



See life differently.

“The true voyage of discovery exists not in seeking new landscapes
but in having new eyes.”

– Marcel Proust

v. 2.03

www.theviewfinderproject.org



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Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in The Viewfinder Project! It is my hope and my belief that this project will open the eyes of your students to the world in a brand new way.

The first two lessons of this project takes students through a very particular process of identifying, through photos, what they both like and dislike about the world around them, the space where they spend their day-to-day life. Students are introduced to the idea that if we as people could change how we look at the world around us, using our minds and our eyes, then we might create for ourselves an entirely different experience and therefore a different life for ourselves in years to come. Upon completing the first lesson, students inevitably have taken something that is ugly and made it beautiful using a few composition tips. This is my favorite lesson because it teaches students that they have the power of redemption within themselves, to transform what was once ugly into something beautiful and good.

The remaining lessons are very specific in subject matter with the intent of helping to train the students' eyes to notice the details in the world around them. A trained eye can see beauty anywhere and everywhere, photos just waiting to be captured. When we train our eyes to see the photos around us, what begins to happen is that we start to see the world around us in a new way. We start to notice things we have never seen previously. And then we start looking for new ways of seeing the world around us. The ways in which we perceive the world around us changes and we begin looking for alternate choices and views.

So often we think we understand people, cultures, or situations that we need to look no further. On the contrary, most of what we encounter in life requires further thought and investigation. Living life requires great creativity and requires us to pay attention! Creativity allows us to create alternative situations for ourselves than simply what has been handed down to us. **But creativity requires the ability and desire to "see life differently."** Everyone is capable of this if they so choose.

When given his first camera for a National Geographic photo shoot, Dewitt Jones was charged to "go and find what's right with the world." This is the charge for all of us in life.

As you complete The Viewfinder Project, please let me know what you learned through the process. This curriculum is made available to you at no expense. My only request is that you keep in touch and that you send me as many original digital copies of your photos the students took as is possible along with copies of the corresponding student consent forms and completed follow-up questionnaires.

The Viewfinder Project is designed to develop relationships between caring adults and children who need more caring adults in their lives. It is my desire that The Viewfinder Project will help forge new sustaining partnerships and relationships in your community for both you and your students. And it is my hope that you are enriched alongside your students as you take this journey together.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Beth Jackson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Beth Jackson

Founder, The Viewfinder Project



DESIRED OUTCOMES

Before beginning The Viewfinder Project, it is important that you understand the outcomes we hope students to have achieved upon completion of both Parts I and II of the project. It is our hope that students will be have learned:

1. how to operate a camera
2. how to better compose photographs
3. following instructions is important for positive results
4. how to identify what they think is beautiful (as opposed to what others tell us is beautiful)
5. learning the fundamentals of how to do something is important and can help to understand when it is appropriate to stray from the rules
6. there are other students who share a common vision or interest in photography, in making positive changes personally and/or in the community
7. to look at people and objects in new ways understanding that this will lead to a greater understanding of people and ourselves
8. that photography allows us to embrace media in a creative, proactive way
9. we all play a role in determining our own futures by using creative thinking
10. there are adults who care about them and who are committed to helping them succeed
11. there is beauty to be found in everything and everyone

****LIFE itself is a choice. Every day we must make choices that affect us either for the good or for the bad.****




HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM GUIDE


The Viewfinder Project targets children between the ages of 8-14 years. Each lesson includes a modifications section should you need to adapt a lesson for the older or younger part of that age bracket.


We recommend that The Viewfinder Project lessons be conducted with no more than 20 students at a time. Because of the time it will take you as a facilitator to go through photos on a weekly basis, archive space, and finances, 20 students is the maximum per class.

Avoid “pack photography” by students. “Pack photography” is when students go around together in a pack taking the exact same photos as each other. This is best avoided by making sure students are paired with only one other student. Even then, make it clear they are each to look for their own photos instead of copying what they see other students photographing.

We advise that you follow the instructions below to maximize the effectiveness of this curriculum.

 Remove yourself from the students’ creative process. There is no formula; there is no right or wrong answer. These lessons should **not** be evaluated in an academic sense. So be very aware of your own responses to their ideas or photos. Try to direct them in the process of discovering for themselves what they should choose to focus on and in turn what will help them find success in life and become responsible, creative adults.

 Use this project as an opportunity to give only positive, constructive feedback to students, not criticism. There are not many times in a child’s life when they are told on a regular basis what they are doing WELL. Let The Viewfinder Project create the space to do this.

 Be sure to email, mail, or post on our website copies of the photos the students take along with the names of who took what photos! We also need you to return copies of all signed consent forms as well as copies of the follow-up questionnaire administered upon completion of The Viewfinder Project.

LESSONS NOS. 1 & 2

If you can only choose one lesson to teach:

Teach Lesson No. 1, “What is Ugly?” This one lesson contains the heart of the rest of the lessons. This lesson is the crux of The Viewfinder Project and is essential to the rest of the lessons. Upon completing this lesson, you will continue reinforcing their ability to turn the ugly into something beautiful in every subsequent lesson.

If you can only choose two lessons to teach:

Teach both Lessons No. 1 and No. 2 because they go hand in hand with one another and build the foundation of the remaining lessons.

THE REST OF THE LESSONS

These lessons are organized from least difficult to most difficult. For this reason, we recommend that you follow the lessons consecutively rather than jumping around lesson to lesson. We understand that because of limited time and resources and/or because of the age of the students you are teaching you may need to alter the order of the lessons. You need to make that decision. They are each intended to develop a particular photographic skill with the hope that by focusing an entire lesson on one small skill, students will be more likely to retain that skill and remember how it applies to their lives.

The lessons are designed to be taught on a weekly basis, starting each new week by concluding the previous week's lesson. The lessons are designed so that students will use the cameras during class time. If it is practical for you and the cameras are covered with your insurance, feel free to allow students to take cameras home overnight.

You might allow five minutes at the end of every class for students to journal about what they photographed, using the daily challenge in each lesson as a guide.

Students do not need to take pictures every week during this part of the project if it is not cost effective for you. If you have been unable to find sponsorships for this project and do not have the funds to print photos for every lesson, have students participate in the first two lessons. Then after that have them choose a lesson to shoot over a 2-3 week period. In the absence of real cameras, you might create cardboard cameras (see Appendix A) so students can practice framing and composing their photos. Students might also sketch out ideas for composing photos from the different lessons in a notebook. These exercises will help them think more about their idea of beauty and composition. You could even convert some of the lessons into creative writing exercises!

Adapt these lessons as necessary to fit into your own city's or country's situation or circumstances. But always try to keep the integrity of the lessons in tact. If you do modify the lessons, please email me what you altered so that I can keep a log of modifications for the future. Your modifications may become part of future versions of these lessons!

For all lessons, remind children to *fill the frame, don't be afraid of close-ups or abstract images.* Also, encourage them to frequently reference the "Tips for Better Photographs" worksheet.

DAILY PROGRAM FORMAT

With the exception of the first and last session, every session together should follow the same basic format. The following daily schedule provides a basic template for how each hour and a half session might look:

- (5 min) Welcome students
- (15 min) Review last week's lesson; go over Discussion Points and Life Skills for last week's lesson
- (10 min) Share your favorite photos for each student from last week's lesson; it is ideal for this discussion to become student led (what they like about each photo); remember to keep all discussion positive
- (10 min) Introduce this week's lesson
- (5 min) Distribute "Camera Log" worksheets and cameras
- (30 min) Students go out to take photos
- (5 min) Collect cameras and "Camera Log" worksheets
- (10 min) Have students journal in response to the lesson's challenge

CAMERA INFORMATION

In most places of the world, simple digital point-and-shoot cameras are easiest and most cost effective. When using digital cameras, do your best to get a very small memory card. For instance, a 16 MB memory card will allow students to take about 18 photos at 3.1 megapixels. **Our desire is that photos are taken at least at 3.1 megapixels.** Any fewer megapixels and it is difficult to enlarge photos for exhibition or to include in print materials.

HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM GUIDE (continued)

If you must use a larger memory card, increase the megapixels to a higher resolution. We are trying to limit the number of photos students take with the cameras. The reason for this is to encourage students to really think about what they are photographing. Additionally, as the teacher you will have to review each and every photo, which can become incredibly daunting depending on how many students participate.

If there is unlimited space on the memory card, students tend to take photos very quickly and without thought, deleting whatever photos they dislike. This is what we do not want! We want them to be thoughtful, taking the time to compose each photo! As you review the digital photos on each camera, you should be able to tell where each photo falls in the greater sequence of shooting. Ideally, the last photo on a card holding 18 photos will be numbered "18" indicating that the student only shot 18 photos; they did not shoot more then delete the photos they disliked.

If using film cameras makes most sense for you, by all means use film. The advantage of film cameras is that they tend to require students to put more thought into what they are choosing to photograph because there are a limited number of shots.

RULES FOR CAMERAS: 1) Always keep camera strap wrapped around wrist; 2) never run with the camera!

IMAGE ARCHIVING

As you lead students through lesson after lesson, you will need to create a system for archiving students' photos. We recommend the following:

- Purchase/borrow an external hard drive. Depending on how many lessons you teach, you will need a lot of computer memory.
- Create a folder for each student.
- Create subfolders for each lesson within each student's folder.
- Name each photo according to student, lesson, image number, site location, and file type (computer usually defaults to JPEG). <NAME>_<LESSON>_<IMAGE NO>_<LOCATION>.jpg

For instance, if I have a student from Helping Hands Community Center whose name is David Smith and who took 16 photos for the "Shapes" lesson, we recommend the following naming structure: David_Shapes_01_hh.jpg, David_Shapes_02_hh.jpg, David_Shapes_03_hh.jpg, and so on. If you have more than one student with the same first name, add the first letter of the surname to the NAME portion ("DavidS_Shapes_01.hh.jpg").

It is important to be able to quickly identify the student, lesson, and site location just by looking at the image name. This also allows photos from all over the world to reside in our database without confusion as to who took the photo.



LESSON No. 5: Shapes

Total Time

1-1/2 hours

Purpose

To identify and photograph a variety of shapes that exist in our surroundings. To better understand what shapes us as individuals.

Materials Needed

Cameras, one per student

Copies of "Shapes" worksheet

Crayons or colored markers for each student or set of students

Planning Notes

It is helpful to bring examples of shapes as they are found in our surroundings. These may be photos you as the teacher have taken specifically for this lesson or photos found in books or magazines. Familiarize yourself with the worksheet which will help you prepare students for how to look for shapes to photograph. You might also have students identify simple shapes in your meeting room.

This lesson is one of my favorites because it tends to generate some very interesting photos. If students are having trouble, help them look for the photos. Have them talk to you about the shape of some different objects they might see everyday. This may spark creativity and vision. Be sure to stick to basic, easily identified shapes.

Lesson

Shapes surround us. We can find circles, ovals, squares, and rectangles all around us if we just look for them.

Have students look around the room and identify some of the different shapes they see. A door, for instance, is usually in the shape of a rectangle as are the spines of most books lined up on a shelf. Clocks are usually in the shape of a circle.

Have students complete the "Shapes" worksheet prior to taking photos.

In this lesson, we are looking for all sorts of different shapes around us. Encourage students to really be creative as they compose their photos. Look for the repetition of shapes. Fill the frame as much as possible.

You may decide to help students identify shapes inside the classroom before sending them off on their own.

It is okay to focus on just one part of a shape if that is what is most interesting to the student. Also, the shapes students photograph do not need to be the traditional shapes included on the worksheet. The primary criteria is that they are shapes that draw the students' eyes to the subject and that they photograph only a few shapes.

Examples of photos might be the drain in a sink or water fountain, honeycomb, a ball, grating in a sidewalk or in front of a door, shells, roofs on houses, shapes of buildings, windows, doors, street signs, or arrows.

NOTE: Make sure students aren't photographing just anything, claiming it is "chair-shaped" or "human-shaped," for instance. The goal in this lesson is to focus on 3-4 definitive shapes, shapes that anyone could look at and say, "that's a circle" or "that's a square."

Students will see shapes around them if you simply help them identify a few before giving them their cameras. (But be careful of giving them too many examples as this might limit their creativity and cause them to photograph exactly the same thing.)

Discussion Points

What shape is most beautiful to you and why? Was one shape more prominent in their photos than others? Why might that be? Are people different shapes? Is that okay, in your opinion? What shapes you? What influences who you are and how you behave? Did it become easier to find shapes to more you looked? Why might this be?

LESSON No. 5: Shapes (continued)

Modifications

Less Difficult: Choose five traditional shapes for students to photograph. Have them look for squares, rectangles, circles, ovals, and triangles. To make it even simpler, you might choose just one shape to photograph, such as circles.

More Difficult: Choose five non-traditional shapes for students to photograph. Have them look for hexagons (six sides), kite shapes, diamond shapes, 3-dimensional spheres, and 3-dimensional boxes. Or have students look for shapes within shapes.

Life Skill

Some of the most ordinary shapes can be found in extraordinary ways and places. Sometimes if we look too literally at the world around us, we miss the beauty of it. Often we need to use creativity and look for what makes the ordinary special. Doing so not only helps us see the extraordinary in the ordinary; it also helps us appreciate the beautiful simplicity of the ordinary. In our “Discussion Points,” we asked if people are different shapes. We tend to think some people have more beautiful shapes than others. Why is that? Sometimes we must work hard to appreciate the beauty of all shapes, even if they are not our favorite shapes. We also asked what shapes you. This is an important question to ask yourselves. If you are aware of what shapes and influences who you are and how you behave, you will be better equipped to decide for yourselves if you are being the person you want to be or if you are being the person other people want you to be.

Name _____

Directions: Color the shapes using the key below!

Square = Green

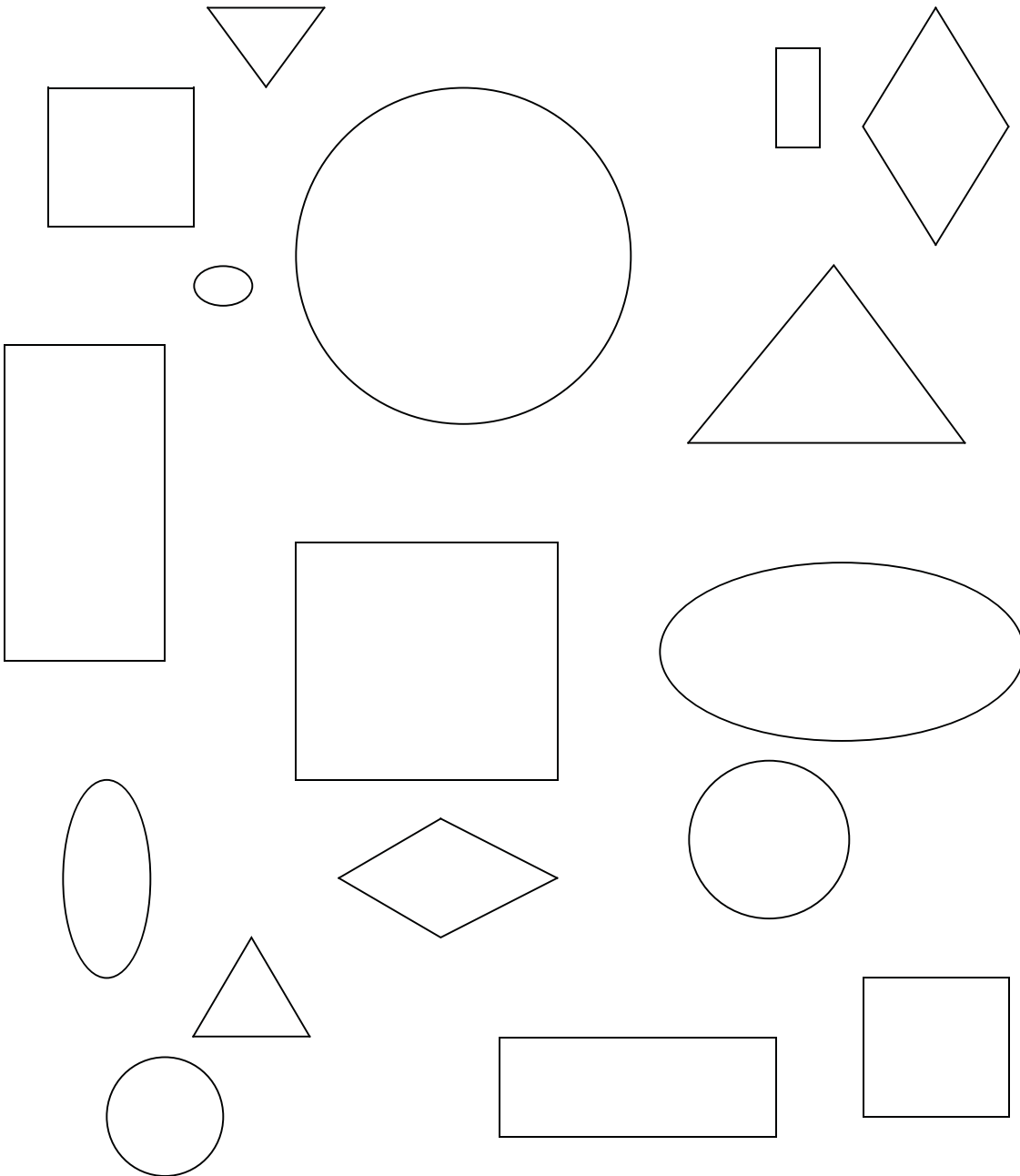
Oval = Orange

Rectangle = Red

Circle = Blue

Triangle = Yellow

Diamond = Purple



Name _____

Directions: Color the shapes using the key below!

Square = Green

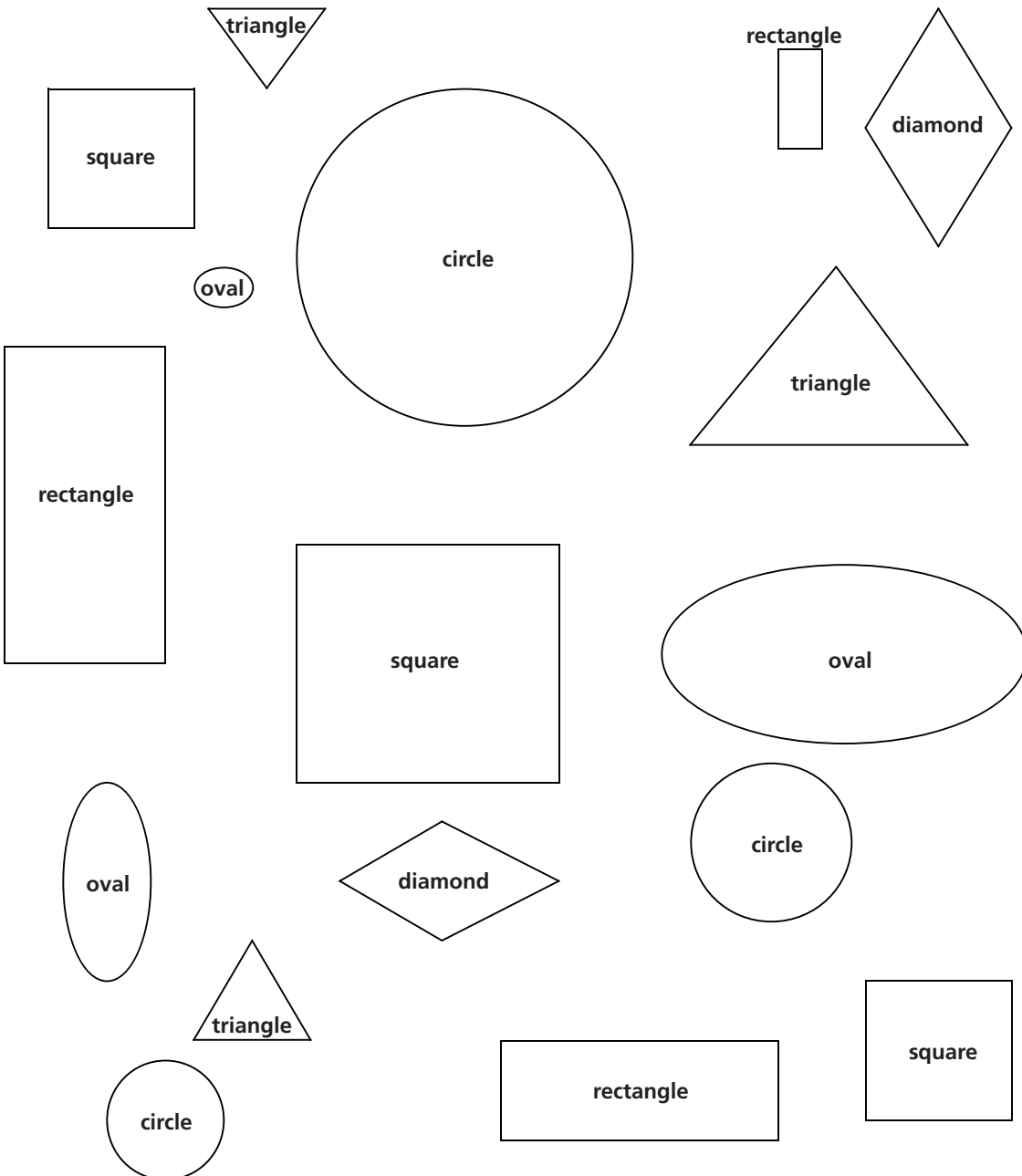
Oval = Orange

Rectangle = Red

Circle = Blue

Triangle = Yellow

Diamond = Purple





FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: How do I start The Viewfinder Project in my city or at my school?

A: You need to make sure you have signed and returned the License Agreement before starting. If you obtained a copy of this curriculum online, then you should have signed it electronically. If you obtained this curriculum from a friend, please contact The Viewfinder Project at info@theviewfinderproject.org before beginning.

Q: Do I need to be a teacher or a photographer in order to teach The Viewfinder Project?

A: No! The only criteria you need to have is the ability to believe that there is beauty to be found in everything. If you can believe this, then you will be able to lead your students through this journey of self-discovery. The Viewfinder Project lessons are written to help easily guide you through this process.

Q: What ages does The Viewfinder Project target?

A: We target children between the ages of 8 and 14 years, though the curriculum can be adapted for both younger and older students.

Q: Can I make changes to the curriculum if I need to?

A: You may make changes to the curriculum provided these changes do not alter the lesson dramatically or go outside the vision and mission of The Viewfinder Project. We in fact encourage you to do what you need to to make these lessons more appropriate for your situation. Please contact us if you have any questions about what you are and are not allowed to change.

Q: Can students take cameras off-site in order to participate in The Viewfinder Project?

A: We do not recommend that students take cameras off-site while participating in The Viewfinder Project. If you have purchased your own cameras, then you need to make a judgment call as to whether or not your students are responsible enough to care for the cameras outside of your supervision.

Q: What if I am unable to purchase cameras or pay for film developing costs?

A: You can always start by asking your friends and family if they would be willing to donate a new or used camera to you. Or you might identify a camera you want all of your students to have and contact the manufacturer to see if they will either donate the cameras to you or offer you a bulk discount. Contact local photography supply stores to see if they are able to assist you in any way. Visit our website at www.theviewfinderproject.org to find out about sponsorship ideas and opportunities.

Q: Can The Viewfinder Project help me with costs?

A: Possibly. The Viewfinder Project is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. We therefore might be able to help provide tax breaks to participants and donors in the United States. Please contact us for more details.

** Please be sure you register for The Viewfinder Project at www.theviewfinderproject.org! By registering, you will gain access to much more information regarding partnerships, idea exchanges, photo libraries, and more!