

PCQC Video Presentation

Fundamentals of Photography II with Joel Sartore—National Geographic

Lesson 15: Black-and-White Photography

Black-and-White (BW) photography is different from color photography in many ways, one of the most important being that BW looks good in any lighting situation. In addition, monochrome images add a sense of drama and timelessness to the photograph.

Lesson Takeaways

- “Light is light to black and white,” is a saying which means that the quality of the lighting is much less important in BW than in color photography. This can be demonstrated by taking a color photograph in 2 different lighting situations, one in pure white light and the other in soft warm light. Then repeat the two photos with the same two lighting situations and set your camera to shoot in BW. There will be a noticeable difference in the two shots taken in color, but the two shots taken in BW will be very similar.
- BW shots are more forgiving of shadows and can be taken at any time of day.
- BW images emphasize reflectivity, surfaces, shine, and tone much more so than color images do.
- BW communicates your message quickly. Emotions seem to “pop.” BW images highlight body language and facial expressions.
- Shadows and silhouettes: good subjects for BW images.
- The rules of good composition remain the same whether taking photographs in BW or color.
- If you set your camera to monochrome you can see your composition clearly on the LED viewer before you take the shot. If you do not have a monochrome setting on your camera you can take a color photo and convert to BW post-processing, however you won’t see the picture you are getting “on the fly.”

Assignment

- Chose a time frame and shoot only in BW, photographing a variety of subjects such as portraits, landscapes, still life, etc. Try working in harsh light (e.g., noon on a sunny day) and note the difference when working with BW and color.