the mosque that the protesters were using as a makeshift hospital, and in the middle of all this chaos, I found Ms al-Qaws holding her 18-year-old son Zayed in her arms. She was so calm, caring for Zayed. I took a few photos, and then people came to take him into the hospital for treatment. Twelve people were killed, and more than 30 wounded that day.”

What does the photo mean for you?
“For me, the photo shows the intensity of feeling between Fatima al-Qaws and Zayed, and it encourages those who see it - perhaps mothers especially - to think about people, and not the niqab, about the prejudice that we in the West have regarding the Arab world. When I returned to Yemen in February 2012, people I met said how happy they were about the award, and that Yemen was being talked about in the media again. I wanted to try to find Fatima and Zayed. Some friends helped me contact them, and we met in their home. Fatima said she was glad the photo showed that just because you wear a niqab, it doesn’t mean you are a terrorist. And both she and Zayed were happy with the renewed media interest in Yemen because of the award, and felt that the photo would help the cause of the revolution. Meeting Fatima and Zayed in these circumstances was an amazing experience. Something I’ll remember for the rest of my life.”

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> Charlie Cole
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