

Storytelling Through Photos

Photography is more than capturing an image—it's a way of telling a story without relying on words. A powerful photograph can show emotion, communicate a moment in time, document culture, or encourage the viewer to imagine what's happening before or after the scene. Here are the core ideas:

1. Every Photo Has a Message

A good storytelling image answers (or asks!) these questions:

- **Who or what is the subject?**
- **What is happening?**
- **Where is this taking place?**
- **When did this moment occur?**
- **Why does this moment matter?**

Even without text, the viewer should understand the basic story the photographer is trying to share.

2. Composition Shapes the Story

The choices a photographer makes—framing, angle, distance, and focus—determine *how* the story is told.

- **Rule of Thirds:** places the subject where the eye naturally looks.
- **Leading Lines:** guide the viewer's eye toward the main subject.
- **Foreground/Background:** adds context, depth, and meaning.
- **Perspective/Vantage Point:** shooting from high, low, or water level creates different emotional effects.

A.R. Gurrey Jr., for example, often shot from canoes to bring viewers into the action.

3. Emotion Brings the Story to Life

Powerful photos capture:

- joy

- determination
- fear
- excitement
- calm
- community

Emotion helps the viewer connect with the image.

4. Action and Timing Matter

Storytelling photography depends on what moment you choose to capture.

- The **peak action** (jump, wave ride, leap, splash)
- The **quiet moment** before or after action
- The **unexpected detail**

Surf photography—like Gurrey’s work—is built around capturing fleeting, high-energy moments that reveal skill, environment, and culture.

5. Details Create Meaning

Small elements can enrich the story:

- clothing
- facial expression
- setting
- weather
- color or lack of color
- movement
- objects or tools

These details help the viewer understand the moment more fully.

6. Context Connects the Image to a Larger Story

A single photo can reflect:

- cultural traditions
- historical events

- environmental conditions
- community identity
- personal experiences

Gurrey's images of early Hawaiian surfers do all of this—preserving a culture, sport, and lifestyle.

7. Captions Strengthen the Story

While a photo should stand on its own, a short caption can:

- identify the subject
- clarify the moment
- add background information
- deepen understanding

Photojournalists use captions to support accuracy and storytelling.

In Short

Storytelling through photos is about capturing:

a moment + emotion + context = a complete visual story