

## Breaking the Rule of Thirds

### A reflection of photography composition inspired by *Ned Pratt: One Wave*

Lesson plan prepared by Brittany Warren for the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

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#### Suggested Grade/Age Levels

##### Easily accessed by grades 9 - 12

This lesson can be modified for younger grade levels, if they have access to a digital camera, use of a smartphone, or iPad/tablet camera.

#### Subject Areas

- Visual Arts
- Math

#### Introduction and rationale

Ned Pratt, a photographic artist from Newfoundland, grew up with artist parents and a keen sense of how to create compositions within a frame. His inspiration for his own work comes from challenging the way people usually create landscape photography, and how people typically think of the Newfoundland landscape. In his images he often includes an element that is unexpected (and breaks the rules of composition) by placing a telephone pole right in the middle of the skyline or a building right in the middle of an otherwise deserted field, for example.

Today, we will venture out into our own neighbourhoods with cameras to photograph compositions inspired by Pratt's photographs.

##### Students will be expected to:

Create photographs that use the formal principles of composition, then introduce an element of surprise to

create a new perspective within the frame – just like Ned.

## Outcomes and Indicators

### Visual Arts 9

- Manipulate and organize design elements to achieve planned compositions.
- Analyze and use a variety of image development techniques.
- Analyze the works of artists to determine how they have used the elements of art and principles of design to solve specific design problems.

### Visual Arts 10

- Independently plan and realize artworks using knowledge of art and design elements and principles
- Analyze and apply visual, spatial, and temporal concepts in creating art images
- Demonstrate independent thinking in interpreting and making judgments about subject matter
- Engage in critical reflective thinking as part of the decision-making and problem-solving process

## Set up

- Access to the outdoor environment (neighbourhood or backyard)
- Access to a camera
- Chrome Books, computers, or library resources for research (optional)

## Materials

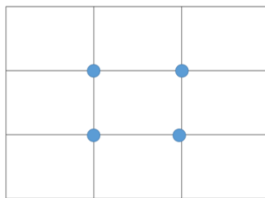
For this project, students require access to a digital camera, use of a smartphone, or iPad/tablet camera.

1. A 10 x 8-inch piece of stiff paper like cardstock, cardboard or pasteboard (a cereal box is made of pasteboard)
2. Pencil
3. Ruler (or a straight edge like the side of a book)
4. Scissors or cutting blade
5. Roll of tape
6. String/yarn

## Process

### Step 1. Introduce students to the 3 rules of traditional landscape photography:

- **Horizon line:** where the land or sea meet the sky. In landscape photography this is traditionally within the middle of the photograph/frame.
- **Vanishing point:** when two parallel (equal) lines appear to converge (to come together). This makes objects disappear the further the lines move “into” the photograph.
- **Rule of thirds:** the frame is equally split into three sections both horizontally and vertically. Traditionally in landscape photography, horizontally, the bottom third of the frame is land, and the two 2 thirds are sky. The main subject of the image usually touches one of the four center intersections of the lines:



### Step 2. Create Viewfinder

1. Place the cardboard down in front of you, horizontally, so that the short edges are on the sides.
2. Using your ruler or straight edge, measure in 1” in from the edge and make three dots. With the straight edge, connect these dots and repeat this step for the remaining three edges until you have a rectangle.
3. Carefully cut this rectangle out of the frame.
4. Using your ruler, measure the short edge and divide the number by three. You are going to make two equally spaced dots on either side based on the number you calculated (i.e if the short edge is 12”, divide by 3, your two dots should be 4” apart starting at the top edge), do the same for the longer sides.
5. Cut two pieces of string to reach across the width and length of the frames connecting the dots on opposite sides of the frame. Using tape, attach the string to the dots, making sure the string is tight. This makes a grid on the frame of your viewfinder.



### Step 3. 'Break' the rule

- Students take a neighbourhood walk (or a walk around their backyard), and capture traditional landscape photographs following the rule of thirds (the frame is equally split into three sections both horizontally and vertically). Then, like Pratt, students shift their perspective to create a “disturbance” within the picture frame and take a photo “breaking the rule of thirds”.
- This can be anything from putting something directly in the middle of the frame, or splitting the frame in half, to using the rule of thirds unconventionally (like 2 thirds land, 1 third sky, or all sky and no land).



In the image *Fog Horn Shelter*, Pratt's focus is not the shelter in the foreground nor the horizon line; instead, he allows the ocean to overcome the frame. Pratt does not create drama using the typical design elements such as a vanishing point (the building is photographed straight on, so the lines do not move through the image) or the rule of thirds (no part of the image touches the centre intersection). Drama is created through a vast flattening of the image.



In the image *Starboard Bouy*, Pratt ignores the rule of thirds completely and photographs a distant bouy floating in the water, through the fog. The entire frame is almost the same tone, texture and colour. If he was using the rule of thirds, he would have probably waited for a non-cloudy day so you could see the horizon line, and he would have kept in part of the land.



In the image *Cow Corn, The Goulds*, Pratt splits the frame almost in half, putting the horizon line in the middle of the image. This gives more emphasis on the vanishing points than the lines in the field are making, and helps the viewer travel more quickly through the image.

## Lesson Extensions

- Discuss the historical, cultural and personal importance of visual arts to our communities. The Nova Scotia Department of Education Visual Arts 10-11 Curriculum Document can be downloaded free of charge: [Click Here](#)
- Discuss why Pratt takes this rule-breaking approach to his images.
- A lot of what he photographs is his history and culture (of being a Newfoundlander), but he looks to represent it in untraditional and unconventional ways. He is finding new ways to find beauty within the mundane (boring) landscapes around him. His images start to tell personal stories of his childhood, his investment in repetitive tasks and more importantly challenges the audience's perception of Newfoundland.

## Resources

- Ned Pratt – One Wave (Goose Lane Editions – The Rooms)
- Rule of Thirds - Modula <https://wp-modula.com/kb/>

## Suggestions for Assessment

### Student responses (oral or written):

- The reason that I photographed my subject is \_\_\_\_\_.
- I adjusted the traditional perspective of the landscape by \_\_\_\_\_.
- This relates to my personal experiences because \_\_\_\_\_.
- A more traditional approach would have been to \_\_\_\_\_.
- Make anecdotal observations based on students' oral presentation and engaged participation during "art talks".