

# Singing Their Praises: Our Public Health Heroes

Inspired by the project [Unsung Heroes of Public Health](#) by Kay Hickman, Ayesha Kazim, and Kevin K. Miyazaki presented at Photoville 2023 by New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC DOHMH)

In this lesson plan, students will define the term “public health” and identify the people and types of work that help their communities thrive. In this lesson, students interview and honor their local public health heroes by creating photographic portraits of them, and sharing their stories in a final exhibition or presentation.



Former members of the Young Lords Party  
Denise Oliver-Velez (left), Miguel “Mickey” Melendez (middle), Minerva Solla (right) Photo by Kay Hickman

## Students will be able to:

- Develop a working definition for “public health” and understand the myriad ways that professional health workers and others contribute to the well-being of their community
- Understand the basics of photographic composition and portraiture, and create a compelling image of a local public health hero
- Interview a local community health hero, edit a story about the individual, and reflect on their experience
- Share their work with the classroom, school, and/or larger community in a final showcase, and express gratitude to their public health heroes.

## FEATURING PHOTOGRAPHY BY

**Kay Hickman**

Additional photography  
by Ayesha Kazim and  
Kevin J. Miyazaki

## AUTHORS

**Jessica Bal**

## GRADE LEVEL

**9th – 12th grades**

## SUBJECTS

**Visual Arts, English  
Language Arts, Health**

## TIME REQUIRED

**2–4 Sessions**

## KEY IMAGES

[Women in Healthcare](#)  
[Racial Equity in Healthcare](#)  
[Answering the Call](#)  
[City COVID Response](#)  
[Community Action](#)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[@NYCHealthy](#)  
[@KayHickmanPhotography](#)  
[NYC DOHMH Website](#)  
[Kay Hickman’s Website](#)

## MATERIALS NEEDED

[Unsung Heroes Image Bank](#), chart paper/  
whiteboard/chalkboard,  
paper and pens/pencils,  
cameras or camera  
phones, photo printer  
or projector, audio  
recorders (optional)

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## LESSON PART 1: INTRO

1. On a piece of chart paper or a whiteboard/chalkboard, write out the words: “PUBLIC HEALTH”. Create a mind map (or any other brainstorming format you prefer) by asking students these questions and recording their answers:

- What words first come to mind when you think of the phrase “public health”?
- What do people and communities need in order to be healthy?
- Who do you think is involved in maintaining or promoting public health? What kind of work do they do?

Split up the class into small groups, and have each group read and discuss one of the following sections of the [Unsung Heroes in Public Health](#) exhibition:

- Women in Healthcare
- Racial Equity in Healthcare
- Answering the Call
- City COVID Response
- Community Action

2. Have students answer the following questions about each section in their small groups, and then share out their answers to the class:

- What specific aspect of public health did the individuals and organizations in your section contribute to (e.g. research, advocacy, innovation, communication, organizing, technology, caretaking)? How are all their efforts connected?
- Who is one person or organization from your section that stood out to you? How did they use their specific skills or knowledge to help their community?
- Was there a quotation in your section that you found memorable? If so, why?
- Did anything that you read expand what we define as public health work? If so, add it to the existing brainstorm board!

3. Together as a full group, review the brainstorm board and create a final working definition of public health.

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## LESSON PART 2: ACTIVITY

1. Have students identify local public health heroes in their community to interview. Who is doing the work of keeping their community healthy, on the frontlines or behind the scenes? If you want to condense this lesson into a shorter time period, you might pre-research public health heroes in the community and have students select from those names. You can have students interview their heroes individually or in small groups.
2. Collaboratively come up with and write down example questions that students might ask their community heroes when they meet with them. Refer back to the sections in the *Unsung Heroes* Image Bank for inspiration as needed.
  - What do you already know about this person?
  - What are you curious about, and what do you not already know about them?
  - What is most important to understanding this person's role in the community?

*If interviewing is new for your students, spend some time talking about what active listening looks like (eye contact, allowing for pauses in the conversation, asking follow up questions), and how to make interviewees (and themselves!) feel comfortable.*

3. Provide students with some examples of portraits (images from the *Unsung Heroes* Image Bank could work!). Discuss basic composition techniques like: rule of thirds, perspective, leading lines, negative space, light/shadow, color, wide/medium/close up, natural frame. Discuss together: How do these techniques help focus the viewer's attention on the person in the picture? How do choices of color and perspective create different moods or impressions of the person in the image? For each student/group photographing a public health hero, have them write down:
  - What are three words that describe your public health hero and their work?
  - Where do you think you should photograph your public health hero? How might the background tell viewers something about them?
  - What visual techniques do you think will portray your hero most accurately? Do you see them in color, or black and white? At an angle? In dramatic or soft light? (Note: These might change, and that's okay! Imagine what your ideal image would be to get ideas flowing.)
4. Students should photograph and interview their public health heroes before Part 3 of the lesson. They can use camera phones or other cameras if available, and encourage them to bring some questions along with them. Students should return to class with:
  - A 15-minute (or longer!) interview with their public health hero, either audio recorded, recorded in notes, or both
  - At least 3-5 portraits of their public health hero

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## LESSON PART 3: REFLECTION/EXTENSION

1. Have students bring their public health hero portraits and interviews (either notes or audio recording) to class. Ask students to:
  - Choose and edit their favorite portrait of their hero
  - Pull out one significant or memorable quote from the interview
  - Write a one-paragraph summary introducing their public health hero and the work that they do for the community

**Optional:** you might want to have students peer edit their summary paragraphs or collaboratively select their quotations and portraits in partners or groups.

2. Organize a final showcase of students' public health hero stories and portraits. This could include projecting their images and having students present their stories in the classroom, hanging a gallery wall of printed photographs in the classroom or school alongside memorable quotes from each hero, or even installing an exhibit in a local space and creating an event for the larger community. You might consider inviting the public health heroes to the final showcase and honoring them in person too!
3. Have students write thank you notes addressed to their public health heroes (a print of their portrait is a great thing to include too, if access to a photo printer is possible!). Students can mail these notes to their community health heroes or deliver them in person. The following prompts might help spark ideas when writing:
  - What is most inspiring about your public health hero?
  - What do you hope they understand or feel about the impact of their work?
  - What did you most enjoy about meeting and talking to them?
  - What might you do differently in your community now or in the future as a result of what you learned from this person?



**Huge Ma**  
Engineer who invented COVID vaccine tracker

*Photo by Kay Hickman*



**Asenhat Gomez** (left)  
Deputy Director of Programs, El Puente

**Dr. Frances Lucerna** (right)  
Co-Founder and President of El Puente

Curing gun violence with self-determination

*Photo by Kay Hickman*



**Camara Phyllis Jones, MD, MPH, PhD**  
Physician and epidemiologist who has dedicated her career to addressing the impact of racism on public health

*Photo by Ayesha Kazim*

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## STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

### [Common Core: Reading Standards for Informational Text 6-12](#)

Grades 9-10, 2. Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Grade 11-12, 3. Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

### [Common Core: Writing Standards 6-12](#)

Grades 9-10, 4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Grades 11-12, 5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

### [Common Core: Speaking and Listening Standards 6-12](#)

Grades 9-10, 1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Grades 9-10, 4. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

Grades 11-12, 5. Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

### [NYC Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Visual Arts](#)

#### Art Making

- Digital Media

#### Developing Art Literacy

- Looking at and Discussing Art
- Developing Visual Arts Vocabulary

#### Community and Cultural Resources

- Public Art and Design

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# Photoville Education Resources

Browse the Photoville Education Resource library for over 20 free lesson plans and resource guides for incorporating photography and storytelling into the classroom.

These lesson plans were developed in collaboration with over 150 educators through our [Educator Labs](#). Educators across subject matters interested in incorporating visual storytelling into their curriculum participate in a free one-day professional development workshop that culminates in a hands-on lesson planning session in collaboration with the artist.

We always love hearing how our exhibitions are used in the classroom; if you would like to submit feedback and stories of your experience, please email us: [education@photoville.com](mailto:education@photoville.com).

The screenshot shows a website interface for filtering lesson plans by theme. At the top, it says "Filter Lesson Plans By THEME". Below this are several filter buttons: "SHOW ALL", "COMMUNITY STORIES", "ENVIRONMENT", "REPRESENTATION & IDENTITY", and "SOCIAL ISSUES". The main content area displays a grid of lesson plan cards, each with a thumbnail image, a title, and a brief description.

**Peer Exchange In The Park: Notes From The Fall 2021 Photoville Educator Lab**  
A resource culminating from our Fall 2021 Educator Lab where educators exchanged ideas about incorporating visual storytelling in the classroom.

**Disability / Visibility**  
Our Fall 2022 Educator Lab where educators exchanged ideas about incorporating visual storytelling in the classroom in the context of the disability community and expanding visibility & accessibility.

**Notes From The Spring 2021 Photoville Educator Lab: Creating With Community**  
A resource culminating from our Spring 2021 Educator Lab meant to spark community collaboration ideas for teachers and their students.

**Project Planning With Intention And Authenticity**  
Students will consider identity through the lens of visual storytelling. Students will use photography and text to tell a personal narrative that may address and disrupt stereotypes.

**My Life In Pieces!**  
Students will tell their personal story through design, images and objects/materials/textures that come alive through a diorama.

**Remix: A Lesson In Collaboration**  
Through a collaborative process, students will create a photo collage together – each contributing a source image and responding artistically to others' source images.

**Your World**  
Students will consider identity through the lens of visual storytelling. Students will use photography and text to tell a personal narrative that may address and disrupt stereotypes.

**What We Share**  
Students will be able to analyze the work of the photographer, determine outcomes of the project and apply these lessons to their own social justice documentary project.

**Connecting With Yourself**  
Students will collage past and current photos of themselves to reflect on their own life history, legacy and role as future ancestors.

The Photoville Education program is presented in partnership with PhotoWings



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