



# AFGHANISTAN

EDUCATION RESOURCE

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Museums & Galleries Queensland acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live, and of the lands and waters through which *Afghanistan* travels.

We offer our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognise their continuing connection to culture, land, water and community. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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122 Gerler Road, Hendra, QLD 4011  
P: 07 3059 9740  
E: [information@magsq.com.au](mailto:information@magsq.com.au)  
W: [www.magsq.com.au](http://www.magsq.com.au)

This Education Resource has been written by Ellie Waterhouse with contributions from photojournalist Andrew Quilty, Patricia Grossman, Human Rights Watch, Dr Rhys Crawley, UNSW, and Rawan Arraf, Australian Centre for International Justice.

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For more information on the national tour of the exhibition tour, *Afghanistan*, and to view the film with photojournalist Andrew Quilty and curator, Ellie Waterhouse, visit the M&G QLD website:  
<https://magsq.com.au/touring-exhibitions/afghanistan/>

*Afghanistan* is a Museums & Galleries Queensland touring exhibition presented in partnership with photojournalist and author Andrew Quilty, and curator Ellie Waterhouse. This project has been assisted by the Australian Government's Visions of Australia program. It is proudly sponsored by Heckler and supported by Human Rights Watch.

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Cover Image:  
Andrew Quilty, *Qasaba, Kabul City, Kabul Province, 24/8/2021*, inkjet pigment print on Alupanel, 100 x 150 cm. Courtesy of Andrew Quilty



Australian Government  
Visions of Australia



Queensland  
Government



Australian Government  
Visual Art, Craft and Design Framework

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# CONTENT WARNING

This exhibition contains images of war that some viewers may find distressing. If you or someone you know needs help, contact details for support services are available from Museums & Galleries Queensland's website: <https://magsq.com.au/touring-exhibitions/afghanistan/>

## **Important information for teachers:**

- This Education Resource is appropriate for years 9, 10, 11 and 12.
- Some activities and resources you may wish to leave out, based on your own understanding of your cohort's needs and considering keeping your students safe. If a student in your class is part of the refugee or diaspora communities in Australia, particular consideration must be made to consider psychological effects that this exhibition may have. This consideration is on a case-by-case basis.
- Please ensure you read this Resource carefully before introducing it to students at your school.
- Get parent permission to go to the exhibition, and check your school policies if you are unsure of the safety of showing images of war and conflict to your students.
- Start with finding out what students know about war, and only use the resources that apply to you and your students' learning needs.
- Be mindful of where this Resource is stored and who has access to it. For example, do not host this resource on servers available to younger students.

Always read all referenced materials associated with this Education Resource before conducting any teaching activities or sharing with your students. Due to the dynamic nature of media coverage on war and conflict, linked resources and materials may be updated in real time.

For tips on how to talk to children about war and conflict please see this link below:  
<https://www.unicef.org/parenting/child-care/how-talk-your-children-about-conflict-and-war>

## **Support for Students:**

### **Kids Helpline**

5 to 25 year olds. All issues. Confidential phone counselling available all day, every day. Online chat available 24/7, 365 days a year.  
1800 55 1800

### **Headspace**

12 to 25 year olds. All issues. Phone counselling and online chat available 3pm to 10pm AEST, every day.  
1800 650 890

# AFGHANISTAN – ABOUT THE EXHIBITION



Andrew Quilty, *Qala-e Musa, Kabul City, Kabul Province*, 24/1/2018, inkjet pigment print on Alupanel, 31 x 46.5cm

A man sells balloons to young residents of Qala-e Musa, located on the northern side of Bibi Maru Hill. This area is vastly poorer than the opposite side, which is home to diplomatic missions, international NGOs, media bureaus and wealthy Afghans in the Wazir Akbar Khan neighbourhood.

*Afghanistan* is a profoundly moving and compelling photographic exhibition by award-winning photojournalist and author Andrew Quilty. Living in Kabul for almost a decade, from 2013 to 2022, Quilty's powerful images capture the complex tapestry of daily life throughout the country. This exhibition stands as a deeply personal narrative—an intimate glimpse into a nation too often defined by conflict.

Quilty describes his work as an 'imperfect portrait of time and place', skillfully balancing moments of breathtaking beauty with the harsh realities of war. Through his evocative compositions, visitors will encounter not only the devastation and hardship wrought by conflict but also the resilience, hope, and humanity of the people he lived among. His photographs invite audiences to reflect on themes of cultural identity, endurance, and the impact that war imposes on ordinary lives.

Quilty says, "To me, it was the experience of Afghan non-combatants, those upon whom the war was imposed rather than the professional soldiers who chose to participate, whose stories most deserved to be told."

He continues, “Witnessing the experiences of Afghans for whom neither innocence nor neutrality were enough to protect them from the war, compelled me to stay and guided my focus.”

“The images I take are not just about conflict, they’re about the resilience of the people caught in it.”

Exhibition curator, Ellie Waterhouse, says, “Quilty’s ineffable portraiture comes with an authenticity gained from the time spent living there and simply observing.”

*Afghanistan* challenges audiences to look beyond headlines, encouraging thoughtful engagement and meaningful discussions around what it means to survive—and thrive—in the face of adversity. This exhibition is not just a showcase of Quilty’s artistic talents; it’s an invitation to connect with the stories behind the images, to empathise with distant lives, and to explore the vibrancy and complexity of Afghan society.

Waterhouse continues, “I envisage that this exhibition may naturally become a space where Quilty’s storytelling becomes an act of advocacy, education, and deep reflection within our communities.”



Andrew Quilty, *Koh-e Tup, Kabul City, Kabul Province*, 19/5/2017, inkjet pigment print on Alupanel, 34 x 51cm

Above is the western side of Koh-e Sher Darwaza, also known as Lion's Gate Mountain, over which the 16th century Walls of Kabul, or Babur's Wall, extend along the mountain ridge to the Bala Hissar fort.

# CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

## A note to teachers:

This Education Resource is designed to connect with the four key areas in the Visual Arts Australian Curriculum v9. These are explored through the themes of Perspectives, Practice and Document.

Resources and activities are targeted at the year 9 and 10 Visual Arts syllabus of the Australian Curriculum and Years 11 and 12. Due to the nature and sensitivity of the images and the complex discussions that may take place in the classroom about war and conflict, we encourage students to use multiple sources to enhance their engagement and understanding of the exhibition.

“We invite you to engage with *Afghanistan* – to see, to feel, and to connect with the stories behind Andrew Quilty’s extraordinary photographs.”

Rebekah Butler, Executive Director, Museums & Galleries Queensland

“While art often seeks to evoke emotion and provoke thought, photojournalism’s primary aim is to document reality. Yet, both forms share a common thread: their capacity to influence perception, challenge assumptions, and inspire action.”

Curatorial Essay, Exhibition Catalogue, Ellie Waterhouse

### **Before visiting the exhibition:**

- At the beginning of this document, there is a content warning with a link to support services. Please consider your own classroom and the needs of your students when visiting the exhibition. We would advise you to speak with parents and students who may have family or loved ones affected by war and conflict or who may be part of the diaspora communities in Australia. The exhibition and its support of organisations such as Human Rights Watch offers a platform for not only learning about war and conflict but also to tell the stories of the humility of the Afghan people. Through this, we hope to connect with the minds of young Australian students by facilitating a deeper connection to these narratives as part of a broader process of empathy and reconciliation.
- Prior to visiting the exhibition, we would envisage students doing some research on the general history of Afghanistan and Australia's involvement in the conflict to be able to attend the gallery with some prior knowledge. Reading the essays in this Education Resource and essays from the catalogue could assist, in addition to the many links to books, videos and other media or resources listed under the resources section.
- We advise students to bring along a camera or smartphone, and a drawing and writing notepad to document their experience when visiting the exhibition. With a deeper insight into

the practice of photojournalism, we envisage teachers being able to set a task that mimics that of Quilty's practice, within their own life setting. Students will be able to record their own surroundings or plan a specific story that they connect with in their community.

### **Arts and Asia: focus in the Australian Curriculum:**

In The Visual Arts, students can examine art forms and practices that reflect the rich and diverse cultures, belief systems and traditions of the Asia region. They can explore traditional, contemporary and emerging media, forms and practices, and relationships between artists and audiences across Australia and Asia. They consider the local, regional and global influence of arts and cultural practices created and experienced across the region. Students can also investigate the role of the arts in developing, maintaining and transforming cultural beliefs and practices, and communicating an understanding of the rich cultural diversity of the Asia region. They can reflect on the intrinsic value of these artworks and artists' practices as well as their place and value within contexts and communities. ([www.australiancurriculum.edu.au](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au), 2025)

### **Cross Curricular Connections**

#### **Humanities, Social Sciences and Media Arts:**

Although this Resource is designed for Visual Arts, there are many cross-curricular connections that can be drawn. In particular, students can make connections through Humanities and Social Sciences, developing 'respect and empathy for diverse perspectives and ways of seeing the world.'

Students can also investigate the ways that media artists use media arts concepts to construct representations in media arts works and practices from across cultures, times, places or other contexts. ([www.australiancurriculum.edu.au](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au), 2025)



Andrew Quilty, *Torkham District, Nangarhar Province*, 18/7/2017, inkjet pigment print on Alupanel, 34 x 51cm

Kamran and Maria ride in a truck from Pakistan, where they were born and lived as refugees after their parents fled Baghlan province during the civil war of the 1980s.

## Perspectives

### Exploring and Responding

#### Overarching Enquiry Question:

How do Andrew Quilty's images in *Afghanistan* challenge our perspectives?

Examples of themes students and teachers could address:

- Afghan culture, history and politics.
- The human cost of war and conflict.

Using various essays, videos and other resources, students will be guided to make connections and comparisons of various perspectives with images in the exhibition.

“It is through his lens, that we gain a delicate and intimate insight into the complex nature of living through conflict.” (Ellie Waterhouse, Exhibition Catalogue Essay)

Investigating how Quilty's use of visual conventions – such as patience and subtlety – communicates ideas of resilience amid conflict.

AC9AVA8E01 / AC9AVA10E01

“His focus was on the innocent civilians and their everyday life amidst the chaos.” (Ellie Waterhouse, Exhibition Catalogue Essay)

Exploring the perspectives and multiple narratives represented in Quilty's photographs of Afghan civilians.

AC9AVA8E01 / AC9AVA10E01

“The photograph of a young boy in Sayedabad...is an example of hope and innocence amidst danger.” (Ellie Waterhouse, Exhibition Catalogue Essay)

Analysing how visual conventions evoke emotion and challenge assumptions about life in wartime.

AC9AVA8E01 / AC9AVA10E01

“Quilty's images reflect the recent decline in human rights in Afghanistan.” (Ellie Waterhouse, Exhibition Catalogue Essay)

Understanding how artworks can develop perspectives that comment on social and political issues.

AC9AVA8E01 / AC9AVA10E01



Andrew Quilty, photojournalist at work. Image courtesy of Andrew Quilty.

## Practice

### Developing Practices and Skills

Andrew Quilty experiments with visual conventions such as candid composition, natural lighting, and timing to capture authentic moments. Students can explore these techniques by experimenting with a variety of photographic processes and materials to develop their own personal expression, much like Quilty's approach to documenting real life.

AC9AVA8D01 / AC9AVA10D01

Quilty's practice demonstrates patience and observation, waiting for the perfect moment to capture the story. Students can reflect on how patience and careful observation influence the development of their own artworks, focusing on timing, framing, and capturing nuance.

AC9AVA8D01 / AC9AVA10D01

Quilty's experience as a photojournalist responds to influences like the environment, current events, and social contexts, which shape his artistic choices. Students can reflect on how external influences, such as cultural, historical, or personal factors, inform their artistic decision-making processes in their own practice.

AC9AVA8D02 / AC9AVA10D02

#### Students will be able to:

Experiment with composition, lighting, and timing to create authentic and emotionally impactful images.

Reflect on external influences such as current events, cultural contexts, and personal experiences that inform artistic choices.

Develop personal expression by observing and responding to real-world situations, much like Quilty's approach to capturing the complexities of Afghanistan.

Consider how patience and observation are vital skills in both photojournalism and visual arts practice, encouraging students to cultivate these skills in their own work.

## Document

This Education Resource provides students with authentic opportunities to engage in the process of creating and making artworks inspired by Andrew Quilty's photography in the *Afghanistan* exhibition. Through exploring Quilty's use of visual conventions, processes, and materials, students can generate, document, and develop their own ideas for visual stories that communicate personal or social perspectives. They are encouraged to experiment with methods such as framing, composition, lighting, and digital or traditional materials to create artworks that reflect their understanding and viewpoint. Additionally, the Resource promotes critical reflection and evaluation, inviting students to seek feedback on their work, refine their techniques, and develop their artistic and photojournalistic practice with deeper intentionality. By responding to influences and challenges within their own work, students reinforce their ability to manipulate visual conventions and processes to express ideas, challenge perceptions, or represent their personal perspectives, aligning directly with the objectives of the Creating and Making strand of the Australian Curriculum.

### Curriculum Connections: Creating and Making

generate, document and develop ideas for artworks  
AC9AVA8C01

evaluate critical feedback when planning, developing and refining their visual arts practice  
AC9AVA10C01

select and manipulate visual conventions, visual arts processes and/or materials to create artworks that represent ideas, perspectives and/or meaning  
AC9AVA8C02

select and manipulate visual conventions, visual arts processes and/or materials to create artworks that reflect personal expression, and represent and/or challenge, ideas, perspectives and/or meaning  
AC9AVA10C02



Andrew Quilty, photojournalist at work. Image courtesy of Andrew Quilty.

### Document: Presenting and performing

Students can engage with Andrew Quilty's *Afghanistan* exhibition by selecting and sequencing their own images that convey specific ideas or perspectives, developing a personal series that tells a story or explores themes such as resilience or conflict. Working collaboratively, they can share their series of images with peers, discussing and evaluating each other's choices to improve the storytelling and clarity of their messages.

Students will have the opportunity to curate an exhibition, making decisions about layout, grouping, and contextual information to communicate their collective perspectives effectively. Through this process, students reflect on the reasons behind their choices—considering how visual conventions, narrative flow, and audience engagement influence the impact of their exhibition, aligning with the curriculum strands on curating and evaluating art practices.

curate and present examples of their visual arts practice to accompany exhibits of their artworks to communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning to audiences  
AC9AVA8P01

evaluate art exhibits to inform the curation and exhibition of their own and/or others' artworks and/or visual arts practice  
AC9AVA10P01



Andrew Quilty proofing images with master printer Selena Simpson from Make Prints, image courtesy of Selena Simpson.

# ESSAYS AND INTERVIEWS

“In international criminal justice, accountability means making sure that people who commit very serious crimes ...are properly investigated and brought before a court.”

Rawan Arraf, Australian Centre for International Justice

“For those of us living in Australia, the US, or the UK, Afghanistan may seem like just a faraway place marked by danger, terror, and tragedy... For Afghans, including those living abroad, it’s different.”

Patricia Grossman, Human Rights Watch

“...there are many truths, and many perspectives about any historical event, but not a single truth.”

Dr Rhys Crawley, UNSW

## **A Keen Observer, essay by Patricia Grossman**

Patricia Grossman is the Associate Asia Director for Human Rights Watch, Asia Division.

For those of us living in Australia, the US, or the UK, Afghanistan may seem like just a faraway place marked by danger, terror, and tragedy. Mostly we tend to see it only through the lens of the 20-year war that started after the 9/11 attacks on the US and ended with the Taliban returning to power.

For Afghans, including those living abroad, it's different. The war has been generational, nearly 50 years of conflict starting with a communist coup in April 1978, utterly changing Afghan society and uprooting millions of people. It has shaped the lives of Afghans in ways that the rest of us will never truly understand.

I met Andrew Quilty in 2015 in Kabul. Shortly after that I asked him to join me on a trip to a couple of provinces where I was interviewing people who had survived bombings by the Taliban and other armed groups and US airstrikes. We wanted to talk to people whose lives had been tragically affected by the war, and after seeing Andrew's stunning photos, I knew he was the one who could best help tell their stories.

One interview that I'll always remember was with Rozina, who was 17 at the time—the only member of her family to survive a US airstrike on their car. Having lived through unbearable trauma, in the interview she talks about her fears that her injuries would leave her unable to walk and have

a normal life. (This story ended happily: she got good care at an Italian hospital in Kabul and was able to walk again).

In another case, a 19-year-old woman told Andrew and me about her appointment in central Kabul for a job interview, for her first real job. Because she was early, she had just stepped into a shop when a Taliban bomb went off, nearly obliterating the street. You can see it in Andrew's photos. We actually ended up not using the interview—her family understandably wanted to avoid any publicity. I've often wondered what happened in her life in the years since.

I tell you these stories to give you a sense of how I have seen Andrew work in Afghanistan. He is a keen observer while at the same time very respectful of those he meets, so many of them ordinary people getting on with their lives in extraordinarily hard circumstances. Many of the stories his photos tell are difficult for us to absorb, as they capture lives cut short or shaped by ghastly violence: men trying to survive a battle, families burying their dead, wounded patients facing a long road ahead, endless struggles of poverty and loss. But there is also joy: people dressed up for a wedding; going boating on a lake; girls whispering in a school dormitory; and kids playing cricket in a field. That is also Afghanistan.

## Consider the following...

Official Histories are commissioned by the government as the national record of Australia's involvement in particular conflicts. Often compiled from first-hand accounts, unit diaries and a range of other reference data, they are a detailed, chronological record of all services and theatres of conflict. (Australian War Memorial, 2025).

Dr Rhys Crawley was involved in the writing of the official record of a period of the war in Afghanistan for the Australian War Memorial. War photographers have access to some of the most intimate scenes of conflict. On many occasions, a photograph will be of use in the telling of history. In Dr Rhys Crawley's case, he looks at multiple sources and tries to create a truthful story of what happened.

## **On truth, by Dr Rhys Crawley, interviewed by Curator, Ellie Waterhouse**

Dr Rhys Crawley, senior lecturer in history at UNSW Canberra and one of the authors of the forthcoming *Official History of Australian Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan*.

***How do you as a historian for a particular period of history go about representing the truth? What challenges do you have during the process?***

Truth is always a tricky proposition for historians: there are many truths, and many perspectives about any historical event, but not a single truth. As an historian, I need to be aware of this reality; and it's important that the reader is shown where multiple truths might exist. For example, rather than presenting something as the truth, I will often attribute it as someone's perspective, and, where the records exist, contrast that with other perspectives. This shows our readers that history is complicated and contested. This is particularly apparent when, for instance, documents provide contrasting details, or if the details in a document do not correspond with oral history interviews. Where that occurs, historians need to use their judgement about the reliability and usefulness of their respective sources of information and, depending on the issue, tell the reader why they put more trust in one account over the other.

***When you speak to veterans, how do you make decisions of what to include and what not to include in this record of history? What does that process look like and how do you include the***

***human aspect that perhaps sometimes is left out in official documentation of war and conflict?***

All of my history projects, including the *Official History of Australian Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan*, have been primarily written from primary sources (documents created at the time I'm studying). Indeed, one of the privileges of writing an official history is that its authors are given early access to government documents that, for the main, are not yet available to the public. That said, documents are not the only source we use, nor are documents always accurate, and they never convey everything. Interviews with participants – be they private soldiers or prime ministers, diplomats or diaspora (of which my project has done hundreds) – can be a really valuable source of information: to provide other research leads, to add colour and perspectives to otherwise bland reports, and to build my own knowledge – so that I am better able to ask questions of the documents, to see what is not written, and to query other participants. Of course, interviews, like documents, need to be treated with caution; memory changes over time, and versions of the same story can differ. Nonetheless, I will use an interview where I believe it adds value to the history.

**Can the act of recording history ever be completely free of bias or moral implications, and how do you address this? Given that so much change in Afghanistan has happened since you created your record, do you feel that this unfinished record perhaps needs to be completed?**

History, and the historian, is never fully objective. In writing about Afghanistan, I have made friends who served in that conflict. Personally, this provides a challenge that, for instance, I did not have when writing about the First World War. In my mind, the best we can do is acknowledge our biases (to myself and the reader), and then have systems in place to help deal with that potential bias: have a colleague interview those friends, or perhaps write a relevant section of the official history or, where that is not possible, ask colleagues to pay particular attention to that relationship when critically reviewing my work. I also believe that empathy, as different from sympathy, is one of the strongest tools an historian can possess: in my experience, empathy is best built through familiarity and relationships.

History is also a continuous conversation. When I began writing the *Official History of Australian Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan* in 2016, the conflict was ongoing. The international community still had hope

for Afghanistan's future. There were no public allegations that Australian special forces might have committed war crimes in Afghanistan. My understanding of the conflict, and my overall analysis, were shaped and re-shaped by those wider changes. The history I produce will be a snapshot in time. I will undoubtedly get things wrong. And that's okay: others will engage with my work, criticising and correcting it, and it's through that process that our understanding of the past will develop.

**Curators note:**

Crawley's perspective on truth resonates deeply with how we appreciate the practice of photography as a record of war. It is a medium that offers diverse narratives and insights, rather than a singular, definitive account. This exhibition is an opportunity for the Australian public to engage with one perspective. Afghanistan, as a country, has a complex history to tell. The exhibition is Quilty's own chronological narrative of the hope and courage of the people who have lived and witnessed conflict that, due to its protracted nature, blends military, political, and ideological battles.  
(Ellie Waterhouse, 2025)

## What is international Criminal Justice?

“In international criminal justice, accountability means making sure that people who commit very serious crimes—such as war crimes, torture, or killing civilians during conflict—are properly investigated and brought before a court. These rules apply to all countries and all individuals, including soldiers and government officials. The aim is to protect people during war, ensure that powerful groups cannot act without consequences, and give victims a chance for justice. When countries take accountability seriously, it strengthens global trust and helps prevent future abuse.”  
(Rawan Arraf, Executive Director, Australian Centre for International Justice, 2025)

# BIOGRAPHIES



Portrait of Andrew Quilty, photo by James Brickwood.

Andrew Quilty is an Australian photojournalist renowned for his work documenting life in Afghanistan. Based in Kabul from 2013 to 2022, Quilty focused on Afghan civilians living and dying on the edges of the country's battlefields. His raw, evocative images have been featured in major international publications and exhibitions, earning him accolades such as the Gold Walkley Award, the highest honour in Australian journalism, and the prestigious George Polk and Overseas Press Club of America Awards. Quilty's work provides a window into the complexities of the American-led war, scrutinising the foreign policy goals and strategies and their outcomes for Afghanistan and its people. Quilty was one of only a handful of foreign journalists in Kabul in August 2021 when the Taliban pushed the Afghan government from power and American diplomats and military personnel made their frantic withdrawal, only days from the 20th anniversary of the attacks that triggered the U.S. invasion.



Portrait of Ellie Waterhouse, photo by Trevor King.

Ellie Waterhouse has over 10 years of curatorial/gallery and artist management experience in both emerging and established galleries, including Olsen Gallery, Sydney. She has a sound understanding of exhibition and curatorial processes. Recently, Waterhouse judged Head on Festival, Sydney and was a special guest speaker at 'On the Verge' Educational conference at Bundanon. She has run numerous arts industry conferences, including 'Future Present' at the MCA during her tenure as Director of Professional Development at VADEA. As Lucida Learning's founder, Waterhouse produced and hosted consecutive years of the Sydney Lucida Conference for Educators, featuring international artists such as Maija Tammi (supported by The Finnish Arts Foundation). In her various educational and creative roles, Waterhouse has focused on innovative, creative learning experiences in the arts to both students and teachers. Her connection to Afghanistan began ten years ago when she discovered the not-for-profit organisation 'Skatestan', which temporarily paused all operations in Kabul, when the Taliban took control of the country in 2021. Waterhouse has a deep passion for equitable distribution of education.

# PERSPECTIVES – ACTIVITIES

When looking at this theme, students may wish to explore the history of Afghanistan before visiting the exhibition.

## Geography

“Afghanistan is located in Central Asia with Iran to the west and Pakistan to the east. Tall, forbidding mountains and dry deserts cover most of the landscape of Afghanistan. The jagged mountain peaks are treacherous, and are snow covered for most of the year.

Many Afghans live in the fertile valleys between the mountains and grow their crops and tend to their animals. Only 20 percent of the land is used as fields.

Summers are hot and dry but the winters are very cold, especially north of the Hindu Kush, which is located in the eastern part of the country near Pakistan and Tajikistan. Many rivers flow through the mountain gorges. Snowmelt and rain that flow out of the Hindu Kush pool into a low area and never reach the ocean.

The mountain passes in Afghanistan allow travelers passage across Asia. The country was a busy section of the Silk Road, a route that merchants have traveled over land between China, India, and Europe for over 2,000 years.”

(National Geographic Kids, Afghanistan <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/geography/countries/article/afghanistan>, 2025).



Source: OpenTopography.org – terrain visualisation of Afghanistan derived from NASA SRTM and Copernicus DEM data

## People and Culture

“The country is made of many different groups. About 15 million people, nearly half of Afghanistan’s population are Pashtuns and live in the south around Kandahar. They are descendants of people who came to the country 3,200 years ago.

Many other groups live in the country as well—Pashtuns are related to the Persian people of Iran, the Tajiks are also Persian, but speak another language called Dari, and the Uzbeks speak a language similar to Turkish.

The Hazaras live in the mountains of central Afghanistan and are believed to be descendants of the Mongols because their Dari language contains many Mongol words.

Due to many years of war, the countryside is littered with unexploded mines and children who herd animals are often killed by stepping on mines. Many schools have been destroyed... (redacted sentence).

Over the centuries, travellers have braved the dangerous high mountain passes to find shelter in the valleys and plains of Afghanistan. Today nomads called Kuchi lead their herds of animals across the country and into the mountain pastures for grazing.

Afghans take pride in making and flying their own kites. They even have kite fights and use wire or glass in their kites to cut the kite strings of rival kite flyers.

Tea is the favorite Afghan drink and a popular meal is palau, made from rice, sheep and goat meats, and fruit.”

(National Geographic Kids, Afghanistan <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/geography/countries/article/afghanistan>, 2025).



Andrew Quilty, *Qala-e Musa, Kabul City, Kabul Province, 29/1/2014*, inkjet pigment print on Alupanel, 33 x 49.5cm

A pigeon circles its master who conducts his flock from a purpose-built structure above his home during evening Kaftar Bazi, play of pigeons, in Qala-e Musa, Kabul.



Andrew Quilty, *Shahr-e Naw, Kabul City, Kabul Province*, 11/10/2017, inkjet pigment print on Alupanel, 35 x 52.5cm

In Kabul's Sherpur neighbourhood, four-year-old Bareen waits in a car outside a beauty salon with her recently engaged brother and his close friends before the engagement party.



Andrew Quilty, *Sherpur, Kabul City, Kabul Province*, 20/1/2018, inkjet pigment print on Alupanel, 22 x 33cm

Children fly kites from among the tombstones of the Bibi Mahru hillside cemetery at dusk.

**Teachers' note:**

Here is a list of other texts that may support you and your students in a more generic understanding of the history of Afghanistan:

1. *Return of a King* by William Dalrymple
2. *The Horseman* by Joseph Kessel
3. *Ghost Wars* by Steve Coll
4. *No Good Men Among the Living* by Anand Gopal
5. *My Life with the Taliban* by Abdul Salam Zaeef
6. *Pomegranate and Fig* by Zaheda Ghani

## Perspective on truth in photojournalism

### Perspectives Activity 1: “Imagine the Story Beyond the Frame”

#### Objective:

This activity could be done in the classroom prior to seeing the exhibition, or as a standalone task. Use your imagination and artistic skills to explore what might be happening outside the borders of Andrew Quilty’s photograph (*Chahr-i Anjir, Lashkar Gah District, Helmand, 23/4/2016*), creating your own visual story that adds depth to the image.

#### View the Image Carefully:

Look at Quilty’s photograph of the police outpost in Helmand. Think about what you see and what the image suggests about the scene—such as danger, boredom, fatigue, or alertness.

#### Write a brief, imaginative caption (2-3 sentences) “Story Extension”:

- Imagine what might be happening just outside what the camera captures.
- Are there more people hiding or patrolling nearby?
- Is there an imminent threat or a moment of calm just before or after this scene?
- What sounds, smells, or feelings might be present beyond the frame?
- Use the words in the glossary below to help you construct a more in-depth description of the image.

#### Share and Reflect: Present your caption to the class:

- Discuss how your imagined story adds new meaning or perspective to the original photograph.
- Consider how different interpretations can deepen or change our understanding of the scene.
- What is this image telling us about what it might have been like to be a member of the national police and their daily life in 2016 fighting in the conflict?



Andrew Quilty, *Chahr-e Anjir, Lashkar Gah District, Helmand Province, 23/4/2016*, inkjet pigment print on Alupanel, 106 x 160cm

Local and National Police rest during the day inside an isolated outpost less than 100 metres from Taliban-controlled territory in Chah-e Anjir, Helmand. Three men had been killed at the outpost in the month prior.

#### Glossary:

**Foreboding:** An ominous or threatening feeling that hints at future conflict or danger.

**Rawness:** The unfiltered, honest quality of the scene, emphasising authenticity or emotional intensity.

**Tension:** A feeling of unease or anticipation generated by composition, subject placement, or lighting.

**Teachers' notes for reflection discussion:**

A focus on the variation of responses here between students can highlight what perspectives we bring to our own interpretations of an image.

Optional extension task: During the final discussion point in 'share and reflect', draw relationships between this activity and their reading of the interview with Dr Rhys Crawley.

**Curriculum Links:**

investigate ways that visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials are manipulated to represent ideas, perspectives and/or meaning in artworks created across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts  
AC9AVA8E01

investigate the ways that artists across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts develop personal expression in their visual arts practice to represent, communicate and/or challenge ideas, perspectives and/or meaning  
AC9AVA10E01

**Cross Curriculum links (Humanities and Social Sciences):**

significant events, ideas, people, groups and/or movements in the development of an Asian society  
AC9HH9K21

create descriptions, explanations and historical arguments, using historical knowledge, concepts and terms that incorporate and acknowledge evidence from sources  
AC9HH10S08



Andrew Quilty, *Hamid Karzai International Airport, Kabul City, Kabul Province*, 31/8/2021, inkjet pigment print on Alupanel, 100 x 150cm

Taliban fighters tour the tarmac inside what was then Hamid Karzai International Airport, named after the first post-2001 Afghan president, the day after the final American military aircraft departed in the early hours of the morning, ending their 20-year presence in Afghanistan.

## Perspectives Activity 2: Uncovering the truth: Questioning the Story Behind the Image

### Objective:

Students will explore how visual conventions can convey multiple perspectives and inspire critical thinking about the meaning behind an image. Images chosen in this activity reflect complex ideas about politics and power.

**Connections:** This activity could be completed in conjunction with Dr Rhys Crawley's interview On Truth.

Watch this behind-the-scenes video of Quilty taking Image 1 (below). Click the play icon (right) to view the video or visit <https://vimeo.com/1154535871/297e1ac5d9>



Image 1



Andrew Quilty, *Maidan Shahr City, Maidan Wardak Province, 28/9/2019*, inkjet pigment print on Alupanel, 35 x 52.5cm

With the sounds of gunfire and explosions outside, election workers in a voting centre in the Awal Baba school in Maidan Shahr had little work to do on presidential election day. Maidan Wardak.

Image 2



Andrew Quilty, *Maidan Shahr City, Maidan Wardak Province, 28/9/2019*, inkjet pigment print on Alupanel, 32 x 48cm

Afghan Border Forces fight from inside the grounds of the school-turned-voting-centre in Maidan Shahr. Sher Mohammad, firing the rocket-propelled grenade, said Taliban fighters were 200m away.

**Analysis:**

1. Look closely at Andrew Quilty's photographs (Image 1 & 2). Describe what you see in both images.
2. How has Quilty used photographic devices such as camera angles, contrast, tone, repetition and framing to compose the images?
3. Do you think these images are both taken in close proximity to each other in terms of time and location?
4. Describe how you see *danger* being represented or alluded to in the images.

**Reflect on:**

- What can you hear in the behind-the-scenes of Image 1?
- How do the sounds you hear affect, change or add to your understanding of the images?
- Notice that the voting polls look empty or untouched. How would you describe the expressions on the faces of the election workers?
- What do you notice about the location of both images? How close do you think these two events could be to each other?
- Why might the voting polls appear empty?
- Consider how this visual detail might lead viewers to question the truth about what is happening. Are voters just not interested in voting today, or could there be another reason?

- What story is being hinted at through the connection between these images?
- How do these two images viewed together communicate a stronger story than if they were to be viewed separately?
- Research the history of elections in Afghanistan and other war torn countries. What information can you find that adds to the narrative that Quilty has observed?
- See Andrew Quilty's photo essay about this election day here: <https://www.vice.com/en/article/the-taliban-made-sure-afghans-were-too-terrified-to-vote-on-election-day/>
- How do Quilty's photographs enhance the story or what we know about this particular event or day in Afghanistan?

**Film:**

Now watch the film that accompanies the exhibition. It can also be viewed on the Museums & Galleries Queensland's website at <https://magsq.com.au/touring-exhibitions/afghanistan/>

**Evaluation:**

- Discuss as a class the insights that the film gives regarding the connection between these two images. Is there any information you can gather about the day that these two images were taken?
- What do you think it would feel like to be the photographer in this moment? Consider the role of the photographer and the dangers that one might face in the pursuit of an image.
- Find a quote that resonates with you from the interview with Rhys Crawley. Place it beside a copy of one of these images in your portfolio or visual art diary along with your responses to the activity above.
- Write a short personal reflection about this activity. Has this changed the way you feel about the truth of images you see in the media? How can you, as a photographer, aim to tell the truth in your photographs?

**Cross-Curricular Connection Media Arts:**

investigate the ways that media artists use media arts concepts to construct representations in media arts works and practices from across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts

AC9AMA10E01

## Perspectives Activity 3: Capturing Conflict: The Role of Photojournalists and Artists in Times of War

### Objective:

In this activity, students will explore how photojournalists and artists document, interpret, and influence public perception during times of war. They will analyse ethical considerations, emotional impact, and the power of visual storytelling.

In class, engage your students in a discussion about 'What is the purpose of documenting war?'

To assist this discussion, it may be helpful to show them iconic wartime photographs and artworks.

Examples of Australian war artists include George Lambert, Arthur Streeton, Will Dyson, Nora Heysen, Ivor Hele, Rick Amor, Jon Cattapan, Wendy Sharp and Shaun Gladwell.

In addition to Andrew Quilty, examples of Australian war photographers/photojournalists include Frank Hurley, Damien Parer, George Silk, Dennis Gibbons, and Kate Geraghty.

In this discussion, explain the roles of photojournalists (who capture real life) and artists (who interpret real life) during times of conflict. Consider the ethical, cultural, and social responsibilities that a war artist or photographer encounters in creating their work.

Divide students into groups and ask them to search online for a photograph and an artwork from a period of war. Referencing these images, ask them to analyse:

- The composition of each image.
- The emotions each image evokes.
- The narrative or story being told.
- How images of war can influence public opinion.
- How images of war can shape our understanding of history and humanity.

Based on their analysis, have the students prepare and deliver a short presentation to share their findings with the class.



Andrew Quilty, *Abi Barak, Argo District, Badakhshan Province.*, 4/3/2014, inkjet pigment print on Alupanel, 65 x 97.5cm

Men watch a helicopter carrying Vice President Karim Khalili fly over Argo district, Badakhshan province, where, 24 hours earlier, landslides buried 300 homes and hundreds of residents.

# PRACTICE

## Concepts in Photojournalism: Andrew Quilty's *Afghanistan* Exhibition

### Practice Activity 1: Creating images that have **IMPACT**

Creating impactful images in photojournalism involves understanding key elements such as drama, action, expression, and context— all vividly present in Andrew Quilty's *Afghanistan* photographs.



Andrew Quilty, photojournalist at work. Image courtesy of Andrew Quilty.

### Glossary

**Drama** captures emotional moments of conflict, tension, and resilience, evoking empathy from viewers. For example, Quilty's image of a family rushing to join a group at the northwest gate of the airport during the Taliban takeover uses subtle details to tell a story of urgency, fear, and hope.

**Action** focuses on movement and specific moments, like the hurried gestures of family members trying to escape, bringing the scene to life.



**Expression** conveys the intense emotions of those involved, whether desperation, determination, or hope, allowing viewers to connect emotionally.

**Context** provides the larger story behind each image.

Quilty seamlessly combines these elements, crafting images that are both visually compelling and rich in meaning. His work demonstrates how focusing on drama, action, expression, and context can communicate complex human stories, helping viewers understand the profound impact of conflict and upheaval.

At the exhibition: Use the following handout 'Photographic Elements' to explore the photographic choices made by Quilty to dissect and reflect upon two additional images you are drawn to in the exhibition.

# PHOTOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS

Describe considerations and decisions made by Quilty with regards to the photographic elements used in his images. An example is provided below to guide you in planning your response.

**Composition:** Centralised arrangement of figures under a canopy, creating balance and focus on the group.

**Lighting:** Natural, dappled light creates patterns and depth, enhancing the textures of clothing and surroundings.

**Colour:** Neutral tones dominate, providing a cohesive and harmonious feel while emphasising the subjects' attire.



**Focus:** Clear focus on the individuals, allowing details such as facial expressions and attire to convey mood and context.

**Perspective:** Eye-level angle engages viewers directly with the subjects, fostering a sense of connection and immediacy.

Andrew Quilty. Combat Outpost Blackbeard, Deh Bala District, Nangarhar Province, 7/7/2018, inkjet pigment print on Alupanel, 40 x 60cm

**Line:** Vertical and diagonal lines from the canopy and poles guide the viewer's eye throughout the image, adding structure.

# PHOTOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS

Select one of the photographs in the exhibition and describe the considerations and decisions made by Quilty with regards to the photographic elements in the image. Refer to the example provided to guide your response.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Composition:**

**Lighting:**

**Colour:**

**Focus:**

**Perspective:**

**Line:**

**Make a sketch of the of the photograph you have chosen here:**

**Write the title and year of the photograph and a short description of it here:**

# DOCUMENT – ACTIVITIES

## Students' Practical Photojournalism Task: Exploring Your Environment

### Document Activity 1: Create your own photo essay

#### Some tips from Andrew:

1. Think about the environment and how to lead the viewer into the story. Set the scene first.
2. Consider next the key characters or subjects/theme of your story.
3. Choose a third image that makes you wonder or question the context. Allow for a personal touch, rather than following a formula.
4. Consider other elements like text or audio (a mini podcast interview, a recording or a soundscape) as an extension of the images to communicate your story.



Image of film still of Quilty's Camera. Courtesy of Jacob Byant.

### Glossary

**Photo Essay:** "You might want to think of it as a storyboard for a film or as a comic strip where the images in a comic are replaced with photos. You have a story to tell and a certain number of photos to tell it, so you have to think about how you best illustrate that story through single images." Andrew Quilty, 2025

## Part 1: Focus and Observation

### Theme/Topic:

What aspect of your environment will you explore?

(e.g., community resilience, daily routines, social issues, moments of kindness)

Why did you choose this theme?

(Briefly explain your interest and how it connects to your environment)

## Part 2: Planning Your Images

How will composition, lighting, and timing help tell your story?

What kind of shots will you look for? (e.g., close-up, wide-angle, candid)

When is the best time of day to take your photos?

(e.g., morning, afternoon, evening)

Will all elements of your composition be in focus, or will you intentionally allow greater focus on some objects/elements in the foreground, while blurring those in the background to tell your story?

What kind of mood or emotion do you want your images to convey?

Are there ethical or cultural considerations for your photo essay plan?

(e.g., permissions to photograph people, sites, ceremonies, etc.)

### Part 3: Taking Photos

Using a smartphone or a professional camera, take multiple photographs based on your plan, experimenting with composition, light, and timing.

**Curate:** Select 3-5 photos that best tell your story. Partner up with someone to talk through your decisions. Select the images that make the most impact.

### Part 4: Reflection, Presentation and Sharing

Prepare to present your photographs and a verbal reflection to the class.

- What story are you trying to tell? Do they differ from your original plan?
- How did external influences shape your images?
- What did you learn from the process?

#### Teachers' note:

Ask students to write extended captions for their images. Display the students' work around the classroom. Encourage students to make decisions about the groupings and layout of the display. These activities will enhance their engagement with storytelling and the meaning behind the images. This can also be a way to ensure there is visual communication and connection between the meaning of the image and what the audience perceives it to be about.

Invite another class in to view the works on display, and have your students speak about their photographs with their peers.

### Curriculum Links:

curate and present examples of their visual arts practice to accompany exhibits of their artworks to communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning to audiences

AC9AVA8P01

evaluate art exhibits to inform the curation and exhibition of their own and/or others' artworks and/or visual arts practice

AC9AVA10P01

experiment with visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials to refine skills and develop personal expression AC9AVA10D01

reflect on the way they and other visual artists respond to influences to inspire, develop and resolve choices they make in their own visual arts practice

AC9AVA10D02

evaluate critical feedback when planning, developing and refining their visual arts practice

AC9AVA8C01

select and manipulate visual conventions, visual arts processes and/or materials to create artworks that represent ideas, perspectives and/or meaning

AC9AVA10C01

select and manipulate visual conventions, visual arts processes and/or materials to create artworks that reflect personal expression, and represent and/or challenge, ideas, perspectives and/or meaning

AC9AVA8C02

## Document Activity 2: Composition

When taking a photograph with a camera, you typically look through a viewfinder (a small window on the camera) or a display screen on the back of your camera to see your subject matter and compose your shot.

If you do not have a camera, you can use and create your own viewfinder from cardboard. Artists often use this simple tool to focus on what they are observing and to select their composition. It helps you to crop and frame a scene within a specific area, allowing you to explore positive and negative space and develop your visual narrative.

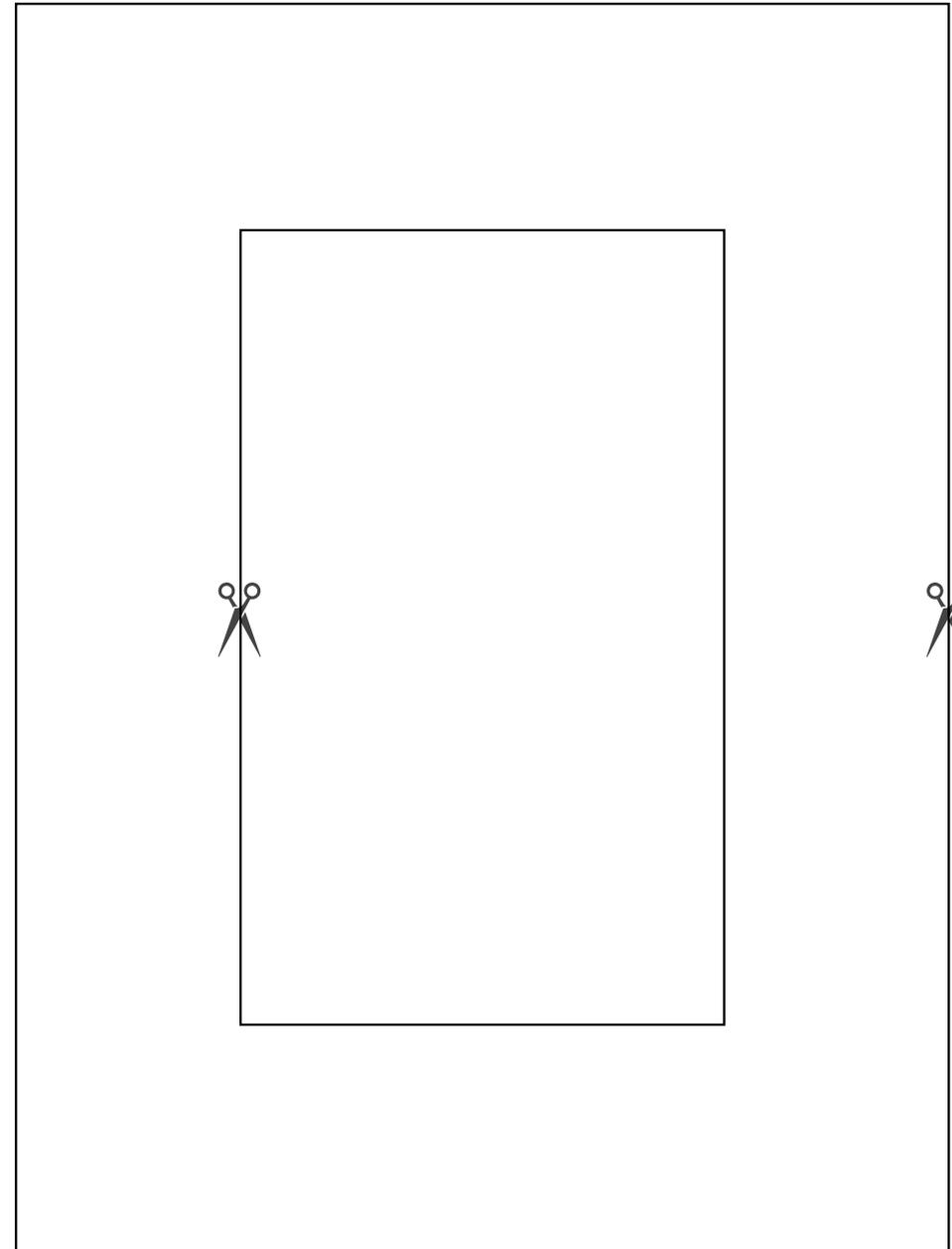
### How to make and use a cardboard viewfinder:

1. **Create the frame:** Measure and cut a rectangular hole from an A5 size piece of cardboard, leaving enough card around the edges to comfortably hold the frame and block out the rest of the view.
2. **Close one eye:** Hold the viewfinder at arm's length, close one eye, and look through the hole at your subject matter.
3. **Find your composition:** Move the viewfinder around – up, down, back, forth, and rotate it from horizontal to vertical – to find the most engaging composition.
4. **Adjust the view:** Zoom in on a specific part of the scene or zoom out to include more elements, just as you would with a camera.

Document your findings by either making a quick sketch of the scene (landscape, portrait) as seen through the viewfinder, or write notes describing your observations.

Consider adding a grid to your viewfinder by taping pieces of string in a 'tic-tac-toe' or 'noughts and crosses' grid pattern. This provides helpful reference points when marking up your composition on paper or canvas.

Try creating a viewfinder with an irregular shape. How does this change your composition and the meaning you wish to express as an artist in your final image?



## Document Activity 3 – Chiaroscuro and Rembrandt Lighting

**Chiaroscuro** is the use of strong contrasts between light and dark to create a sense of volume, drama, and three-dimensionality.

**Rembrandt lighting** is a dramatic portrait technique named after the Dutch painter, defined by a small, inverted triangle of light on the cheek of the shadow side of the face, created by positioning a single light source about 45 degrees to the side and slightly above the subject's eye level, allowing the nose's shadow to connect with the cheek's shadow. This moody, classic style adds depth, form, and dimension, making it popular in photography and film for its artistic, timeless feel, often using one light and a reflector for control.

1. Search on the internet for examples of these various techniques in painting and photography and annotate these images in your visual art diaries.
2. Individually or in groups, select one of Andrew Quilty's photographs and analyse how he uses the contrast of light and shadows to create mood, depth and focus in his composition.
3. Identify different zones of light and shadow, for example: highlights, midtones, reflected light and cast shadows. Make a thumbnail sketch of the photograph and mark these different zones on your drawing.
4. In class, get into pairs to take a portrait of another student. Find a dark area of the classroom. (store rooms, dark rooms or underneath desks can work with a black cloth over it). Then, using a single light source, such as a lamp or torch, create the effect of chiaroscuro and/or Rembrandt lighting. Using a camera or smartphone, photograph your partner, capturing the dramatic contrasts between light, dark and shadow.
5. Print the photographs or create a PowerPoint presentation to project in class, and have the students critique each other's work and provide constructive feedback on how well they used chiaroscuro and/or Rembrandt lighting to create atmosphere and focus in their compositions.



Andrew Quilty, *Chahr-e Anjir, Lashkar Gah District, Helmand Province, 14/8/2016*, inkjet pigment print on Alupanel, 33 x 49.5cm

ANA Special Forces defend a frontline compound after coming under attack from Taliban fighters during yet another attempt by the insurgent group to overrun Helmand's capital, Lashkar Gah.

### Respond

Research the techniques of artistic masters Caravaggio and Rembrandt, focusing on their use of light and shadow in their paintings.

Select one of their portraits/figurative works and compare it with Quilty's photograph, *Lashkar Gah District, Helmand Province, 14/8/2016*. Analyse the similarities and differences in their use of light, tone, and shadow, and explain how these choices influence the narrative or storytelling in both works. Write a short essay of about 300 words to share your perspective.

# RESOURCES AND ADDITIONAL WEBSITES TO VISIT

<https://www.ssi.org.au/about-us/research-and-policy/foundations-for-belonging/>

Australian War Memorial. Official Histories. Accessed 10 October, 2025.  
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/official-histories-rolls-unit-diaries>.

Kids National Geographic, Accessed 10 October, 2025.  
<https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/geography/countries/article/afghanistan>

Bilston, Brian. "Refugees." Last modified March 23, 2016, Accessed 9 October 2025.  
<http://brianbilston.com/2016/03/23/refugees/>

## Glossary of relevant WORDS

**ANA Special Forces:** Afghan National Army Special Forces.

**Combat Outpost:** A temporary military base for operations.

**Composition:** The placement or arrangement of visual elements to convey ideas or emotional impact.

**Diaspora:** The spread or dispersion of people from their homeland.

**Elders:** Local community leaders or advisors.

**Depth of field:** The distance between the nearest and farthest objects that appear in focus or blurred in an image.

**Green Berets:** A unit of the United States Army Special Forces.

**Military:** Relating to or belonging to the armed forces.

**NGO:** A non-government organisation. It can be a for-profit or not-for-profit entity.

**Observation:** The act of looking closely at or monitoring something or someone.

**Photojournalist:** A photographer who relates news stories through images.

**Press:** Media representatives covering news and events.

**Province:** A region or division of land similar to a state or territory. There are 34 provinces in Afghanistan.

**Refugee:** A person forced to leave their country to escape war or persecution.

**Staging Position:** A base for launching military operations.

**Visual conventions:** Traditional, cultural, or stylistic, agreed-upon methods used to create and interpret artworks, including elements like line, colour, shape, and composition.

**War:** Armed conflict between groups.