Catherine Opie was born in Sandusky, Ohio in 1961. When she was almost nine, she discovered the work of photographer Lewis Hine, who documented the plight of child laborers at the turn of the 20th century. Inspired by Hine’s photographs, she requested a camera for her ninth birthday, and was given a Kodak Instamatic by her parents. She immediately began photographing her family and neighborhood, exhibiting a fascination with community that continues to this day. Opie notes, “basically what I did then, and I still do is wander around with my camera to describe my relationship to the world and where I live.”

When she was 18 Opie moved to San Francisco to study photography at the San Francisco Art Institute. After graduating in 1985, she enrolled in the MFA program at CalArts in Valencia. Her thesis project Master Plan examined the planned communities of Valencia, from house construction and advertisement schemes, to homeowner regulations and the homes of residents.

In 1989 Opie moved to Los Angeles and began working as an artist, supporting herself until 1994 as a lab technician at the University of California, Irvine. As her work became more well-known she accepted teaching positions and residencies at such institutions as the St. Louis Museum of Art; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and Yale University. In 2002 she was offered a tenured position at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Opie uses her camera to examine the world around her, documenting community, decoding identity, and deciphering American culture. She has developed a contemporary approach to documentary photography and credits earlier photographers including Berenice Abbott, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and August Sander and among her greatest historical influences.

Although she is best known for her striking images of individuals from specific communities or subcultures, she has also consistently photographed the natural and urban landscapes that surround her. These bodies of work represent a different but related approach to her interest in community and identity—an interest that unifies all her projects to date, whether focused on gender and sexual identities, notions of community, or her singular vision of life in the USA.

“My work is really simple; I don’t have a lot of hidden agendas. It’s about place and identity and how they inform each other, and that includes myself; but iconic images need to be simple, powerful, and specific.”

Photo: Nicole Belle
“I always tell the people I’m photographing not to look at the lens but to look through the lens. I want them to look through you a little bit. I told them I wanted them to be in a really special place inside their heads, to be kind of dreamy and confident at the same time.”

Opie’s *Portraits* series, encompassing more than fifty photographs created between 1993 and 1997, synthesizes an approach that is at once grounded in documentary tradition and deeply personal. The subject matter is her community of gay and lesbian friends. As part of a community that is not represented in mainstream American culture, Opie sought to provide visibility and representation to her friends and the community at large.

Opie creates discrete bodies of work in series, each with specific parameters. *Portraits* reflects a typological tradition that can be traced from nineteenth-century archival documentation through August Sander’s *People of the 20th Century* project, which Opie has cited as an influence. Sander’s straightforward portraits, taken during the Weimar Republic, are frontal, centered in the frame, evenly lit, and present individuals organized by types such as “The Skilled Tradesman,” “Classes and Professions,” and “The Artists.” Although Opie’s photographs echo Sander’s in many ways, she is careful to present her subjects on their own terms, without a repressive system of labeling.

In the tradition of the Northern Renaissance court painter Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/98–1543), Opie isolates her subjects against vibrantly colored backgrounds of blue, brown, green, purple, or red. She says, “the colored backdrop allows your eye to go through the photograph in a different way than if it was, say, a person sitting in their house. It’s about separating the subject from their world, but still representing their world through their body.” The portraits are often three-quarter or bust-length shots, with the subjects standing or sitting, their eyes frequently locked with the lens in looks that range from boredom to defiance.

This highly formal style of composition is a means of paying tribute to her friends, who were unaccustomed to such dignified pictorial treatment. As Opie liked to think, “The photographs stare back, or they stare through you. They’re very royal. I say that my friends are like my royal family.”

Opie’s *Portraits* celebrate the bravery of her subjects’ decisions to craft their own identities in the face of restrictive social norms. The series documents this living community, rendering visible an otherwise invisible or misunderstood sector of American culture with characteristic respect and compassion.
Although photographs don’t always reveal reality, what are some of the characteristics that this portrait suggests about its subject? Write a brief character profile that includes what you imagine this person’s approximate age, livelihood, living situation, and hobbies might be.

This person’s eyes seem to be looking directly at the viewer. If you were to start a conversation with this person, what might be the dialogue?

Opie acknowledges the influence of Renaissance court painter Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/1498–1543) in her approach to these portraits and even refers to this series of photographs as her “royal family.” Compare Opie’s approach to Holbein’s painting of Sir Thomas More. What similarities do you notice? What differences do you see?

If Opie were to create your portrait, what pose would best portray you? Why? What color fabric would you prefer in the background? Why?

One of Opie’s motivations in creating this series was to depict her friends in a respectful and dignified way that replaced stereotypes. A stereotype is an exaggerated belief, image, or generalization about a person or group. Stereotypes are based on images in mass media, or ideas passed on by parents or peers. Once learned, stereotypes and prejudices resist change, even when evidence points to the contrary. What group do you feel is unfairly stereotyped by the media? Today’s kids, teenagers, an ethnic or religious group, etc. may come to mind. Explain the difference between the way this group is stereotyped and your personal experience of these individuals.

The Web site www.tolerance.org is dedicated to dismantling bigotry and creating communities that value diversity. The site offers resources for teachers, parents, teenagers, and kids, and includes a section titled “Hidden Bias: A Primer About Stereotypes and Prejudices” that discusses the effects of prejudice and stereotypes and what you can do to prevent them. For more information, visit: http://www.tolerance.org/hidden_bias/tutorials/index.html.

Opie presents a print to each of her subjects. Some display them proudly, while others are uncomfortable with their depictions. What is your favorite photograph of yourself? What is your least favorite? If possible make photocopies of both and write about what you most like—and dislike—about these representations.

Work with a partner to create a photographic portrait. Before taking the photograph decide what you will wear, and what your pose, facial expression, background, lighting, and cropping will be. How do these choices help to convey information about who you are?

Opie's Portraits series was informed by several sources, including the work of German photographer August Sander (1876–1964). Sander’s project, People of the 20th Century, was intended as a comprehensive photographic index of the German people. Over some forty years he photographed subjects from all walks of life. Although the Nazis banned the portraits in the 1930s because the subjects did not adhere to the ideal Aryan type, Sander continued to make photographs. The directness of Sander’s portraits continues to influence artists today. Research Sander’s work and discuss why the Nazi government felt that it should be destroyed.
Since the 1950s the California highway system has played a vital role in the formation and development of the Los Angeles metro area. During the mid-1990s Catherine Opie found herself using this highway system regularly. While commuting each day, Opie first began to notice the beauty of the interstate concrete. “I’d start watching these shapes and these forms, and I’d just be like, ‘God, you know, these are really kind of phenomenal structures.’ I thought about that for a good year before I went out with a camera and figured out how I wanted to do it.” The result was a new series of photographs that focuses on freeways as icons of Southern California.

Opie’s Freeways (1994–95) represent a departure from her previous work. Instead of the vibrant colors and vertical orientation of her earlier Portraits series, for Freeways Opie used a panoramic camera, and a labor-intensive platinum process to produce a series of forty small, matte, tonal images. Exhibited together, they look less like a journalistic photo-essay than a quiet, almost mournful meditation on the dubious success of a system that was conceived as a means of connecting suburban and urban areas. Opie herself states, “the freeways separate communities, but I would say that the biggest thing they do is separate the city from the suburb....”

In order to eliminate people and automobiles from her compositions, Opie photographed early on weekend mornings. Emptying the freeways stripped them of their functionality, providing a rare view of the structures themselves and highlighting their systematic organization. Opie imbued the works with a kind of timlessness, veering toward abstraction in her views of swooping overpasses set against muted skies. In many images the freeway structures look like all that remains of human culture in some post-apocalyptic future. As Opie has noted, the series bears a strong connection to the early photographs of the Egyptian pyramids taken by Maxime Du Camp in the mid-nineteenth century.

Opie had originally intended to print the Freeways in a large mural format, but when she reviewed her initial contact prints, she decided that the grandiose architecture would be more effective rendered small. Indeed, her images’ miniature scale and rich tonality lend them an intimacy that forces viewers to reconsider these structures, which, especially for an audience living in Southern California, govern their daily movements. The beauty and even tenderness with which Opie represents the freeways hints at a certain collective appreciation, a sense that they are a true common ground, what she has called “our monuments to Southern California.”
VIEW + DISCUSS
Show: Untitled #1 (Freeways), 1994

- As a class brainstorm a list of adjectives you would use to describe this image. Discuss the communal list—are there any surprises or disagreements?

- Opie herself seems to be ambivalent about these structures. While fully admiring their grandeur she also notices how they separate communities, and create demarcations between city and suburb. Depending on whether you live in the midst of a busy city, the suburbs, or a rural community this image may seem more or less familiar to you and may hold different associations. Discuss your response to this image. Is it primarily positive, negative, or mixed?

- In speaking about the Freeways, Opie says, “I was originally going to make them huge. But then I started looking at the contact prints, and I started thinking about that whole nineteenth-century language, and I realized that they had to be small.” Draw a rectangle that is 2 1/4 x 6 3/4 inches to represent the scale of this work. Do you agree with Opie’s choice? How would the impact of this photo change if it were very large?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Opie underscores the enormous mass of these structures by shooting the images from the ground to emphasize their looming monumentality. Imagine this image from other vantage points—as a traveler along the freeway or from a helicopter, surveying it from above. How does your point of view impact your response?

- Photograph a structure from various points of view:
  - As though you were an ant, looking up
  - From above as though you were a bird flying over
  - From a distance
  - Close-up

Strive to convey a different impact from each of these photos even though the subject remains the same. Share your results with your classmates and consider which vantage points are most effective and why.

- Opie has compared this series to the French photographer Maxime Du Camp’s documents of the pyramids that he took on a trip to Egypt in the mid-1800s. Discuss how Du Camp’s photo is similar to Opie’s and how it is different.

- Opie’s Freeways considers mortality and the passage of time. The lack of human presence in these photographs eerily suggests monuments of a glorious lost civilization haunted by long since departed inhabitants. Many artists, writers, and filmmakers have explored this futuristic theme. A recent book, The World Without Us by Alan Weisman, offers another look at humanity’s impact on the planet, and asks us to envision our earth post-humanity (http://www.worldwithoutus.com/index2.html). In any artistic medium, create your own vision of a world without human beings. Discuss your work and your response to this idea.

Du Camp, Maxime (1822–1894). Égypt Moyenne: pyramide de Chéops, (1852). Salted paper print, 15.5 x 20.5 cm on mount, 31 x 44.5 cm
Born out of Catherine Opie’s daily experience of Los Angeles, her first mini-mall photographs focused on those bordering Koreatown, the neighborhood where she was living at the time. *Mini-malls*, created between 1997 and 1998, signaled a turn toward a more deeply documentary approach in Opie’s work. Assuming the role of wanderer in the urban landscape of Los Angeles, she sought to record the city’s social life in one of its most ordinary manifestations, taking the generic architecture of the mini-mall to reflect the ever-shifting relationships in her city’s neighborhoods. By formulating a visual history of these vital yet barely acknowledged spaces, Opie hoped to capture a larger aspect of American culture, a “utopian notion of difference that is integral to the American dream.”

Photographing at dawn on Saturdays and Sundays, Opie was able to avoid the commercial activity that normally characterizes such spaces. The signs that identify individual stores and restaurants come to stand in for the actual populations and communities inhabiting the neighborhood.

Opie had intended to print the *Mini-malls* in a small format similar to the one she had used for *Freeways* but soon realized that enlarging the images would highlight the signage that pervades them. Reading these signs, viewers come to understand what an incredible range of ethnic and cultural positions are represented in the mini-malls. A Mexican-American restaurant with faux terra-cotta roofing stands next to a pagoda-like East West Bank; restaurants offering Thai-Chinese cuisine, barbeque, and falafel abut an Armenian ophthalmologist’s office and a Latino “service center” dispensing advice on income tax, immigration, divorce, and translation. To Opie, “the mini-malls are the essence of place, the new town center that shows the multi-cultural aspect of the city. They are not about the Starbucks and Noah’s Bagels and all the other chains that are so prevalent. . . .They are the Mom and Pop shops of the American Dream. More importantly they signify what ethnic neighborhood you have just entered, or exited, as you wander through the streets of Los Angeles.” Though some would argue that these structures are eyesores characteristic of urban blight, Opie seems to present them as signs of hope and change to be embraced as an integral part of the community.

“[They] mark the entrance and exits of various populations. They are not like mini-malls in the suburbs, which have chains like Starbucks and Jamba Juice. These are about the American dream for me. But they’re very fragile. They change almost overnight, and are often forgotten about, just like the freeways.”
Show: Untitled #2 (Mini-malls), 1997

- Create a list of all of the things you observe in this photograph. Use a magnifying glass if it will help you to see the details more clearly. What have you learned about this place by looking at it carefully?

- Have you ever seen a place similar to this? Where? Does it remind you of any place you have seen or visited? Explain.

- Opie made several very deliberate choices in creating the Mini-malls series. She shot in black and white rather than color; fit the entire strip of shops into the frame, including the parking lot, sidewalk, and accompanying bus-stop benches; and excluded people from the photographs. How do these choices effect the impact of this image? How would making other choices produce alternative meanings? Explain.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- What do the commercial areas in your community look like? As a class assignment photograph the storefronts in your neighborhood. Print them and look at them together. What do they collectively tell you about your community?

- Usually we document grand architecture, skyscrapers, bold and new designs, and historical landmarks, but Opie chooses to turn her camera on these humble—even ugly—mini-mall structures instead. What structures are important to your community? Explain your choices.

- Make an appointment to interview a storeowner or merchant in your community. If available, like Opie, choose a business that is not part of a large chain, for example an independent drugstore rather than Walgreens, or a corner pizza place rather than McDonalds. Create a list of interview questions that will help you to find out more about the business and its owners.
  - How long have they operated the business?
  - Why did they choose this location?
  - What are the satisfactions of owning this business? What are the challenges?

Add your own questions to this list. Share the information you learn with your classmates. Discuss what you discovered in the process.

- Catherine Opie uses a custom-made camera specially designed to take her panoramic shots, but even a novice can experiment with this elongated format by combining several slightly overlapping photos and piecing the panoramic scene together. Choose a subject and experiment with this technique. Share the results with your classmates.
“A family doesn’t have to be a mom and a dad and a kid. We build family and community in other ways, too.”

In 1998 Catherine Opie embarked (along with her dog) on a “great American road trip.” Over three months she completed a 9,000-mile journey across the United States photographing lesbian families and couples in their home environments. The resulting series of photographs titled Domestic (1995–98) presents these families involved in everyday household activities: relaxing in their backyard, hanging out in their kitchen, or playing with their children. There is no sensationalism here. These intimate photographs speak both to Opie’s identification with her subjects and to the overwhelming absence of such images in mainstream representations.

Domestic was Opie’s first major presentation of photographic subjects from outside of her regular daily experience. Nonetheless the series is deeply connected to her personal life. “My work is always close to home,” she has said, whether home is defined as the place where she lives, the houses of others, or the country she lives in. Domestic is part of her effort to make visible a virtually unrepresented, or misrepresented, sector of society. Lesbian couples and families are represented from nearly every region of the country. Nearly every race is also represented, as are old and young, rich and poor, urban and suburban. The domestic households shown comprise couples, parents with their children, and collectives. Photographing her sitters in their own homes, Opie carefully constructed images that appear as individual as their subjects, skillfully manipulating her large-format camera to create the effect of a snapshot, capturing people amid the daily routines of their lives. Added layers of meaning lie in the numerous details of her large format prints. For example, a plastic dollhouse and a white picket fence hint at myths of the traditional American home, while windows offer glimpses of the outside world from which these domestic spaces provide shelter.

Domestic is a photographic exploration into relationships that thrive in the privacy of the home, and presents a different perspective on the classic American dream that questions what constitutes the ideal home and the ideal family.
Describe this image as carefully as you can. What are some of the details you noticed only after a thorough examination?

What do you think this scene will look like 10 minutes from now? Explain your response.

Imagine that your first viewing of this room was without its occupants. Who would you imagine inhabited this space? Are they similar or different from the people you see here? Explain.

Imagine that the first time you encounter this family was while they were outside their home. How would you picture where they live? Would you imagine it to be similar or different from this setting? Explain your response.

Although at first glance this photograph may have the feeling of a candid snapshot, Opie actually combines elements that are carefully pre-planned with those that are more spontaneous. Which elements of this photograph appear to be staged, and which parts appear more impromptu? Explain your response.

- Work with two partners, each taking the role of one of the people in this photograph. Collaboratively write a short dialogue that suggests what they might be talking about, and then take on the posture of your character and perform the script for your classmates. Were the dialogues of your classmates similar or different from one another? How did various people in the class interpret what was being communicated?

- The “great American road trip” has served as inspiration for works of art and popular culture, providing a theme for many well-known books, films, and television programs. Research one or more of these works, and discuss how each is supported by the experience of the road trip.

  **BOOKS**
  - Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*, 1957
  - John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, 1962

  **FILMS**
  - *Easy Rider*, 1969
  - *Thelma and Louise*, 1991

  **TELEVISION PROGRAMS**
  - *Route 66*, 1960–64

- Create your own domestic photograph. Decide which elements of your household are most characteristic. Who should be included? What will they be doing? Where should they be situated? Carefully consider the lighting and environment, then take the picture. Share the photograph with your classmates and discuss how the decisions you made impart meaning to the photograph.

- According to recent census figures, approximately 1 million children are currently being raised by same-sex couples. There are many resources available including books, Web sites, and films that provide guidance for adults on how to speak with children about same-sex relationships and other gender related topics. The Resources section of this packet contains several suggestions.
“I concentrate on disturbing the devices that society imposes on variant communities to keep them ‘ghettoized’ by class, race, sexuality, and gender. It’s important that my work be seductive as a visual language, as I want to keep the viewer engaged. This allows for multiple readings which challenge viewers to consider both people and space in their various complexities.”

< ICEHOUSES AND SURFERS >

At first Catherine Opie’s series Icehouses (2001) and Surfers (2003) seem to be departures from her previous work, but with closer examination they hold many of the same interests that she has gravitated to throughout her career.

Icehouses are structures used to for ice fishing. They are brought out onto frozen lakes in the beginning of winter and removed before the ice melts at the end of the season. Some are constructed according to detailed plans, while others are thrown together in a more haphazard way. There are lakes with hundreds of icehouses on them each winter, and there are icehouses that stand alone without any other sign of human habitation in sight.

To create Icehouses, Opie traveled to northern Minnesota braving up to an hour of inclement weather for each exposure. Unlike her previous works focusing on architecture, here, the manmade forms are dominated by the natural landscape. Strewn across the flat surface of the lakes, the tiny shapes of the icehouses reflect the temporary nature of the community and the ever-changing relationships between ice fishers and the passing seasons.

In 2003 Opie once again surveyed California’s physical and cultural landscape. This time her gaze settled on a new subject, the surfers off the coast of Malibu, resulting in the series Surfers. In representing the Malibu surfers, Opie chose to pick up where Icehouses had left off, producing another series of color photographs with a constant horizon line. Once again the natural conditions of the landscape—here the early morning mist and fog rather than blinding snowstorms—frequently obscure the ostensible subjects of the images, rendering some of the photographs almost entirely abstract. More striking, hardly a single wave appears among the fourteen images in Surfers: Opie’s subjects seem forever afloat on a tranquil sea, primed to catch the perfect ride that may never come. Upending the heroic vision of surfers as daredevils suspended on the face of towering breakers, the artist focused on a seemingly marginal aspect of the sport, the long periods between waves that foster the conditions in which surfers bond as a surrogate family.

For Opie the most compelling aspects of surfing, like ice fishing, concern the formation of temporary communities that cut through the social divisions of life on the land.
VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: Untitled #6 (Icehouses), 2001 and Untitled #3 (Surfers), 2003

- Describe each photograph as carefully as possible. What appears to be going on in each image?
- The pastimes of ice fishing and surfing may or may not be familiar to you. What do you know about each activity? What can you learn about them by carefully examining these photographs?
- Compare the two photographs. What do they have in common? What are their differences?
- Describe the relationship between humans and nature in each photograph.
- Imagine yourself in each of these landscapes and write a paragraph from the point of view of one of the surfers bobbing in the water or an inhabitant of one of the icehouses. Share your writing with your classmates. How were their descriptions similar or different from yours?
- Describe how this depiction of surfers differs from how they are usually portrayed.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- We rarely consider how many varied communities we belong to. Catherine Opie is an artist, a teacher, a mother, and an active participant in her community. Some communities require that you pass a test or pay dues to join, while you are a part of some communities the moment you are born. Make a list of all the communities that you belong to, and discuss the commonalities that hold each of these communities together.

- Opie has frequently photographed communities that she belongs to, but for both Icehouses and Surfers she chose to focus on communities where she was an outsider. All around us are communities that we do not belong to. Choose one of these communities and learn more about them through interviews and research, then decide how you might create a photograph that reflects what you have learned.

- Catherine Opie created Icehouses during an artist residency at the Walker Art Center. As part of this project people were invited to contribute stories and poetry to the Walker Art Center’s Web site focusing on ice fishing experiences. One contributor, Glenn Stimler recalls his experience of ice fishing as a six year old. Visit http://www.walkerart.org/archive/C/9E13590A80C1A3226169.htm to read his story and the accounts of others. Then think about a vivid experience that you have had in nature and write or draw about it.

- To see a brief video of people ice fishing visit http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QnfxMNaNuU. Is this a pastime that you think you might enjoy? Explain your response.
“I started photographing when I was nine. I recently reprinted my first two rolls of film, and I realized that nothing had really changed. I’m still doing portraits; I’m still doing houses. I’m still doing things in the neighborhood…I documented my whole neighborhood when I was nine…Taking photographs is all I’ve ever wanted to do. It’s how I think.”

In and Around Home (2004–05) is Opie’s most personal series. It invites us into the artist’s day-to-day surroundings and allows us to engage with various components of her everyday life. This includes the interior and safety of her home, the community that she lives in, and the jarring and unexpected moments that can invade and startle our everyday calm. The images show how information and current events make their way into this domestic setting through television, newspapers, and community response. The series focuses on family, but also acknowledges the local, national, and global forces that enter and act upon it.

The photograph Sunday Morning Breakfast shows Opie’s son Oliver as he plays with two dogs. It is early morning and we can see his half-eaten breakfast on a plate. No family is isolated from the world that surrounds it, and the series explores this porous boundary through the inclusion of Polaroids that focus on the most common way that the outside world enters the home: through television news media. Shot off the TV screen, the Polaroids preserve the most fleeting of visual information, including glimpses of the 2004 presidential debates between George W. Bush and John Kerry, coverage of Terry Schiavo’s impending euthanasia, and in one late work, the flooding of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. The images of current events signify the larger world coursing through the lives of Opie, her family, and her neighbors.

As Opie stated in a 2006 interview, “Life is very complex . . . and I think that we forget that we have these ways of containing everything . . . one of the things I wanted this body of work to do is move you in and out . . . . I’m a tenured professor at UCLA. I have a wonderful family. I own a home . . . . Should I be complacent at this point because I’m living my American Dream? And I feel that as an artist it’s my responsibility not to be completely complacent, to try to create a weave of complexity through images and looking at the world, and ideas of the history of photography as well as the history of culture . . . and to still stay really aware of that and give that back to an audience.”
View + Discuss

Show: Sunday Morning Breakfast, 2004

Before showing the image, tell students that they are about to see a photograph titled Sunday Morning Breakfast. Ask them to imagine the photo that they expect to see, and perhaps do a quick sketch to document their ideas. Brainstorm a list of all the things they think will be included.

Show Sunday Morning Breakfast. How is it similar to your expectations? How is it different? How many of the things on the list are in the photo?

Describe your response to a Sunday morning breakfast at Catherine Opie's house. What does this photograph suggest to you about her home, her family, her lifestyle?

Would you like to be invited over for Sunday morning breakfast at Opie's house? Explain your response.

Further Explorations

• What is Sunday morning like at your house? Each student should create a Sunday morning breakfast photograph and/or essay that reflects their own personal experience. Bring them into class and review them together. What are the similarities? What are the differences? What are the surprises?

• In this series Opie intersperses 16 x 20-inch full-color photographs of her home, family, and neighborhood with 4 3/16 x 3 1/2-inch Polaroids of images from the television news. Why might she make this distinction and use different media to capture these moments?

• In and Around Home documents a series of moments that occur inside Opie's home, in her neighborhood, and those that are transmitted into her home via television. Although news events enter our consciousness daily through a steady stream of media, certain extraordinary events penetrate our usual immunity and we remember forever where we were when we became aware of them. For one generation of Americans it was the bombing of Pearl Harbor, for another it was the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Another generation remembers the attack on the World Trade Center. Have you ever had your everyday life interrupted or surprised by an important news event? When was it? What was it? Tell the story of that moment.

• Opie has said, “I’m kind of a twisted social documentary photographer.” She acknowledges the early influence of several American documentary photographers including Lewis Hine (1874–1940), Dorothea Lange (1895–1966), Walker Evans (1903–1975), Berenice Abbott (1898–1991), Margaret Bourke-White (1904–1971) and Helen Levitt (b. 1913). Research the work of one of these photographers and compare their approach to Opie's.
RESOURCES

ON CATHERINE OPIE


www.aldrichart.org/exhibitions/past/c-opie.php
Video of Catherine Opie and curator Jessica Hough interviewed on the ABC News program The Influentials

www.guggenheim.org/artscurriculum
Catherine Opie: American Photographer – Resource Unit for Teachers

http://www.ocma.net/pdfs/catherineopielessonplan.pdf
Teacher Guide (PDF): Catherine Opie: In and Around Home – Pre-visit Activities for High School Students, Orange County Museum of Art

ON PHOTOGRAPHY


ON DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY


http://education.eastmanhouse.org/discover/kits/
George Eastman House: Educational Materials Focusing on Photography and Photographers

ON SOCIAL JUSTICE

http://www.tolerance.org
Southern Poverty Law Center. Teaching Tolerance. Teaching Tolerance is dedicated to reducing prejudice, improving intergroup relations and supporting equitable school experiences for our nation’s children

http://www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?p=0&ar=821&pa=6
ABCs of Sexual Orientation: Suggested resource materials for teachers and students

All works by Catherine Opie appear courtesy of the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles.
**DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY** Photographs that provide a record of social and political situations with the aim of conveying information.

**KODAK INSTAMATIC** A series of inexpensive, easy-to-load cameras made by Kodak beginning in 1963. The Instamatic was immensely successful, introducing a generation to low-cost photography.

**PLATINUM PROCESS** An archival and rare form of photography valued for its broad scale of tones from black to white and its permanence.

**POLAROID CAMERA** A photo process that develops a small positive print within seconds.