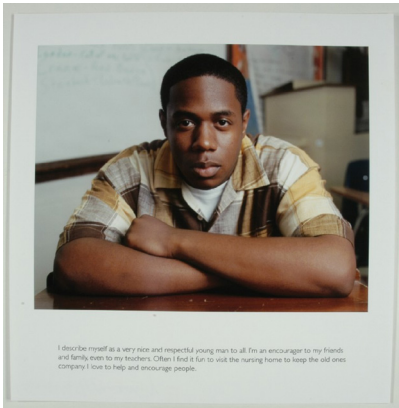


## Exploring How Artists Shape Light in Photographic Portraits

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Difficulty level:** Low

**Messy level:** Low



Dawoud Bey, *A Girl in the Met Supermarket*, 1987, gelatin silver print, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of John S. Parsley and Nancy Nolan Parsley in honor of Anne Wilkes Tucker on the occasion of her retirement, 2017.154. © Dawoud Bey

Dawoud Bey, *Untitled*, 2003, chromogenic print, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of Joan Morgenstern, 2006.1269.1. © Dawoud Bey

To view a hi-res images of these works, visit the [MFAH Collection online database](#).

The American photographer Dawoud Bey portrays communities and histories that have been underrepresented or even unseen. From portraits in Harlem, New York, to nocturnal landscapes, classic street photography to large-scale studio portraits, his images combine an ethical imperative with an unparalleled mastery of his medium. Inspired by photographic portraits of Dawoud Bey, this activity will guide you in exploring light and shadows when creating a portrait of someone you know or admire.

### Investigate the Work of Art!

1. Each of these sample images captures a person the artist knows or lives in the artists' communities. Looking at the examples, what do you notice about how the artists have used shadow and light to create a mood or express a feeling?
2. Photographers may help shape the light around the subject by using flat pieces of material with a reflective surface on one side to bounce light from a main source of light, like a lamp or the sun. Where do you think the main source of light is located for each of the examples?
3. To create sharp shadows in a picture, artists will also block out parts of the light source to limit the exposure. Why would an artist wish to limit the light in an image?

### Let's Make Some Art! Gather These Art Materials

- Piece of shiny gold paper
- Piece of shiny silver paper
- Piece of plain white paper
- Piece of matte black paper
- Mirror
- Smartphone with camera or digital camera

# Exploring How Artists Shape Light in Photographic Portraits



## Step-by-Step Artist Instructions

### Project 1

1. Gather the shiny gold, shiny silver, and plain white paper and sit it in front of a mirror in a room with limited natural light.
2. Look around your space and find the main light source in the room. This could be a lamp, lights in the ceiling, or a window.
3. Hold the shiny gold piece of paper toward the light source and try to bounce the light onto your face. Look in the mirror and see how that changes your face. Try this again with the shiny silver paper and the plain white paper.

### Project 2

1. Gather the piece of black paper and sit in front of the mirror.
2. Look around your space and find the main light source in the room. This could be a lamp, lights in the ceiling, or a window.
3. Looking at your face in the mirror, try to block out some of the light source and create a sharp shadow on your face.

### Project 3

1. Use what you have learned about bouncing light and creating shadows to create an image of someone you know. How can you shape the light to create a specific mood or feeling in the picture?

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