

# Teachers' Exhibition Resource

## *Ernest Cole: A Lens in Exile*

Curated by Mark Sealy

13 Jun - 12 Oct 2024 at Autograph, London



Ernest Cole, Harlem, New York, c. 1970. © Ernest Cole / Magnum Photos

## Visiting Autograph

Autograph is in the Shoreditch area of Hackney in East London.

We are a short walk from Shoreditch High Street, Old Street and Liverpool Street stations. If you are travelling by bus the 26, 35, 47, 48, 55, 67, 149 and 243 buses stop at the Shoreditch Church and Shoreditch Town Hall which is close to the gallery.

Autograph does not have public parking. To find the nearest available parking and rates, we recommend [justpark.com](https://www.justpark.com). We have two disabled parking bays on-site, to book one for your visit please email [adrian@rivingtonplace.org](mailto:adrian@rivingtonplace.org) or phone 020 7749 1240.



### **Address**

Autograph ([Google Maps link](#))

Rivington Place, London

EC2A 3BA, UK



### **Open times**

Wed and Fri: 11am - 6pm

Thur: 11am - 9pm

Sat: 12:30 - 6pm

Closed on public/bank holidays



### **Booking a visit**

Please fill out [this form](#) to book your class visit. Our Education Studio is also available upon request.

Entry to all of our exhibitions is free.

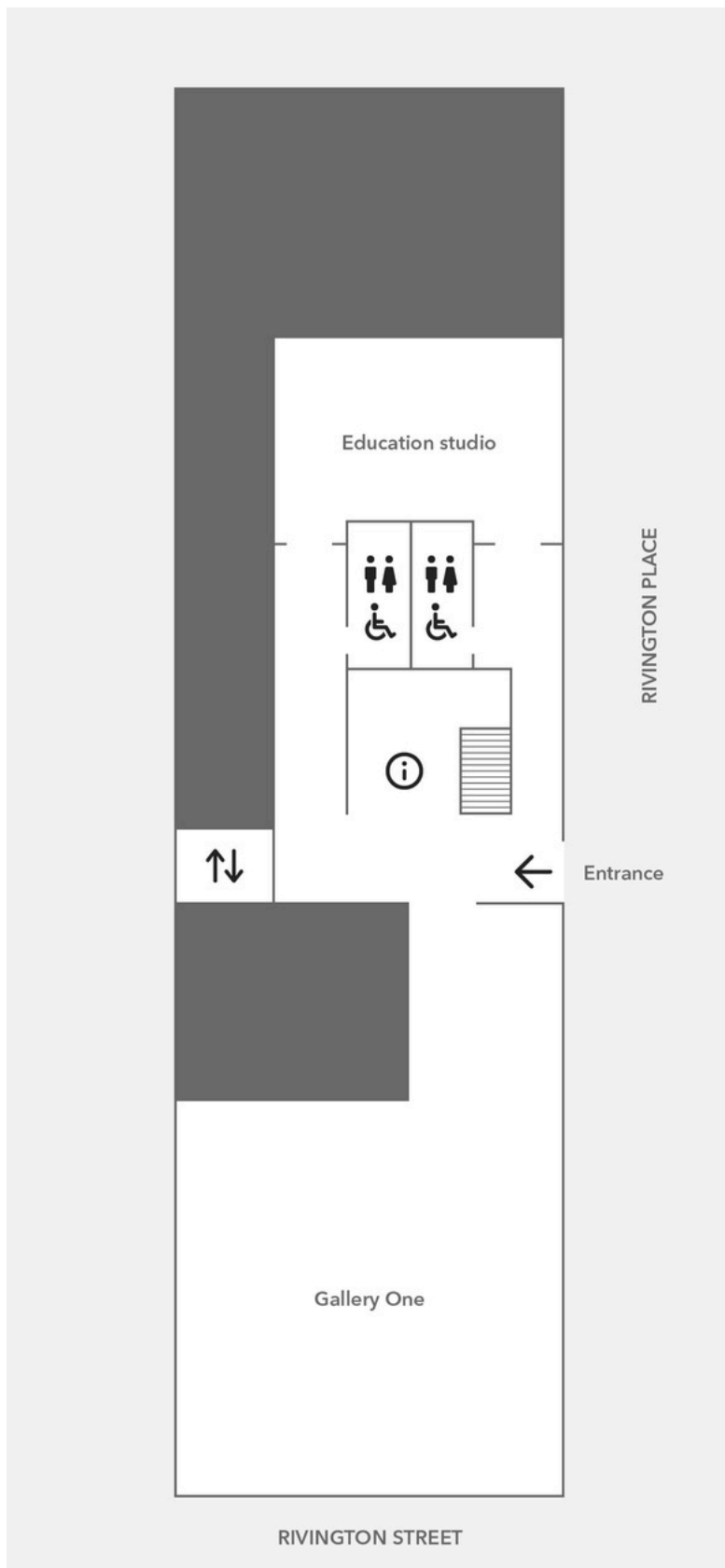


### **Accessible venue**

Our gallery is a step free venue that welcomes people with all types of disabilities. [Download our accessibility guide](#).

You can find more information about your visit [here](#).

*Ernest Cole: A Lens in Exile* is situated in Gallery One which is on the ground floor of Autograph.



## **About Autograph**

Established in 1988, Autograph is a visual arts charity with a mission to champion the work of artists who use photography and film to highlight questions of race, representation, human rights and social justice. Through doing so, we invite people to explore the creative and critical power of visual representation in shaping our understanding of ourselves and of others.

## **About this resource**

The aim of this exhibition resource is to support secondary school teachers in engaging students with Autograph's exhibition *Ernest Cole: A Lens in Exile*, the first exhibition of Ernest Cole's photographs documenting New York City during the height of the civil rights movement in America.

The resource contains prompts, discussion points and ways to engage with the artwork and themes in the exhibition before, during and after the exhibition visit. Activities include:



### **Classroom Activities:**

**Background Research (KS4 & KS5)** - inviting students to research the work and life of Ernest Cole through watching, reading and observing.

**Think, Pair, Share (KS3 & KS4)** - inviting students to analyse an Ernest Cole photograph through class discussion.

**Writing About a Photograph (KS3 & KS4)** - asking the students to write a piece of written analysis of an Ernest Cole image in class or for home learning.

**Poetic Response (KS4 & KS5)** - inviting students to write a poem in response to an Ernest Cole photograph.



### **Exhibition Activities**

**Debate, Mate (KS3, KS4 & KS5)** - inviting students to debate what photograph they find most compelling.

**Create a Word Bank (KS2 & KS3)** - inviting students to create a collection of words associated with an Ernest Cole photograph.

**Photograph Treasure Hunt (KS2 & KS3)** - inviting students to locate objects and concepts in the photographs.



### **Extension Activity:**

**Exploring Documentary Photography** - inviting students to document everyday life in their communities and then share the images in class.

## **Who was Ernest Cole?**

Ernest Cole was a South African documentary and street photographer. He is best known for documenting the lives of black people living under apartheid between 1958 and 1966. Apartheid was a system of institutionalised racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa that lasted from 1948 to the early 1990s. This system separated people based on their skin colour, granting more rights to white people and taking away rights from people with black or brown skin.

In 1966, Ernest Cole fled to the United States in search for a better life, smuggling his photographs with him. In 1967, he published a book of his photographs called *House of Bondage*, that showcased the violent and harsh realities of the South African apartheid system to the rest of the world. The South African government, displeased by this, banned the book and stripped Cole of his citizenship, meaning he lived in exile for the rest of his life.

## **What is exile?**

Exile is the forced or voluntary removal of an individual from their home country, normally for political reasons, threats to their safety, or legal issues. People are often exiled because their country's leaders disapprove of their actions or statements. This could be because they are speaking out against injustices carried out by the government, which makes it unsafe for them to stay in their own country.

## **About the exhibition**

The photographs in the exhibition were taken by Ernest Cole in New York City between 1967 – 1972 after he left South Africa. These street photographs document the daily existences of the African American communities living at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, which aimed to end discrimination against black people in the United States and to ensure they had the same rights as everyone else. Isolated and in exile, Cole began to realise that the systemic exclusion, segregation and racism he witnessed in South Africa was also present in America. In his own words “it wasn’t any better: there was no freedom”.



## Classroom Activities:

### **Background Research (KS4 & KS5)**

Inviting students to independently research the work and life of Ernest Cole through watching, reading and observing.

**Webpage:** [Introducing Ernest Cole: A Lens In Exile](#) (Autograph)

A comprehensive introduction to the exhibition including a timeline of Ernest Cole's life and rare video footage of Cole talking about his work.

**Article:** [Lost Photographs of Black America By Vann R. Newkirk II](#) (The Atlantic)

In this article, Vann R. Newkirk II describes how a trove of Ernest Cole images from the 1960s and '70s were discovered in a Swedish bank vault.

**Article:** [Ernest Cole's Rediscovered Archive](#) (Magnum)

In this article, Magnum discusses Ernest Cole's book on South Africa under apartheid, the mysteries of his life and the impact of his work.

**Book:** [House of Bondage](#) (Aperture Foundation)

Ernest Cole's *House of Bondage* has been lauded as one of the most significant photobooks of the twentieth century, revealing the horrors of apartheid to the world for the first time and influencing generations of photographers around the globe.

**Book:** [The True America](#) (Aperture Foundation)

The first publication of Ernest Cole's photographs depicting Black lives in the United States during the turbulent and eventful late 1960s and early 1970s.

## **Think, Pair, Share (KS3 & KS4)**

**Think:** Invite students to observe an Ernest Cole photograph for 2 minutes encouraging them to keep in mind what they found out from their research.

Whilst they look at the photograph, get them to consider:

**Content:** What's going on in the photograph? Where is it taken? What are the people doing? What features can you see?

**Form:** How has Ernest Cole composed the image? Think about the shapes, patterns, angles and viewpoint. Do you think this was a deliberate, conscious decision or perhaps spontaneous?

**Process:** Think about how this photograph was made. What equipment was used? What is the lighting? How has the finished product been created?

**Mood:** How does the photograph make you feel? What emotions and feelings are created by this image? Do you think this is a deliberate choice by Ernest Cole?

**Pair:** Now, ask the students to describe their considerations to each other in pairs or small groups. Encourage the class to discuss how their responses are similar or different to each others. Get one student per pair or group to act as a scribe and to write their main key words on large sugar paper.

**Share:** After the group discussion, invite the students to feed back to the class.



## Writing About a Photograph (KS3 & KS4)

Set the students a piece of written analysis in class or for home learning, using a photograph by Ernest Cole.

Guide to analysis for students:

- Describe the content and composition of the image and techniques used.
- Consider how the image was created. What processes have been used? Is it a digital or film photograph, a collage, or a series? Has it been edited? What do you notice about the lighting, colours or tones? Why do you think the photographer used these techniques and effects?
- Why do you think the photographer made this work? What potential meaning are they trying to convey?
- Compare the image/s with other work. Look for similarities and differences. Why do you think these occur?
- Consider your personal response to the work. How you relate to the work personally?

Suggested sentence starters for written analysis:

- o In this image I can see...
- o We can see that the photographer has used...
- o They have done this to/ by/ so...
- o The style/ genre of this work is...
- o The colours/ tones in this work can be described as...
- o The shapes/ textures/ patterns are...
- o The lighting here is...
- o The depth of field here is...
- o This technique is used to create a ..... effect.
- o This image is similar/ different to...
- o The mood created in this image is...
- o I feel that this work...
- o This work has inspired me to...



## **Poetic response (KS4 & KS5)**

Individually or in small groups, ask your students to choose one image from the exhibition and to create a poem about it.

Here are some examples they could use as prompts:

- Describe the scene or subject in the photograph.
- Write from the perspective of a person or object featured in the photograph.
- Describe your thoughts as you observe the photograph.
- Describe what the photograph reminds you of.
- Write from the perspective of Ernest Cole.
- Create a dialogue between the characters in the photograph.
- Speak directly to Ernest Cole or the subject(s) in the photograph.

Suggestion: you could play some appropriate music whilst the students are writing their poem, such as: Miles Davis; Ornette Coleman; Kamasi Washington; BJ The Chicago Kid; Solange, or any other music to inspire your students!



## Exhibition Activities:

### Create a Word Bank (KS2 & KS3)

Invite the class to observe an Ernest Cole photograph for 2 minutes and write down a list of words they associate with the photograph.

Whilst they look at the photograph, you can encourage their observations with these prompts:

- What is going on in the photograph?
- What does the photograph make you think and feel?
- How is this photograph different from real life?
- What title would you give to this photograph?

After the students have written down their own list of words, get them to share with each other in pairs or small groups. Encourage the class to discuss how their responses are similar or different to each others.

*Share:* After the group discussion, invite the students to feed back to the class and discuss everyone's words together.

### Debate, Mate (KS3, KS4 & KS5)

Get the class into two or three groups and encourage each group to select a photograph. Each group will debate with the other groups as to why they think their photograph is the best!

They should consider the formal elements of the photograph as well as the mood and meaning. Of course, like any good school debate, there is no right answer. The exercise is to engage them in identifying what they think makes a compelling photograph and why they like it.

## **Photograph Treasure Hunt (KS2 & KS3)**

Ask the students to find the objects and concepts listed in the table below (see table on the next page) in the photographs, and to write the number of the photograph down on the worksheet (laminated numbers can be requested at Autograph's reception and placed on the floor below each image in the exhibition space).

This activity can also be done as a group activity where the teacher calls out the object/concept ("Find...") and students actually go to stand next to the photograph. They can then discuss what they are seeing in the work that made them identify the object/ item/ concept.

FIND THIS OBJECT/ ITEM/ CONCEPT	PHOTOGRAPH NUMBER
A necktie	
Music	
Love	
Power	
Sadness	
Food	
Perspective	
Identity	
A hat	
A doorway	
Work	
Dancing	
Fashion	
Direct Gaze	
Averted Gaze	
Politics	
Family	
Movement	
Colour	
Learning	



## Extension Activity:

### Exploring Documentary Photography

Set a personal development project for your students, to document everyday life in their communities. Ask them to consider everyday scenes in their life, which they might visually capture to express a sense of their lived experiences.

Other useful references:

**Bandeke 'Tex' Ajetunmobi:** [Street Scenes from the East End, 1950-1980](#)

**Roy Mehta:** [Between Feeling and Time: Brent in the 80s and 90s](#)

**Karabo Mooki:** [Afropunk Countercultures in the South African Townships](#)

**Syd Shelton:** [Rock Against Racism](#)

**Ridley Road Stories:** [Documenting and celebrating the African and Caribbean locals of Hackney's Ridley Road](#)



## Share your outcomes

We'd love to see your student responses! Please email any work to:  
[learning@autograph-abp.co.uk](mailto:learning@autograph-abp.co.uk)

This resource pack was made with Amir Nathan, Head of Visual Arts at Eastbrook School.

*Ernest Cole: A Lens in Exile* is curated by Mark Sealy and realised in collaboration with Magnum Photos and the Ernest Cole Family Trust.



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