

Total time:  
8 hours



Difficulty Level: Very  
challenging

Skill Points:

- Exposing for a predominance of dark tones
- Conveying a message through tonal selection
- Proper post-production

# CREATING DRAMATIC LOW KEY PHOTOGRAPHY



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A low key photograph is reproduced primarily as black or dark hued colors or tones. This style can be organically discovered, or created through lighting, props, wardrobe, and post-production techniques.

**KEY LESSON:** Low key photography is often misunderstood. It is **NOT** an underexposed image, or one in which all of the light areas have been removed, or altered, in post-production. A low key image begins in-camera. It requires proper exposure, and a keen photographer's eye toward light, shadow, and tone. Study the sample images.

## EQUIPMENT

### Camera

Any camera including a smartphone camera

### Lens + Lens hood

Any lens

### Post-processing software

Necessary

**There are no set rules on how to set up your camera.** Be cognizant of exposure. If possible, check the histogram to make sure that the vast majority of tones are falling into the lower third of the scale.

## SAMPLE PHOTOGRAPHS



A



B



C



D



E



## ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

### 1- Study the sample photographs:

- A-** The left side of this image is simply underexposed. The right side is properly exposed. Underexposure created in-camera, or in post-production, does not create a true low key effect.
- B-** This is an exquisitely 'spotted', exposed, and processed low key shot. It consists of primarily black or dark tones along with small areas of bright tones to produce a full contrast effect.
- C-** A properly executed low-key image doesn't necessarily need an absolute white (255 on the histogram). However, the included light tones should be in the upper third of the histogram. The light tones versus dark tones will have a significant impact on the mood of a low key photograph.
- D-** Carefully crafted lighting can help to create a low key image. However, most low key photographs will require some fine-tuning in post-production.
- E-** Post-production can be used to enhance the low key effect by decreasing the brightness values of some middle tones. If you go too far, your high key image will look faked.

- 2-** Self-assign two low key shots: For the first one you will assemble your subject by choosing the subject, props, clothing, location, etc. Keep all chosen tones in the lower third of the histogram. Use the appropriate lighting to create the low key effect. For the second shot, you must go out on-location and 'find' a low key subject. This may require you returning to your chosen subject to 'get the right light' for the low key effect.

## HOW DID YOU DO?

- Does your shot have a majority of black or dark tones?
- Were you able to primarily create the effect in-camera or did you have to rely heavily on post-production?