

The Masterpiece of the Month Program

Hi Mom & Dad,

Today we had a visit from the art parents and learned about the famous photographer and environmentalist, **Ansel Adams**. Ansel Adams was best known for his black-and-white photographs of the American West.

Adams was born in San Francisco, California in 1902. His father decided to pull Ansel out of school in 1915, at the age of 12. He was educated by private tutors, and his original passion was to become a concert pianist. However, after seeing photographs by wilderness photographer, Paul Strand, Adams became interested in photography.

At age 17, Adams joined the Sierra Club, a group dedicated to preserving the natural world's wonders and resources. Adams took his first long trip into the wilderness in 1920, when he was just eighteen. His burro, Mistletoe, carried almost a hundred pounds of gear and food; he himself carried a thirty-pound pack full of photographic equipment.

He remained a member of the Sierra Club throughout his lifetime and served as a director, as did his wife, Virginia. Adams was an avid mountaineer, and was later responsible for several first trips through the Sierra Nevada. It was at Half Dome in Yosemite Park in 1927 that he first found that he could make **photographs that were "poetry."**

Adams became an environmentalist, and his photographs are a record of what many of these national parks were like before human intervention and travel. His work promoted many of the goals of the Sierra Club and brought environmental issues to light. Adams also wrote many books about photography, including his trilogy of technical manuals.

Our class looked closely at Adam's photograph, "**Snow in Apple Orchard.**" We talked about how he turned pictures into poetry. **Today we tried making our own "picture poetry"** about trees, or something else in nature. Ask your child to tell you about Ansel Adams and the story of their picture poem!



True or false?

Read aloud-- kids have fun guessing which facts are true or false.

Adams was born in San Francisco, Florida in 1902. (False... S.F. California)

His first memory was of lying in his baby carriage, watching the low fog move across the sky. (True)

He showed his artistic side early— his original passion was to become a concert tuba player. (False...it was piano)

After seeing photographs by wilderness photographer, Paul Strand, Adams became interested in photography. (True)

At age 17, Adams joined the Sierra Club, a group dedicated to preserving the natural world's wonders and resources. (True)

Adams took his first long trip into the wilderness in 1920, when he was just 10. (False...he was 18)

His burro, Mistletoe, carried almost a hundred pounds of gear and food; he himself carried a thirty-pound pack full of photographic equipment. (True)

Adams used large format cameras that were heavier to carry, but they made sharp, vivid photos. (True)

He and his wife, Virginia, served as directors of Club Med. (False...it was the Sierra Club)

It was at Yosemite Park in California where his photos of Half Dome showed him that he could make photographs that were "poetry." (True)

One of Adam's photographs is about the Voyager Spacecraft, sent into outer space in the hope of teaching alien civilizations about life on Earth. (True)

Adams created a record of what many of these national parks were like before human intervention and tourism. (True)

Adams also wrote many books about photography, plus several Harry Potter books. (False...he wrote a trilogy of photography books).

Ansel Adams Lesson Plan- "Picture Poetry"

Time Commitment: 1 hour

Materials: Snow in Apple Orchard print (Lyon Closet), or simply show slides from website on smart board. Black/White construction sheets, plus white scrap or printer paper. Kids can use their own white crayon, pencils, and glue sticks.

1. **Discussion** (5 min): Have you ever used a camera before? If you were going to be a photographer, what landscapes or scenery would you want to remember on film? Show the print. Does this scene remind you of any place you have seen or visited?
2. **Introduce the artist** (10 min): Do you think art can tell a story? Can it even get across an important message? Show the Slideshow from the Website, discussing each scene as you go. Ansel Adams like to show nature untouched by man. He worked hard to keep it that way!
3. **True or False** (5 minutes). Read (or let the kids read) the fun facts, attached.
4. **For 3-5 grade:** (5 min) Explain that Adams used strong subjects with carefully chosen vantage points to compose interesting photographs. Good photographers spend lots of time setting up their "shots" and finding dramatic lighting. Also, he developed his photos so that they used at least eleven tones from white to black. Look at our print and see how detailed black and white can be!
5. **Introduce the art project.** (30 min) Ansel Adams discovered that a picture could be "poetry." It tells a beautiful story. We'll make our own picture poetry about a tree. Instead of photographs, we'll use descriptive words, combined with our drawings, to create our own kind of poem. Poems express feelings, but they don't necessarily rhyme.
 - Hand out scrap paper and Black sheets to each student. Ask them to draw a tree in their own style, using white crayon.
 - Now let them cut out about 7 shapes with white scrap paper, just big enough to put a few words on. A leaf shape would be great. (Optional: pre-cut these before class)
 - Write descriptive words about their favorite tree on the leaves. Ex: Blowing in the wind, snowy branches, home for squirrels, strong and tall.
 - Kids can glue these white pieces onto their black sheet, either making leaves on the tree, or any where they want. (Some kids get very creative with this).
 - As they finish, take a digital picture of the art project to e-mail the teacher.
6. **Recap:** How did Adams help the environment? What are some of the little things we can do to help? (The slide show covered some of that, or kids will have ideas for more)