

Total time:  
2-4 hours



Difficulty Level: Beginner

#### Skill Points:

- Using a silhouette as a focal point
- Using a silhouette as the subject
- Understanding the different types of silhouettes

# UNDERSTANDING SILHOUETTES



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There is much confusion among the difference between silhouettes, a shadow, and when something is shadowed. (Review the “Shadows” Action Card). Here is the definition of a silhouette: the dark shape and outline of someone, or something, visible against a lighter background.

**KEY LESSON:** Silhouettes are powerful, because they make use of shape [See “Shape” Action Card]. The most powerful silhouettes include a storytelling element. A simple outline can be effective as a focal point, but rarely as the subject. If it includes a storytelling element, it will often become the subject. These elements can be physical objects or action.



**Woman at Sunset:** A simple silhouette as this, gives little to a viewer. It becomes a weak photo. There is nothing wrong with starting out this way, and when you feel comfortable, incorporate storytelling details.

**Woman & Dog:** This is a similar situation to the previous example. The inclusion of the dog, and the ball, greatly increased the story value and resulting pleasure for a viewer of this photo. Take notice to the importance of shape in conveying the story.

**Dandelion:** When an object has opaque, and translucent parts, the silhouette will vary in density. This is called a **semi-silhouette**.

**Monks:** Here is an example of what can go wrong - if

you don't consider the entire composition. The intent was for the monk in silhouette to be the subject, as camera focus is placed on him. The device in his hand is meant to be a focal point. The problem here is that he monk in red draws more attention than the subject. This leads to visual confusion. If you intend for your silhouette to be the subject- make sure it firmly holds that position!

**Man at Beach:** A full silhouette is deep black. A semi-silhouette has some detail in the shadowed areas. Here, we have both. When exposing for a silhouette, you want to take the camera meter reading from the lighter background. Slightly underexposing will turn the silhouette a deeper black tone.



## ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Organize a photo shoot similar in content to the example photos: Shoot at sunset. | Bring a model or two and props (include one or two translucent props) | Bring your lighting bounce cards (if you made them).
- 2- Place your subject(s) into the scene. Introduce your various props to create stories. Be cognizant of the shape (outline) of your silhouettes. (Don't let the model nose(s) disappear). Study the sample photos.
- 3- Take your light meter reading from the bright sky and slightly underexpose.
- 4- Create deep black silhouettes. Now, introduce some light back into the silhouette using your lighting bounce cards, (don't overdo it. You simply want to lighten the deep black) and create a semi-silhouette. Play with your translucent props.

## HOW DID YOU DO?

- Did you create deep black silhouetted images? Did your silhouetted images tell a story through shape?
- Were you able to successfully lighten the silhouette into a semi-silhouette?



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