



STAY COMPOSED

CHRISTOPHER BEAN (1936)

ROMEO AND JULIET [JULIET'S CHAMBER] (1933)

FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

When a photographer wants to draw your eye to a certain part of a photograph, he will use light sources, cropping, and props, but also experiment with lines and composition. A line does not necessarily have to be obvious, or drawn with a ruler, it can be created by lining things up in a path that subtly guides your eye. There are different kinds of lines: horizontal, vertical, diagonal and curved. All of these are used by artists to get a desired effect, for example a diagonal line gives the sense of movement or depth.

As a photographer, Karsh made many decisions before taking a photograph. One of these decisions was how the image would be composed. The composition of an artwork is the way in which its visual elements are arranged to create a shape. A common shape used in art is the triangle. Renaissance artists, for example, would use the triangle to represent hierarchy in paintings, pointing to what they considered most important – Heaven.



In this image from a production of *Christopher Bean* (1936) at the Ottawa Little Theatre, a very strong diagonal crosses from the upper left corner to the lower right.

That line is also slightly curved around the group of people. Karsh deliberately selected these elements and paired them with the use of light. This focuses our gaze on the action in the centre of the image, and provokes curiosity about the story.

In the photograph from *Romeo and Juliet* (1933), the two main characters form a symmetrical triangle. The shape is reinforced on the right by Juliet holding out her arm and Romeo's outstretched leg on the left, as well as the bench they are on and the archway under which they are sitting. This creates a stable image.



Christopher Bean (1936)
Yousuf Karsh
Ottawa, Canada
Library and Archives Canada,
Yousuf Karsh Fonds, e008441745

Romeo and Juliet [Juliet's Chamber] (1936)
Yousuf Karsh
Ottawa, Canada
Library and Archives Canada,
Yousuf Karsh Fonds, e010678944

KARSH IN THE CLASSROOM

- Use a cut-out frame to see how different angles/details can change how we 'read' an image. Also try using a cut out shape such as a triangle and look for themes in the online gallery at: www.festivalkarsh.ca.
- Give students magazines and have them group together different compositions in images or advertisements. This will help them understand why they look at things the way they do and how photographs or artworks are composed.
- Another way to get students familiar with the idea of composition is to use objects on sun print paper or to create a collage with images from magazines. Have them explain why they arranged the objects or images in the way they did and how the message of their artwork would change if they arranged it differently.



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