

AMERICAN CREED
**CITIZEN
POWER**



PHOTO + CAPTION

KQED Youth Media Challenge



CONTENTS

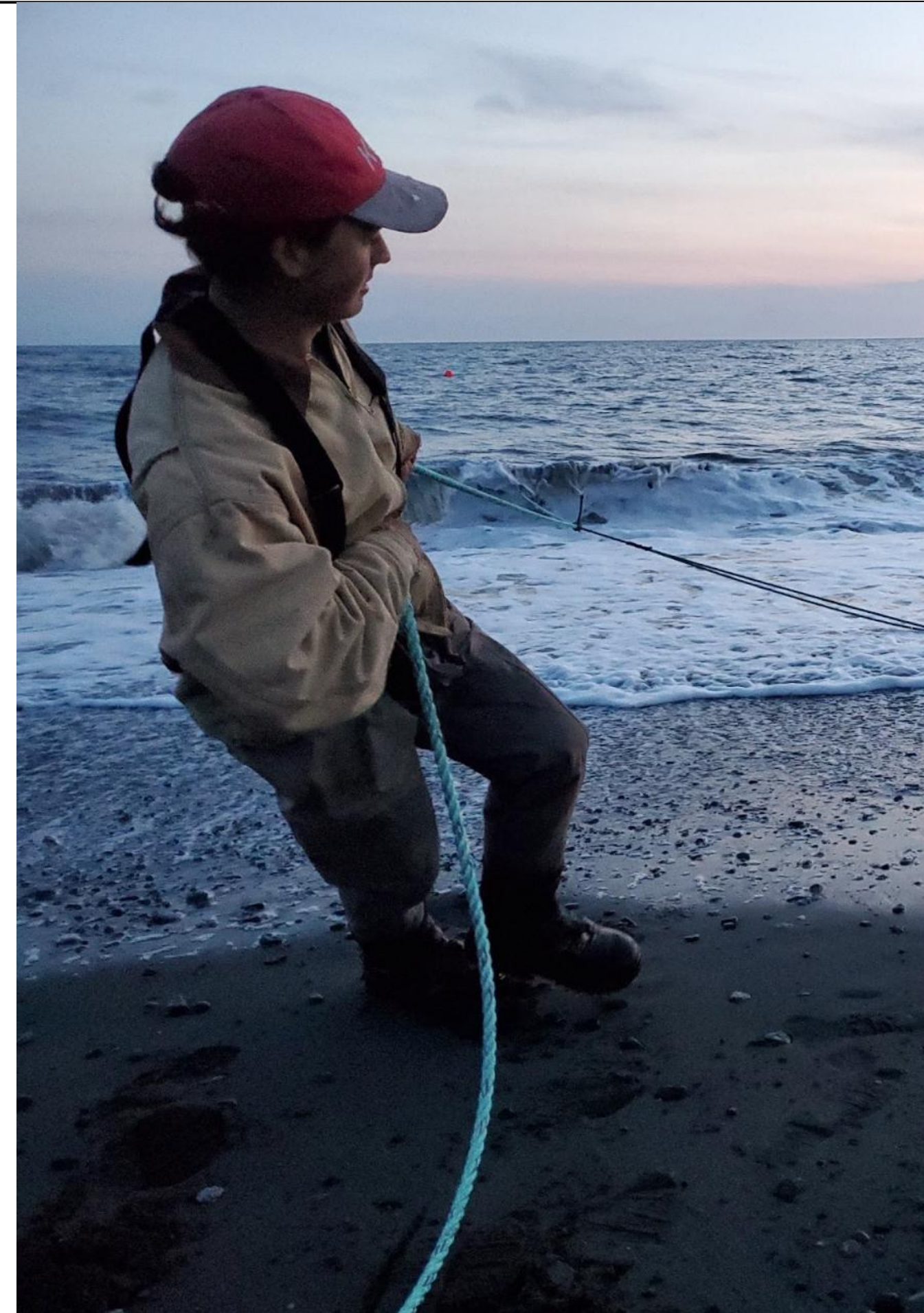
Note that you might be led through this slide presentation by your teacher or, you might work through it individually. In either case, **work bravely and honestly.**

- + [Introduction](#)
- + [Visual thinking](#)
- + [Photo Captions](#)
- + [Mentor Text](#)
- + [Photography](#)
- + [Your Captions](#)
- + [Peer Input](#)
- + [Publish](#)

INTRODUCTION

WHAT TO EXPECT

- You will collect data by photographing things you care about in your community that speak to your ideas of American Creed.
- You will combine text and photography to create a final product to share.
- You will work with peers to both give and receive feedback.



The examples made by more experienced writers and media-makers—i.e. “mentor texts”—will connect you to real-world approaches to writing. You will learn about what other writers do and then consider what you would like to do yourself.

This—along with doing lots and lots of writing—will help you grow as a writer.

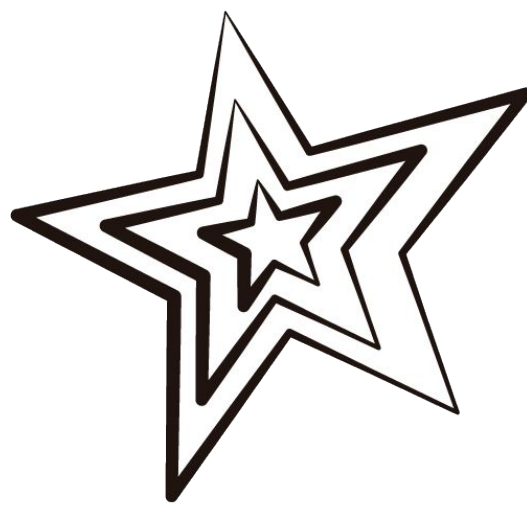




WHAT IS THE AMERICAN CREED INITIATIVE?

PBS launched the American Creed initiative in 2018 with a documentary that features a mosaic of stories, set in communities around the country, showing people striving to realize their own visions of America's promise, embracing the idea that what unifies America is a set of foundational national ideals. The new PBS American Creed documentary series, releasing in 2026 to mark America's 250th anniversary, explores this idea from young adult perspectives.

AMERICAN CREED



The title “American Creed” comes from a phrase written by Nobel Prize-winning economist Gunnar Myrdal during the U.S. Great Depression in the 1930s. Myrdal defined that creed as the sense that individuals, regardless of their circumstances, deserve fairness, freedom, and the opportunity to realize their potential. He believed that creed, expressed by America’s founding documents, defined the American character. He called the gap between that creed and the reality of American life “an American dilemma.”

Martin Luther King Jr. was among Myrdal's most attentive readers. Dr. King called the ideals expressed in America's founding documents "a promissory note."



[Listen to students respond to the film](#)

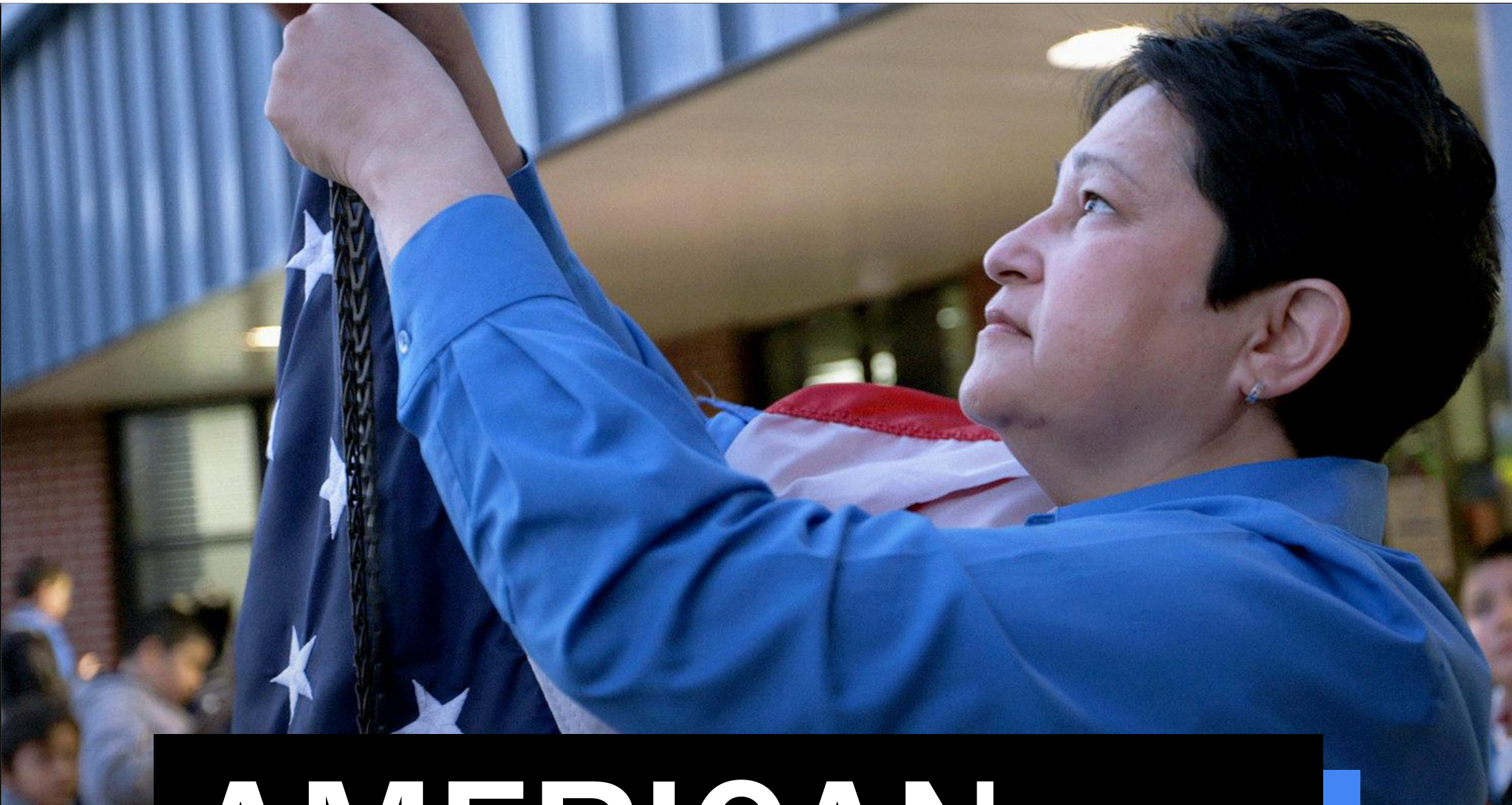
WHAT IDEAS DO YOU CONNECT TO?

As you get started on this project, take a moment to look at American Creed-related words and phrases on the next slide. These terms express ideas that often surface in conversations about what America stands for.

What connections do you make to these words or phrases? How do these ideas relate to what you want for your community? Note the terms that you feel connect to your beliefs and/or experiences.

Hold onto this to come back to later.

Creed
Community
Care
Equality
Freedom
Fairness
Opportunity
Independence
Justice
Responsibility
Security
Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness



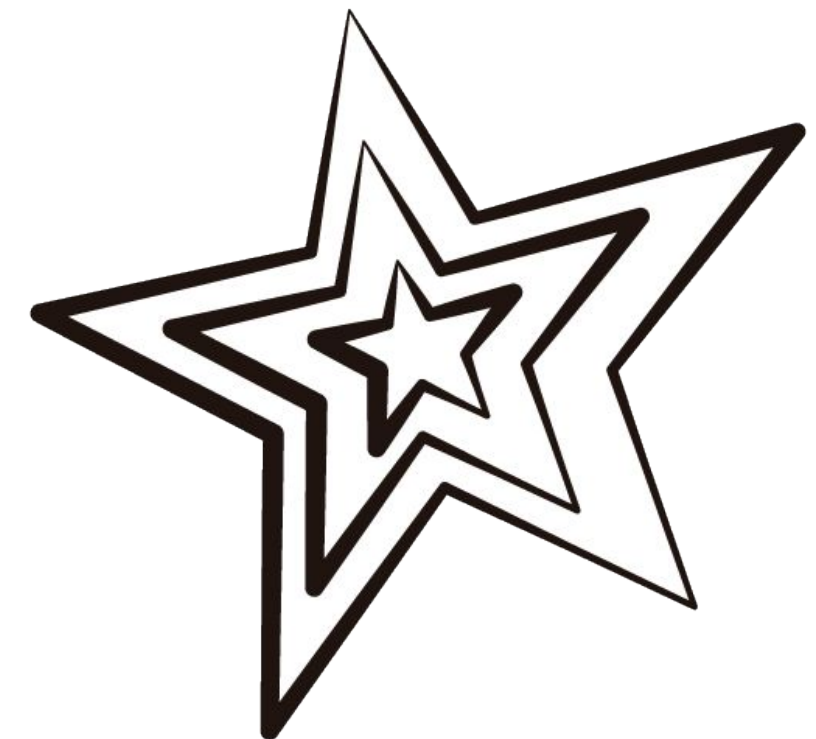
AMERICAN CREED TERMS

“

Being American means loving this country so much that you accept that it is not in the place that it needs to be and doing whatever you can to see that it reaches its fullest potential.”

—Annays Yacaman

[Students Respond to American Creed](#)



PRACTICING VISUAL THINKING



EXAMPLES FROM AMERICAN CREED

To do our visual thinking, start by exploring photos by American Creed leaders.

Practice visual thinking by asking yourself these questions:

- What is going on in this picture?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can you find?

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QUICK WRITE

Do a quick write now to capture your visual thinking:

- What does it feel like to spend time looking at these photographs?
- What connections did you make to photographs (individually or as a set of photos)?
- What questions came up for you?

ABOUT QUICK WRITES

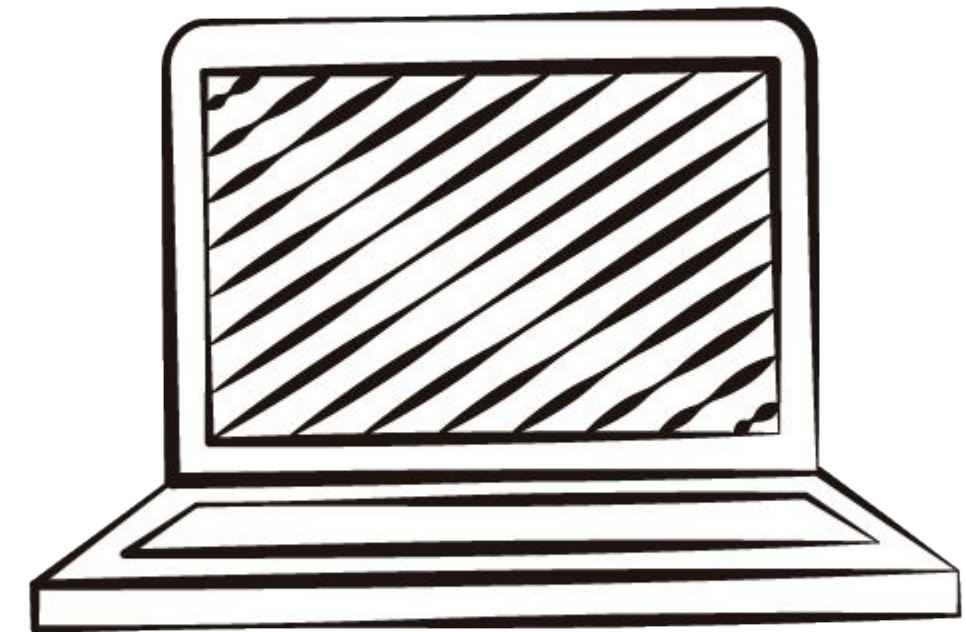
Quick writes help you get your thoughts together and practice writing. Give yourself a short period of time. Set a time and stop when time is up. Just write the whole time— don't stop, keep writing. No grades and no judgment here.

Stop when time is up.
What emerges?

WHAT IS A PHOTO CAPTION?



- Captions give photos context, telling viewers what's going on in a photo so they don't have to guess or jump to conclusions.
- And just like anything else that is published, captions should be fact-checked and typo-checked. They should: present the who, what, where, when, and (sometimes) why without necessarily stating the obvious.



LET'S LOOK AT SOME

Now we are going to meet one of the emerging leaders participating in the American Creed documentary initiative, and look closely at their photos with captions.

Practice your visual thinking while you keep track of what you notice about the captions.



EXPLORING A MENTOR TEXT

Ready?

Meet SAM SCHIMMEL

Kenai Peninsula, Alaska



While you watch [this video](#), make notes of things that you notice that are interesting or important to you.

GETTING TO KNOW SAM SCHIMMEL

Quick Write:

- What do you know about Sam?
- What matters to him?
- What do you know about his community?

If possible, turn and talk to a friend who also watched this and share:

- What did you notice?
- What do you wonder?

Next, read through Sam's photo essay; read aloud or to yourself.

While you read, identify things about the photos and related captions that you think are interesting or important and jot them down.



[Subsistence on the Kenai Peninsula](#)

Let's choose a few photos from this essay to look at more closely. Start with the photo alone and then add the caption.

- What is going on in this photo? How do you know?
- How does the caption support your understanding of the photo?
- How do the photo and caption relate to Sam's interests and community?



My auntie MaryAnn has been advocating for decades for our tribe's fishing and subsistence rights. In her work, she has met many other Indigenous leaders and advocates and has been given gifts like this bag in honor of her work and friendship. In the background, my uncle Bill.



- What is going on in this photo?
How do you know?
- How does the caption support your understanding of the context of the photo?
- How does the photo and caption relate to Sam's interests and community?

Both of my aunties sit on our Tribal council. They work hard to ensure the well-being of the community, from fighting for our rights to maintaining Tribal programs that ensure the continuity of our traditional subsistence practices. They also participate in subsistence activities, like fishing and preparing salmon.

- What is going on in this photo? How do you know?
- How does the caption support your understanding of the photograph's context?
- How does the photo and caption relate to Sam's interests and community?



My cousin Julianne pulls out the gill net with some fresh salmon that will be brought back to the Tribal fishery to be cleaned.

When I was 6 or 7, I remember fishing with a cousin for 12 hours on the east side of the Cook Inlet. After carrying the fish back to the camp, we cut and cleaned them for 3 hours before my cousin smiled at me and said, 'we need to grab some wood and smoke these fish then go check the net that's still out'... 'there's always more.'



QUICK WRITE

Return to your notes for another quick write:

- What message do you take away from Sam's overall story? What matters to him?
- How does he share what matters through the photo and captions he chose to use in his story?

“

I am not rich. I am not
wealthy.

I can write. And I want to take
that somewhere.”

—McCamey Miller

[Students Respond to American Creed](#)

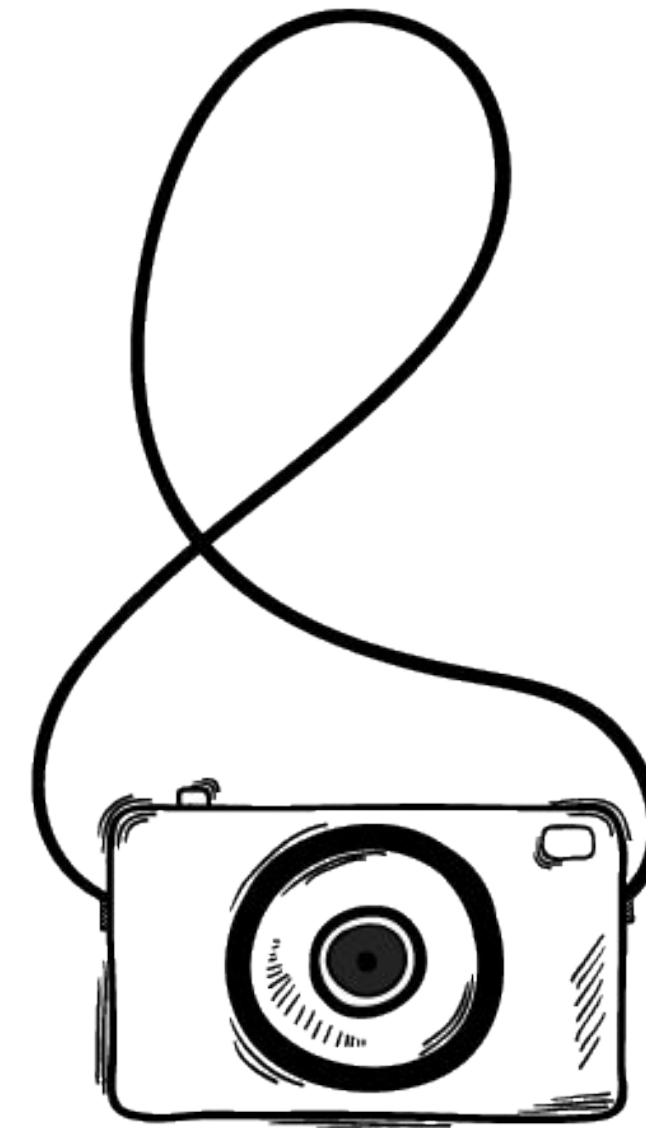


A woman with dark hair, wearing sunglasses and a vibrant floral tank top, is in the foreground holding a Canon EOS camera to her eye. She is standing in a field of tall, dry grass. Behind her, a herd of horses is grazing. One horse is dark with white patches, and another is white with brown patches. The background shows rolling green hills under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds.

**READY TO GET STARTED ON
YOUR OWN PHOTOGRAPHY?**

TAKE YOUR OWN PHOTOS

1. Take up to 10 photographs that capture stories you would like to share from your community.
2. Stay close to home with people you know and trust.



COMFORT AND RESPECT

- Think about aspects of your life or the life of your community. What are you comfortable sharing? What would you rather not share? Why?
- Even if you know the people you are photographing, ask them if you may photograph them and if you may share photographs of them.

PHOTO TIP



Tap into more photo tips from the experts at [Working Assumptions](#).

BE DELIBERATE

Many professional photographers say they visualize a shot before taking it. This allows them to work with a specific outcome in mind. Doing this helps you slow down and make a conscious choice about the photograph you are about to take. It can also be helpful to narrate the scene in your head.

AND, BE DECISIVE

Photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson coined the term “The Decisive Moment” to describe the instant when everything in a situation—movement, gesture, expression, composition—comes together to reveal the essence of the scene.

FRAMING

One of the choices you make is about what to keep in the photo and, just as importantly, what to leave out. Do you want to include the subject’s hands? That dog in the background? A slice of sky? Etc.

LIGHTING

You can use light to create mood, meaning, and emphasis in your images.

POINT OF VIEW

Bird's-eye view, worm's-eye view, and kid's-eye view are all ways to mix up your photography approaches.

COMPOSITION

You can make your photographs dynamic and engaging by playing with all of the shapes and lines in an image or considering how elements at the edges or corners of your frame might connect, reinforce, or complement one another.

PRACTICE CURATION

- “Curation” is the selection and evaluation of your own photos for the purpose of presenting your work to other people.
- Of your 10 photos, which do you want to keep? Which do you not want to keep?
- Of those you keep, which 1 photo do you most want to caption and share?



AMERICAN CREED

YOUR CAPTIONS | PHOTO WITH CAPTION

**READY TO WORK ON YOUR
OWN CAPTIONS & TITLE?**

AMERICAN CREED TITLES & CAPTIONS

This resource from experts at Working Assumptions will guide you through the process of including a caption and title for your project -

[Lessons in Photography: Titles and Captions](#)

Consider the American Creed terms and ideas (slides 7-10) when you create your caption and title; what about American ideals, or issues that get in the way of those ideals, connect to your photo? How might your caption help to make visible these connections to others?

PEER INPUT



PEER INPUT

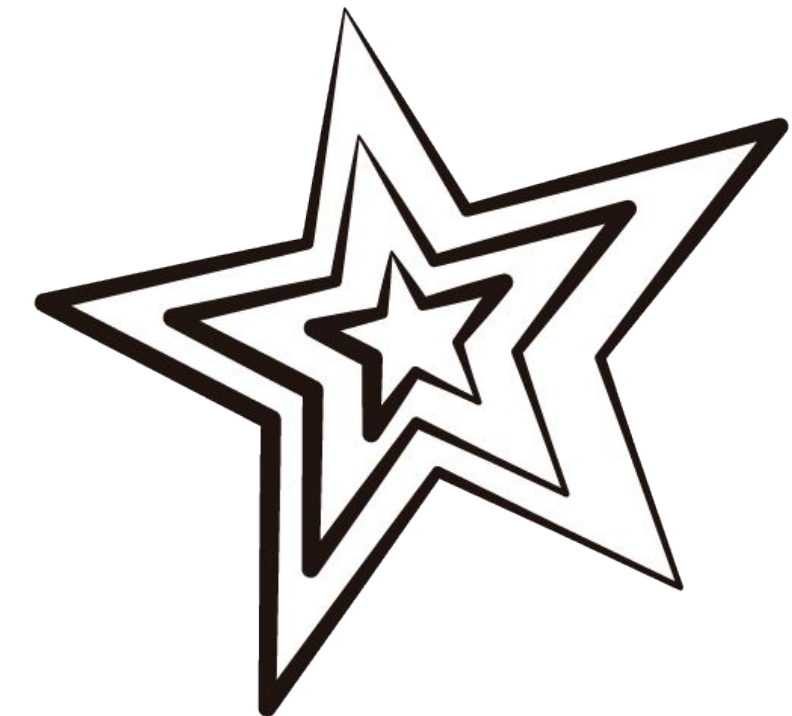
Share your photograph, but not your title or caption, with a partner. Ask your partner to describe what is happening in the photograph. Write down their questions. Then, have your partner read your title and caption.

Do they have any thoughts or suggestions?

Use this feedback to make revisions.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

- Present the photo in a way that shows the entire image.
- Add the caption to the photo in a way that is visually pleasing and readable.
- Use Sam Schimmel's photo essay to see how the captions are designed and formatted.



TIME TO SHARE

PREPARE TO SHARE

Share locally

Create a gallery of photographs with captions in a local space where others can view and read them. This can happen in the hallway of a school, in a library space, media center, local cafe or bookshop, etc. Online galleries can also be created using virtual spaces like Padlet or storymap.knightlab.com; QR codes can be created that link people to this virtual space.

By sharing your work with your community, you will contribute to local dialogue about things that are important and meaningful to you and your peers.

Share nationally

Share your photo and caption nationally by publishing it to the American Creed Youth Media Challenge platform at KQED Public Media. (Note that the following slides will walk you through this process.)

By sharing your work, it will contribute to a national dialogue about what motivates us to care for our communities and America as a whole.

Considering sharing nationally?

We welcome you to consider publishing your work via the American Creed Youth Media challenge. By publishing here, your work will be eligible to be shared by PBS stations across the country, contributing to national dialogue about what motivates us to care for our communities and America as a whole.



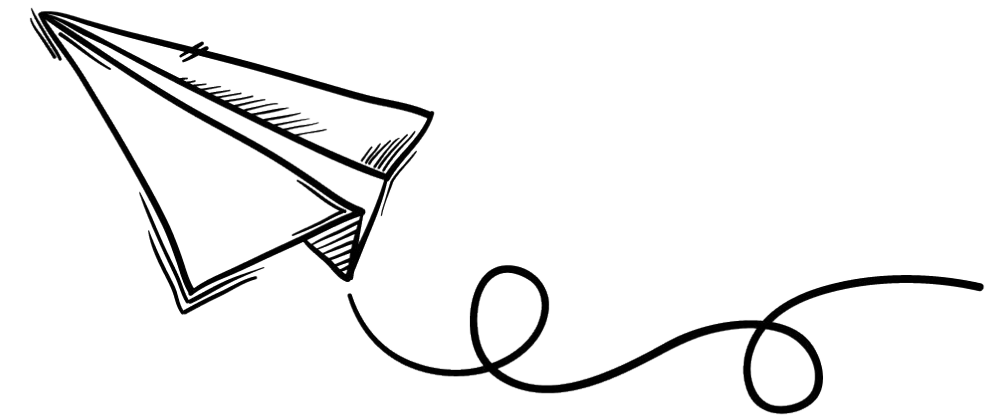
Learn more at <https://youthmedia.kqed.org/americancreed>

PREPARE TO PUBLISH

Get ready to submit your photo essay to the American Creed Youth Media Challenge.

- Ask your teacher for the American Creed Youth Media Challenge submission code.
- Finalize the title of your photo essay. Make the title thematically related and not “schooly;” try to make it uniquely yours.
- Note that the file must be a PDF smaller than 10MB.
- Include up to 3 tags for your project.
- Write a producer’s statement...

WRITE A PRODUCER'S STATEMENT



This will be displayed with your photo essay.

Your reflection doesn't have to be long, but it should answer these questions (and include anything else you want to share):

- Why did you choose your topic?
- What did you learn during this project?
- What do you want people to know about the project and how it relates to your American Creed?

REVIEW THE CHECKLIST



- ☐ Did you ask your teacher for the American Creed Youth Media Challenge submission code?
- ☐ Did you finalize the title of your photo essay? Is it something the public would find interesting?
- ☐ Is the file a PDF and smaller than 10MB?
- ☐ Do you have 3 tags for your project?
- ☐ Do you have your producer's statement ready?

FINAL PROOFREAD



- Since this will be public, you want to make sure it doesn't have any spelling or grammar mistakes.
- Try this: read your writing aloud to yourself. This way, you can find things you missed before.
- Or try this: read sentence by sentence, only backwards! This will help you focus on the line-by-line details.

SUBMIT YOUR PHOTO ESSAY

Start your submission process here:

<https://bit.ly/acsubmit>

AMERICAN CREED



CITIZEN POWER

You did it!

Woot woot!

