If you are accompanying students to the World Press Photo 13 exhibition, the ‘My Album’ workbook will help them get more out of the exhibition. All the questions have been designed so that discussions will arise spontaneously as your students are studying the photographs. By answering the questions, the students will learn what news is, what press photography is, and what freedom of the press means. They will also learn how to see more in the photographs they are viewing. It’s up to you if you want to discuss the answers with them afterwards.

The lesson consists of general questions and supplementary questions. The detailed questions are intended for the older students who work quickly, and for students who will stay at the exhibition for longer than normal (more than an hour). You are the best judge of whether your students can handle the supplementary questions, but tell them beforehand if you want them to answer them.

To help you with any discussions you have before and/or after the exhibition, and to answer any questions during the exhibition itself, here is some more information about press photography, news, the winning photograph and the World Press Photo organisation.
News tells us about an event or situation that meets one or more of the following criteria:

- It’s different from the normal situation
- Little or nothing is known about it yet
- It’s important for the reader or viewer to know about it
- To the reader or viewer, it feels as though it happened somewhere close by
- It’s about a contemporary theme
- It has a big impact
- It evokes emotions and excitement in the reader/viewer
- It concerns well-known people

In the lesson for the students, the definition of news has been simplified. This is what it says in the lesson:

Press photos are not like photos used in advertising or art photos. Press photos show us news. Everyone has their own ideas about what news is exactly, but two things are important:

- News is something that hardly anyone knows about yet, and that has just happened. For example, that there has been an earthquake, or that Osama Bin Laden has just been killed.
- News is something that has a huge impact for a lot of people. For example, an epidemic has broken out. Or the banks are in trouble, so that people may lose their savings.

It’s difficult to give a brief description of ‘news’. What one person considers to be news may not be at all important for another person. The hottest news item in Buenos Aires, may not be news at all in Beijing.

Because so much is happening all the time all around the world, it’s impossible for the media to broadcast or publish everything. This is why editorial teams and press agencies use the above guidelines to help them make a quick selection of the news. For example, an item is more likely to be labelled as news if the event is exciting or totally new, or if it concerns important or famous people. Sometimes these guidelines for news are extremely specific. A fire will be considered news by some media if it has caused at least a million dollars’ worth of damage for example, and a traffic accident is news if people have been killed or more than a certain number of people have been wounded.

The reader – and therefore the medium – is also a significant factor when deciding what news is. The readers of the Financial Times for example will be more than averagely interested in economics, and will therefore consider events in the financial sector and in industry to be more important than events in other fields. But a website about the wellbeing of animals will have the collapse of the roof of a chicken farm as its leading news item.

Press photographs that have been taken by photo journalists must comply with the journalistic codes. These journalists record what they see, and are not allowed to manipulate or stage what is happening in front of the camera. A press photograph must always portray the truth. And the photographer is not allowed to edit the photo once it has been taken, or if they do, then only slightly. The rule is: the content of the photo must not be changed by manipulating it afterwards. But the boundary between what is acceptable and what is not acceptable can be very thin. For example, adjusting the contrast of a photo is generally accepted, but making the background so dark that you cannot see it anymore is considered to be going too far by many people.

Press photography is different from art and advertising photography because it shows reality. An exception to this rule is portrait photography. In a portrait, photographers are allowed to alter the situation and to show the person or persons being portrayed in the way they wish to portray them.

A press photo shows the viewer the state of the world, making the viewer part of the event itself. The main driving force for many press photographers who work in extremely difficult circumstances, like war zones or areas in the world where famine or natural disasters occur, is: to show the world what is happening. Because maybe there’s a chance that the world can help.

A press photo always shows news. If it’s not about a recent or remarkable event, then it’s about a subject or story that very few people know about. The series on basketball players in Somalia and the series about sex workers in Italy, which are featured in this year’s exhibition, are good examples of this. Another category of press photo is the one where background reports are added to the news. Such as the Victims of Love series, about a mother and daughter in Afghanistan whose ex-husband and father threw acid at them, disfiguring them. Or the series about the whale shark, showing how human actions harm the living environment of this species.

It is the press photographer’s responsibility to take photos and to select a balanced view of the subject, just like a journalist writer has to do. Just as a journalist writer has to show both sides of a conflict, a photo journalist also has to show that there are more sides to the same story. This responsibility increases as the number of journalists and photo journalists decreases. He or she is then the only person who can show what is happening and the viewer or reader has to be able to trust that the journalist is being objective and is informing the public fully.

This means that a photo journalist must always remain critical. Is the regime trying to hide information? Is the government leader really as healthy as he looks or has he just left his hospital bed for the photo to be taken? Have the angry demonstrators been paid by the regime? Have the victims of demolished buildings been deliberately removed from the images of the streets? Many wars are also fought via the media. The world’s outrage can help to get extra support on your side. It’s simple to organise a demonstration just for the news station cameras. It’s the job of a good press photographer to show this aspect too, to provide a context.

The ethical code of behaviour for journalists is laid down in the Code of Bordeaux, drawn up by The International Federation of Journalists in 1954. These are four of the nine principles:

1. Respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist.
2. The journalist shall observe professional secrecy regarding the source of information obtained in confidence.
3. The journalist shall be aware of the
danger of discrimination being furthered by the media, and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such (…).

4. The journalist shall regard as grave professional offences the following: plagiarism, slander, libel, calumny, unfounded accusations, acceptance of a bribe in any form (…).

Subjectivity

Of course press photos are also always subjective. A photo will often tell you about the photographer’s ideas about specific issues and his view on the world. Has the outstretched helping hand been removed from the photo or not? Is the photo of the old man taken from above, making him look insignificant, or from below, making him look physically powerful?

The photos of the gay and lesbian couples in Vietnam are a perfect example of this subjectivity. In Vietnam homosexuality is barely accepted. In 2012, the government announced that it was considering making it legal for same-sex couples to marry. Despite the public debate that this initiated, polls indicated that the majority of Vietnamese continue to oppose gay marriage. These photos from the series about gay and lesbian couples are highly intimate and tender. The couples are portrayed in their domestic setting, showing the gentle and natural attention they have for each other. By photographing the couples in this way, photographer Maika Elan is making a clear stand: gay and lesbian couples are just very ordinary couples.

Freedom of the press

Freedom of the press means that journalists and press photographers can report on all important events without being obstructed in any way, without being taken prisoner or being murdered.

Freedom of the press is laid down in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It states: ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.’

It often happens that a regime or an organisation does not want journalists or press photographers to come to their country to record what is happening. In some countries, press photographers have to register when they enter the country. This way, the government can monitor the issues the photographers are dealing with. Sometimes, press photographers are deported, on other occasions they are put in prison or kidnapped. Reporters without Borders (www.rsf.org) maintains a list of how many journalists are murdered every year. In 2012, 89 were killed, mostly journalists in the Middle East. The story behind the iconic photo shown above is a good example of what freedom of the press is.

In 1989, photographer Charlie Cole travelled to China to report on the student demonstrations for democratic reforms. The army put an end to the demonstrations through violence, causing many casualties. Cole took the famous photo of a young man on Tiananmen Square standing in front of a row of tanks of the People’s Liberation Army. At that time, China was an extremely isolated country. Any news that extended past the country’s borders originated almost always from the ruling communist party. This photo changed all that. The photo showed the world how dissatisfied the Chinese people were with the situation in their country. Cole took the photo from a hotel room that overlooked the square. Later, Chinese secret service agents stormed into his room and took all of Cole’s rolls of film and his passport. They didn’t know that Cole had hidden the roll of film with the photos of the young man in front of the tanks in a plastic tube in the toilet tank. He succeeded in sending it to the AP press agency and the American magazine Newsweek.

World Press Photo

World Press Photo is an independent nonprofit organisation that was founded in the Netherlands in 1955. Its most important goal is to support and promote the work of professional press photographers on an international scale. Over the years, World Press Photo has grown to become an independent platform for photo journalism and the free exchange of information. In order to achieve its goals, every year World Press Photo organizes the biggest, most prestigious photography competition in the world for press photographers.

This year, 5,666 photographers from 124 different countries sent in 103,481 photographs. They were judged by an independent international jury consisting of acknowledged professionals in the field of press photography. The jury awarded prizes to 54 photographers from 33 countries. The prize-winning photos are included in this travelling exhibition, which is visited every year by some 3 million people at more than 100 locations in 45 countries. A yearbook appears annually in six languages. As well as organising the extensive exhibition programme, World Press Photo also closely follows all the developments in the field of photo journalism. Educational projects also play a key role in the activities of the organisation. In developing countries, seminars and workshops are held that are accessible for individual photographers, photo agencies and image curators. In the Netherlands, World Press Photo organises the annual Joop Swart Masterclass, especially for talented photographers at the start of their career. They receive practical instructions and professional advice from prominent professional photographers.

The World Press Photo website, www.worldpressphoto.org, contains all the winning stories in their entirety, including the technical information about the photos, information about the photographers, and interviews with some of the winners. You can also view prize-winning multimedia productions there and of course more information about the organisation. To view the lesson, go to www.worldpressphoto.org/schoolvisits.
The photo shows a group of men carrying the dead bodies of two children through the city streets of Gaza. They are being taken to the mosque for the burial ceremony, and the body of their father is being carried on a stretcher. The two-year-old Suhaib Hijazi and his elder brother Muhammed were killed when their house was destroyed by an Israeli air attack. Their mother was taken to Intensive Care. The photo was taken on 20 November 2012 by the Swedish photographer Paul Hansen.

Paul Hansen lives in Stockholm and is employed by the Swedish daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter. Hansen has won many prizes during his career: in 2010 and 2013 he was chosen by Pictures of the Year International (POYi) as Photographer of the Year, he was Photographer of the Year in Sweden seven times, and he was twice awarded first prize by the American National Press Photographers Association (NPPA).

How did you become interested in photography and photo journalism?
“I started getting interested in photography as a child, long before I had ever heard of the term photo journalism, and then an uncle gave me a camera. For me, photography meant having access to the world; it turned out to be my way of seeing the world and investigating it. Photo journalism and telling more complex stories came automatically during my first job at Göteborgs Tidningen.”

Can you give us some idea of the background to your winning photo?
“The story of this photo began for me the night before I took it. A Norwegian doctor told me about an attack on a house earlier that evening, in which three people had been killed: a father and his two sons. The doctor was worried about how he was going to tell the mother, who had survived, that her husband and sons had been killed and that their house had been demolished. I could hardly keep back my tears when I heard that. But it was just one story out of many similar stories that night. The next morning, I reviewed the events of the coming day with a journalist. There was a funeral planned in Jabaliya.

In the local mortuary, various families would be collecting their dead. We decided to report on one of the funerals and followed the funeral procession, which – according to the custom – would take the deceased first to their home, and then to the mosque and the cemetery. We followed the procession for a while, but no-one could find the family’s home. That’s when I realised that this was the Hijazi family I had been told about the night before. So there was no house left for them to go to. After a while, the mourners came to an alley, which was so narrow that they had to walk behind one another. I went to the front and walked backwards along with the procession, waiting for the sunlight to be reflected on the walls, which added extra light to the scene.
It was a terrible day. It’s always hard to report on funerals, especially if children are involved. I’ve got a daughter of my own, which made the scene even more heartbreaking.”