

Selected from published material submitted by members for the 2011 NSPA Picture of the Year contest. Picture selections and copy by Matt Snider, Panorama Productions & Digital Services, Dallas.

## About the selections

Three seconds. That's all the time you have to capture a reader's attention with your photo. From sports action, spot news, and features to hard news, photo essays and the unusual, readers have to be presented with the best image possible to both tell them the story and get them to linger and talk about it. Better yet, to refer their friends to see it too.

In this Internet age, powerful images can go viral in minutes and have lasting impact. They can provoke action, such as the photos showing brutal political repression, which led to the recent Arab Spring rebellions that overthrew dictators. Alternatively, photos can evoke great compassion and outpourings of sympathy, as in those from the Aurora movie theatre shootings. But a photojournalist has only moments to capture those images and get them submitted for publication.

Thus, when I am selecting photos for publication, I look for the power of "perspective." I am looking for photographic moments that remind me there are multiple ways to view and engage the world and I don't always have the best vantage point. I depend on photojournalists to present the world to me in such a way that I can consider not only their point of view but also the viewpoints of the subjects presented.

## Peak Action

Photographing activity at the very height of action is a technique used to convey determination, perseverance, energy, resolve, skill and/or athleticism. While you may use multiple photographic techniques to capture that action, such as freezing, panning or blurring, the skills you need to master here are learning to anticipate the action and split-second timing.



**Alyssa Johnson**  
Cub, Sterling HS, Sterling, Kan.

Straining to shoot a basket against the blocking of an opponent is another good peak action scene. A shot like this is only obtained by tracking the movement of the player from initial receipt of the ball until the release point, continuously firing off the shutter as he goes into the shooting wind-up.

**George Edgar Amspaugh**  
Legend, Coronado HS, El Paso, Texas

George Amspaugh used a 1/500th shutter speed to photograph this swimmer at the bottom-end of his power stroke. Capturing the swimmer's expression of sheer determination as he gulps air before his next stroke makes this a great peak action shot. Composing the frame with the additional lanes behind the swimmer provides context for the swimmer's effort.



**David Ashby**  
Roundup, Great Falls HS, Great Falls, Mont.

David Ashby was able to shoot both the player and the ball in mid-air, a photo that shows his quick reflexes on the shutter button and that he was paying careful attention to the game action. David nailed the action and also was able to compose the shot to include opposing player reaction.



# Freezing-Panning-Blur

To emphasize or highlight a subject in motion, a photographer can employ three different techniques: freezing the action with a high shutter speed, panning (moving the camera horizontally with the subject in motion to blur the background) or dragging the shutter (using a deliberately slower shutter speed than required) to allow motion blur to convey an event's activity. All three techniques require thoughtful preplanning to determine correct shutter speeds to achieve the desired effect and still obtain a properly exposed photograph. The action that will be captured in the frame should determine the technique used.

## Juan Vazquez

The Torch, Orange Glen HS, Escondido, Calif.



Sometimes a photographer wants to show motion in the background of a photo. However, unlike in panning where the subject is also moving, sometimes the foreground subject is stationary. To accomplish this, it is necessary to slow the shutter speed down to let the motion of the action be recorded. In a very good story illustration, Juan Vazquez manually selected a 1/8th shutter speed and an 18mm wide angle view to convey a sense of isolation of the seated student. Life appears to “passing him by,” which is entirely the point. Complementing Juan’s exposure selection is excellent composition, with the subject occupying the right third of the frame.

## Sierra Whitlock

Spark, Lakota East HS, Liberty Township, Ohio



Parkour, or free-running, is by necessity a very fast-moving activity if one is to overcome the pull of gravity. As such, a photographer needs to be able to freeze action to capture the immense physicality of the sport. Sierra Whitlock froze the action of this runner suspended in air while running along a vertical wall. The shutter speed was “only” 1/640th at an aperture of f5.6 with a 100 ISO. A faster shutter speed was not necessary to freeze this action because subjects moving quickly towards the camera in the same plane do not blur as much at slower shutter speeds than when moving across the frame.

# Changing Angles

A simple way of enhancing visual appeal of a photograph, and one that is very relevant to photo-journalism, is to shoot from an angle that is different from the way we normally encounter the world but is still an accurate representation of the scene. Shooting from below (a “worm’s eye view”), above (an “eagle’s eye view”) or off-center (left or right of an obvious centerline or with the camera tilted or rotated from level) from a normal viewing angle (straight ahead at eye level) yields an image that tells a different story. But be mindful when shifting the perspective of the camera and the viewer to above or below the action because that may result in a message either not intended or an inaccurate one.



## Lana Sheta

Legacy, Green Valley HS, Henderson, Nev.

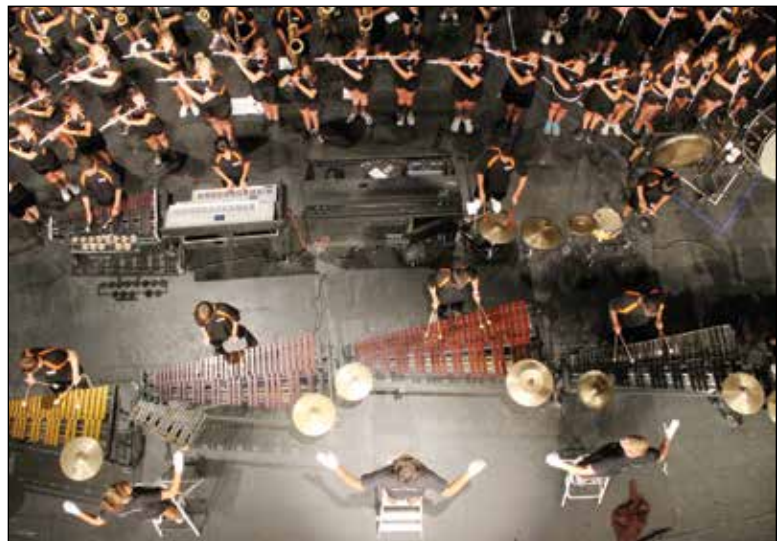
The most interesting aspect of this photograph by Lana Sheta is that all the visual cues that are normally present to orient a viewer to a photograph are shifted. We see the subject technically upside-down but against the cloud-filled sky our perception is somewhat confused by the incongruity and juxtaposition of the subject, the action and the background. This kind of photograph, with a worm’s eye view and an unusual arrangement of subject to background, invites a long, slow consideration and appreciation of this complex yet appealing composition. The soft, diffused focus supports the photo’s incongruity with an “ethereal” feel but should be used sparingly.



## Hannah Kunz

Featherduster, Westlake HS, Austin, Texas

Hannah Kunz gives us a terrific reverse angle view of a calculus student working through a difficult problem – and she did this without having to change the normal eye view of the camera. She presents an unusual spatial orientation of a subject merely by shifting shooting position, shooting through the glass panel instead of over the student’s shoulder. Augmenting her choice of changing shooting position is precise focus on the student’s face, high key lighting, selecting a wide angle lens with an 18mm focal length and shooting very close to the glass panel to distort the size of the subject’s hand. This arrangement gives us another “angle” on calculus.



## Valorie King

Buffalo, Haltom HS, Haltom City, Texas

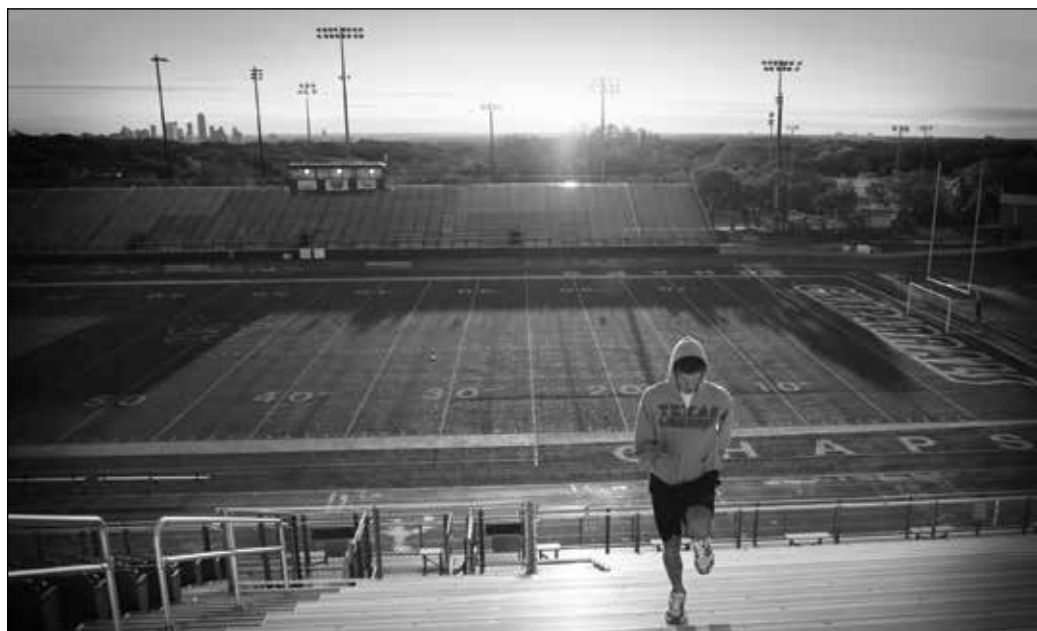
Valorie King provides our eagle’s eye view example in this photograph of the Haltom HS marching band. With the band relocated inside due to rain, Valorie took advantage of a catwalk or balcony to shoot directly down on the band, anchoring the shot on the drum major lit by a bright spotlight, also from above. Complementing the shooting angle, Valorie combined photographic techniques, setting the scene with a wide-angle lens at 18mm and including repeating patterns of the xylophones, cymbals, keyboards and flutists.

# Wide Angle-Setting the Scene

Shooting with a wide-angle lens under certain circumstances can add a unique perspective to an otherwise ordinary photograph and make it outstanding. Small subjects, when photographed close up will dominate the frame and seem much larger in relation to their surroundings. This is because wide-angle lenses tend to have close focusing distances. Conversely, a photographer can show a sense of scale in their photographs when a large subject is photographed with a wide-angle lens so more of the setting is included in the frame. This sets the scene for the viewer and provides a context for the photo's content. A photographer can also take advantage of the fact that a super wide-angle lens will force parallel lines to converge when shooting above or below the horizon line in a given scene, lending enormous creative possibilities to otherwise plain photographs.

## Chris Bull

El Paisano, Westlake HS, Austin, Texas



This photograph by Chris Bull, taken at a 16mm focal length, of a solitary runner on an early-morning workout routine, is far more effective than a close-up. Its wide-angle view gives us a context to his effort. It shows the runner alone. The only way to do this is to conclusively show his solitude by including the empty stadium. The monochrome conversion gives a harder “edge” to the story.



## Zach Elmore

Talon, Rockwood Summit HS, Fenton, Mo.

The business end of a duck hunter's shotgun is distorted in size in Zack Elmore's photo about the sport. Using a 6.2mm focal length with the focus point on the hunter's face creates a vanishing-point perspective as our eyes follow the shotgun barrel from tip to rear sight. The wide-angle view also shows the size of the duck blind in relation to the hunter's position in it and possibly how effective camouflage can seem from a duck's perspective.



## Hannah Kunz

Featherduster, Westlake HS, Austin, Texas

Hannah Kunz's super-wide angle, ankle-high perspective of the hurdlers is another excellent example of providing context for a scene. Shot at 10mm at peak action, the hurdlers appear to be jumping right into the sky as they fill and dominate the frame. The three hurdlers, at different points in their jumps, adds a repeating pattern to the visual interest of the image. Note the converging parallel lines of the running lanes at left, a hallmark of super-wide angle photography.

# Framing

To emphasize or exclude one aspect of a photograph over another in the same shot, or to create a unique optical effect, a photographer can selectively choose to compose an image as a frame within a frame. The basic technique is to place a natural or artificial object between the camera and the main subject (or around the main subject) so that the viewer “looks through” it to the subject beyond its bounds. This “frame” is a supporting structure to the photograph in the same way a supporting actor in a film helps a main character. This gives the viewer a “context” or a “lens” (pardon the pun) through which to view the subject. The frame then helps focus attention on the subject while obstructing less important aspects of the image.



## Allie Weiss

The Visor, Archbishop Hoban HS, Akron, Ohio

Allie Weiss has given a classic framing technique a post-modern twist with an iPad. Utilizing the iPad's built-in rear-facing camera, she has effectively combined frame-within-a-frame with other techniques. She has controlled the exposure with a rectangular vignette. She's used selective focus to throw the walls of the hallway nicely out of focus. She's further used image repetition (the hallway is both mirrored and completed in the iPad image). The monochrome conversion accentuates the story's futurist message of “moving along the ‘halls of time.’”



## Daniel Um

Aquila, Freedom HS, South Riding, Va.

Frames of straight or slightly angled lines that form a bounding box around a subject are effective tools. This photo from Daniel Um is a good example of framing because the fence top rail and its support pillar (at center) create both “left-and-right” frames in the photo but also wrap the runner neatly within the right frame. Less obvious but equally effective is the rim-light frame around the subject from the sun, a very nice touch. Using light as a subtle frame is an advanced photographic skill.

## Jenny O'Grady

Northern Light, Blue Valley North HS, Overland Park, Kan.

In another good example of traditional framing, Jenny O'Grady ‘plays it by the book’ with an environmental portrait of a student volunteer at a library. Breaking with Rule of Thirds composition to good effect, Jenny places her subject center frame and encloses her within a frame of books on the left and right. This photo is noteworthy for its good exposure on the face of the subject while keeping the focal point on the subject's hands as she shelves a book. The gentle reflection of the subject's face off the highly reflective book cover on the left, gives the photo a third dimension and secondary point of interest. Please note, this photo was not taken with a digital SLR, which proves the valuable lesson that the cost or features of your camera is not a significant component to good photography.



# Selective Focus

No other single photographic technique has the power to direct attention to precisely the area or subject the photographer wants the viewer to attend to. Through thoughtful and judicious control of lens selection and aperture (to control depth-of-field) and keen attention to the exact focus point, the photographer guides the viewer through and into that area of a photograph that is critical to the main story. Determining whether the image should be front-focused or back-focused is the key to telling the story. Properly applied, selective focus can offer a three-dimensional feel in an inherently two-dimensional medium.



## Abby Gillam

Budget, Lawrence HS, Lawrence, Kan.

An out-of-focus foreground and mid-ground are visual devices that help create a focus tunnel in a back-focused photograph. Since the main story is at the “back” of the frame, that’s where the photographer wants a viewer to look. Abby Gilliam shoots from the vantage point of the school’s mascot’s head, which is blurred due to its closeness to the lens, but focuses on the mirror at top right. Even the wall at bottom right is slightly out of focus. Our visual cortex “tells” us that the two blurred areas of the frame are not the main subject and causes us to focus our vision in the top right corner.



## Landon Ochsner

Epic, Shawnee Mission West HS, Overland Park, Kan.

In a good example of a front-focused image, Landon Ochsner places his publication’s story subject within the larger context of the activity in which he is featured. His subject is seen as a part of larger group, contributing individually to a cooperative effort. As the photo becomes blurred behind him, the subject stands out.



## Kheren Garcia

Touchstone, Stony Point HS, Round Rock, Texas

Kheren Garcia has done a very good job of making her feature subject the literal “center” of the story. Kheren used a 70-200mm lens at f2.8 with a 95mm focal length (almost the center of the focal range) to throw the foreground and background out of focus. The sharply-focused subject is composed in a good location horizontally and vertically to give the photo additional depth. Tripping the shutter as the subject is watching some action completes a well-balanced, selectively focused photograph.

# Leading Lines

If you want a viewer to engage with a photograph quickly, providing certain visual cues for their eyes to follow is one way to accomplish that. Shooting linear patterns leading to the main subject is a powerful technique to attract and drive interest in a photograph and heighten its drama. Using leading lines together with careful framing and cropping to accentuate a photograph's sense of perspective and tell a specific type of photographic story is an important tool in a photographer's technique kit.



## Jackie Tien

Carillon, Bellaire HS, Bellaire, Texas

Leading lines do not always have to be horizontal, extending to a vanishing point in the center or near the edges of a frame. Photographer Jackie Tien has mixed multiple vertical leading lines – the stairsteps and the water trails on the foreground concrete together with the waterfall behind the subjects – to take our eyes on an upward journey into the top right corner of the photo. Even the girls' legs, dangling over the steps are another vertical line that complements the upward motion of the entire frame.



## Halley Hollis

The Rock, Rock Bridge Sr. HS, Columbia, Mo.

Halley Hollis' lit-from-below swimmer with important edge-lit highlights and very high, low-lit horizon line is a great example of combining bi-directional leading lines with multiple other techniques to create an outstanding photo. A small aperture (f9.0) and a fast shutter speed (1/1000th) work together to mute the light at the back of the frame. Also, the fast shutter speed freezes the water action and swimmer's motion in an gymnastic-like iron-cross in mid-stroke that, together with the lane lines at the bottom of the pool and the lane floats, make our eyes follow those lines right to the swimmer's position. The splashing water directly behind the swimmer completes the pool line directly below him all the way to the horizon line at the top of the frame.



## Porter McLeod

Odyssey, Clarke Central HS, Athens, Ga.

Porter McLeod created a powerful image that shows multiple photographic techniques employed simultaneously but features strong leading lines to frame the subject. An excellent environmental portrait by itself, the low shooting angle causes the railing and fencing below the subject and the wall and netting above the subject to perfectly frame the player and lead our eyes directly to him. The off-center geometry of the shot also enhances the photo's effectiveness through the use of strong negative space (the vibrant blue sky with clouds).

# Reaction-Sideline

The purpose of the “reaction” photograph is to communicate the spontaneous emotional part of an activity. Since sports are inherently competitive, the entire panoply of human emotions and range of their intensity is in play in the competitors and the fans. The photographer’s assignment is to ensure that both sides of the competition and their fan’s reactions are represented during the game no matter the outcome. Some of the best reaction shots show expressions of intense satisfaction, incredulity, frustration or disappointment at unexpected and unpredictable moments during or following a giving play.



**Shelby Tauber**  
The Lion, McKinney HS, McKinney, Texas

The heartbreak of defeat in competition is the mirror opposite of the joyful moment of victory and is a staple of sports reaction photography. In Shelby Tauber’s photo, a police officer offers comfort and solace in the moment of greatest disappointment to his son, a player on the losing team. Framing the photo to include crucial information – the final tally on the scoreboard – provides complete context and tells the whole story.



**Chris Hansen**  
NCHS Live!, North Central HS, Indianapolis, Ind.

Critical moments in a game are frequently pivotal moments. An injury to a key player can alter the expected outcome of the competition, especially between equally matched opponents. Chris Hansen correctly zoomed in to fill the frame with the emotional-filled face of a pain-racked key player who hit the court after an injury. The stationary legs and feet surrounding the downed player shows the action has stopped for the time being.



**Austin Becker**  
Jag Wire, Mill Valley HS, Shawnee, Kan.

No publication’s sports section would be complete without a sideline shot of fans or teammates at a decisive moment in a game. In this splendidly timed photo by Austin Becker, some players on the winning team on the bench react with effusive anticipation as the game-winning free-throw is tossed in the final seconds of the game. Composing with the four players together, each with complementary facial expressions, supports the story, adds interest and credibility to the image. To capture sideline reactions this well, start shooting just before the action starts and keep shooting throughout the entire action sequence.