



# RULES OF COMPOSITION



Ask yourself:

What do I want to CREATE?

*Instead of what picture do I want to take?*

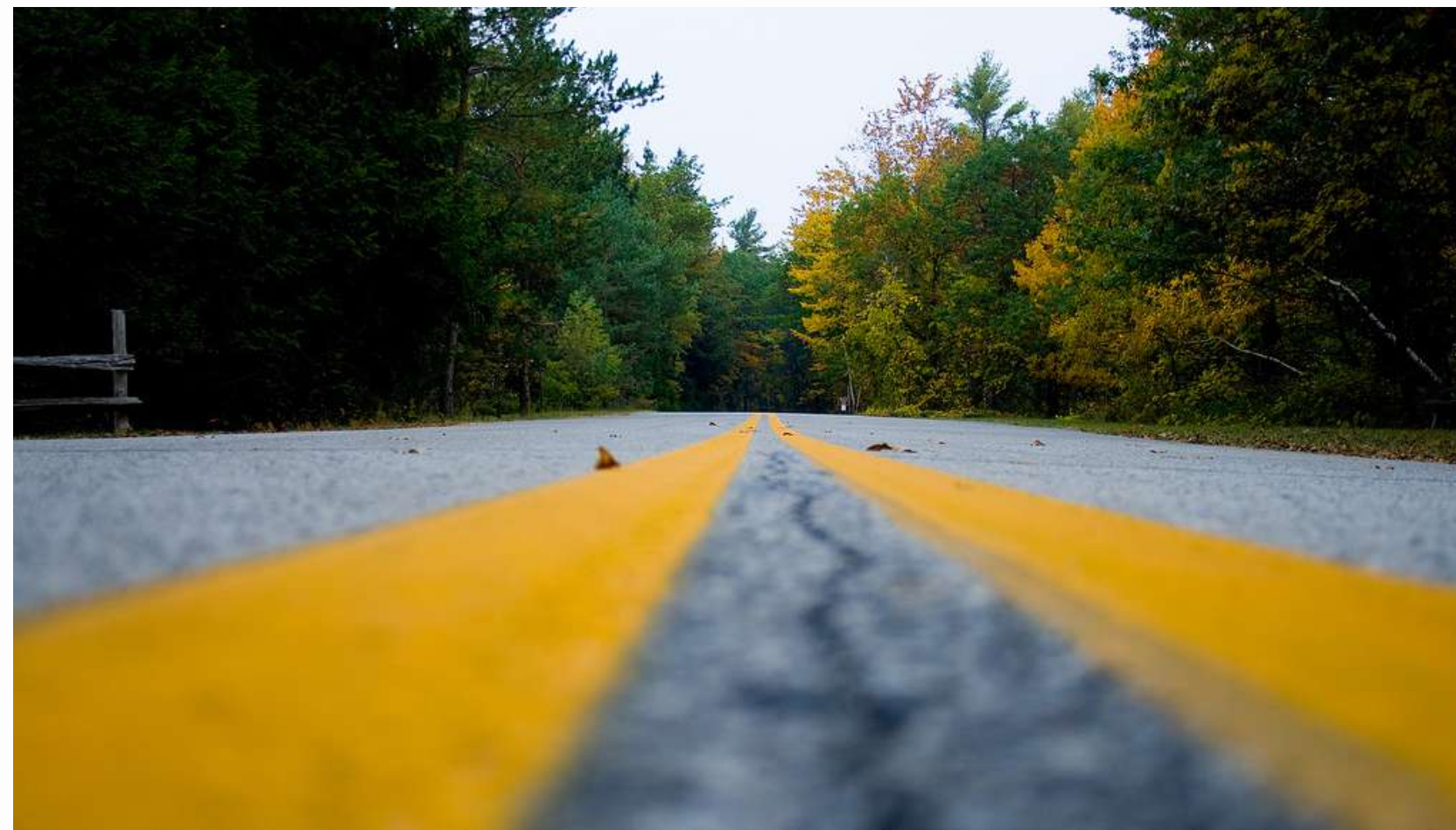
What do I want people to feel or see when they look at my photographs?

Consider how your composition will change if you position yourself or the subject differently. What would happen if you got closer, moved farther away, got on level, changed the orientation? Play with these things to achieve different vibes and feelings.



# Viewpoint

Bug's eye view, Bird's eye view, From the side, From the back, Direct  
(different viewpoints offer illicit different feelings from the viewer)



# Rule of Odds

When you have an odd number of subjects in your composition, it creates a more interesting picture. The viewer's mind can relax and not be bothered with trying to group the objects, rather they automatically perceive the image as having one group. This allows them to linger on the image longer. Try a triangle formation when composing your images.



This image also employs the Rule of Thirds and Negative Space



This image also employs the Triangle Rule

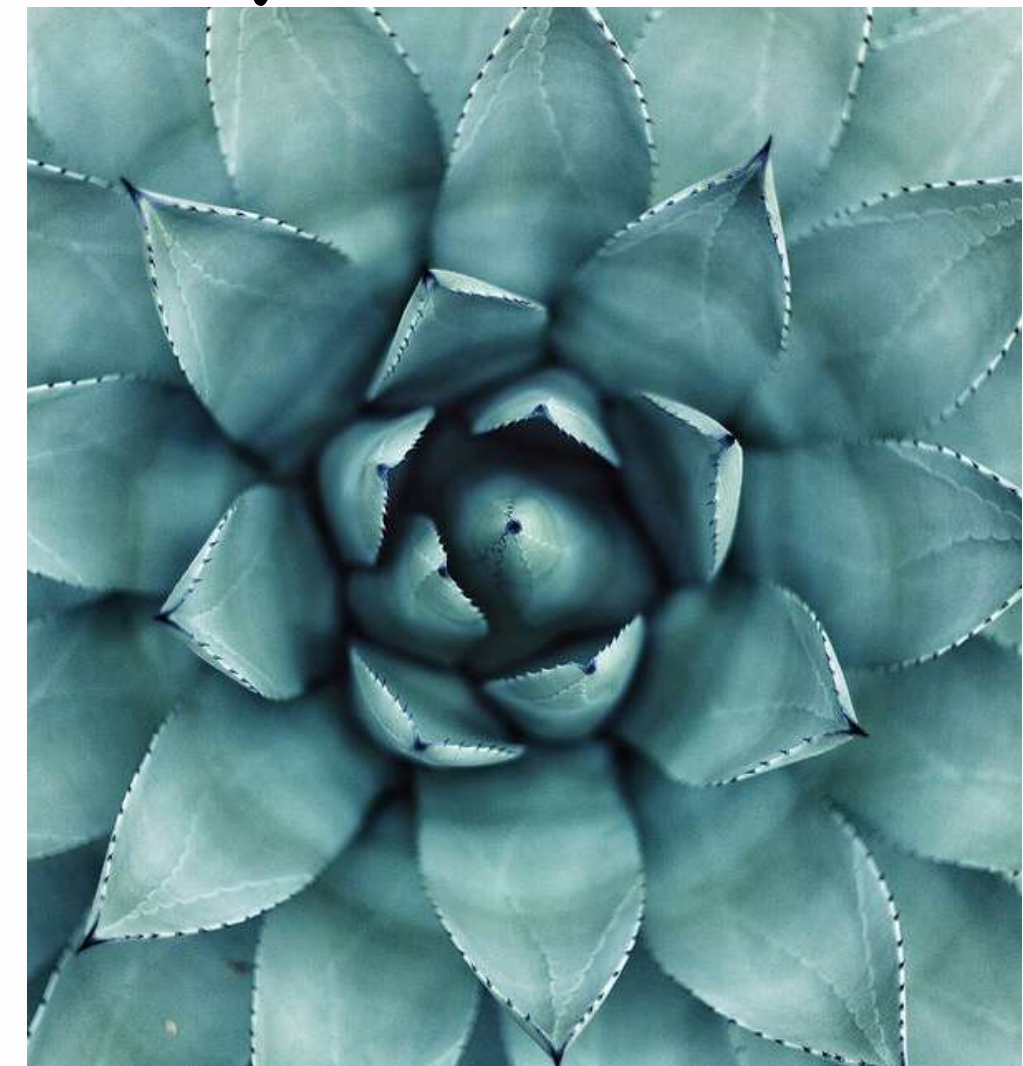


# Fill the Frame

This rule is a great way to direct the viewer to exactly what you want them to notice. Filling the frame produces a clean image by eliminating distractions and creates more impact.

You have to be careful with film photography though because you have to achieve focus and that requires distance. A well focused image can be cropped in tight in the darkroom!

This image also employs the Repetition







Notice the S-Curve in the above image and the Rule of Odds and Leading Lines in the other

# Orientation

Horizontal (or landscape) orientation conveys calmness and stability while a vertical (or portrait) orientation conveys strength.

Consider which orientation fits your composition best. Try both and see which suits best.



# Negative Space

Negative space involves leaving the area around the focal point unoccupied. This is the opposite of Fill the Frame.

This conveys a feeling of calm and serenity to the viewer, giving the eye time to appreciate and become part of the image.



# Separation

Separation can emphasize a focal area and help the viewer know exactly what to look at in a photograph. This can be achieved in many ways:

Use a low f/stop (blurs the background)

Darken the background

Add light to the subject

Use color (mix warm and cool tones)

Blur motion (a biker in focus while the background is swooshed)





# Leading Lines:

composing your image so that natural or manmade lines direct the viewer to the heart of the image and cause the eye to “travel” and linger



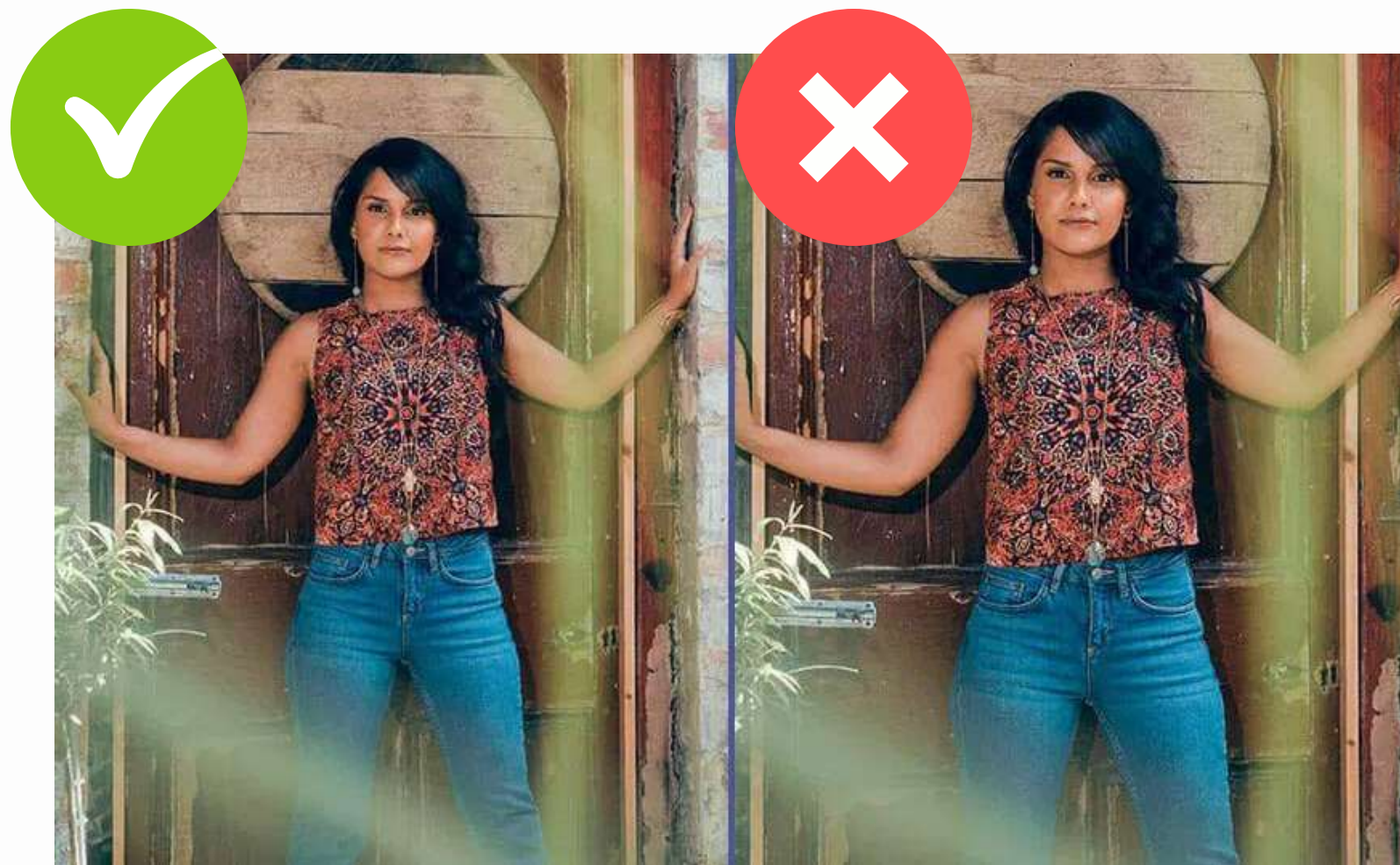
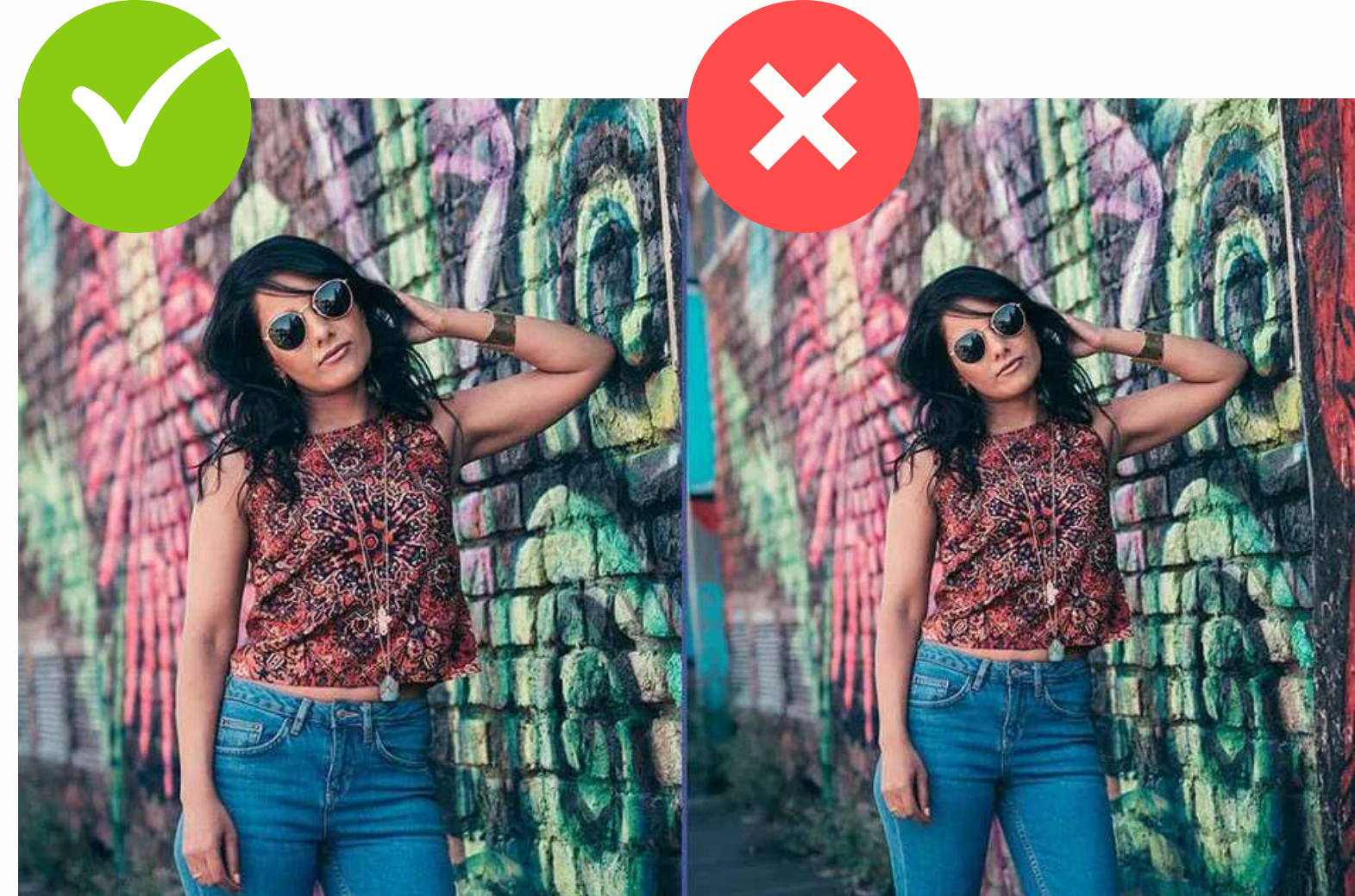


# Cropping Dos and Don'ts

The general rule is to avoid cropping at places that bend (wrists, elbows, knees, ankles, etc)

Make sure to leave "room to look"

For trees, leave room at the bottom where the roots would be





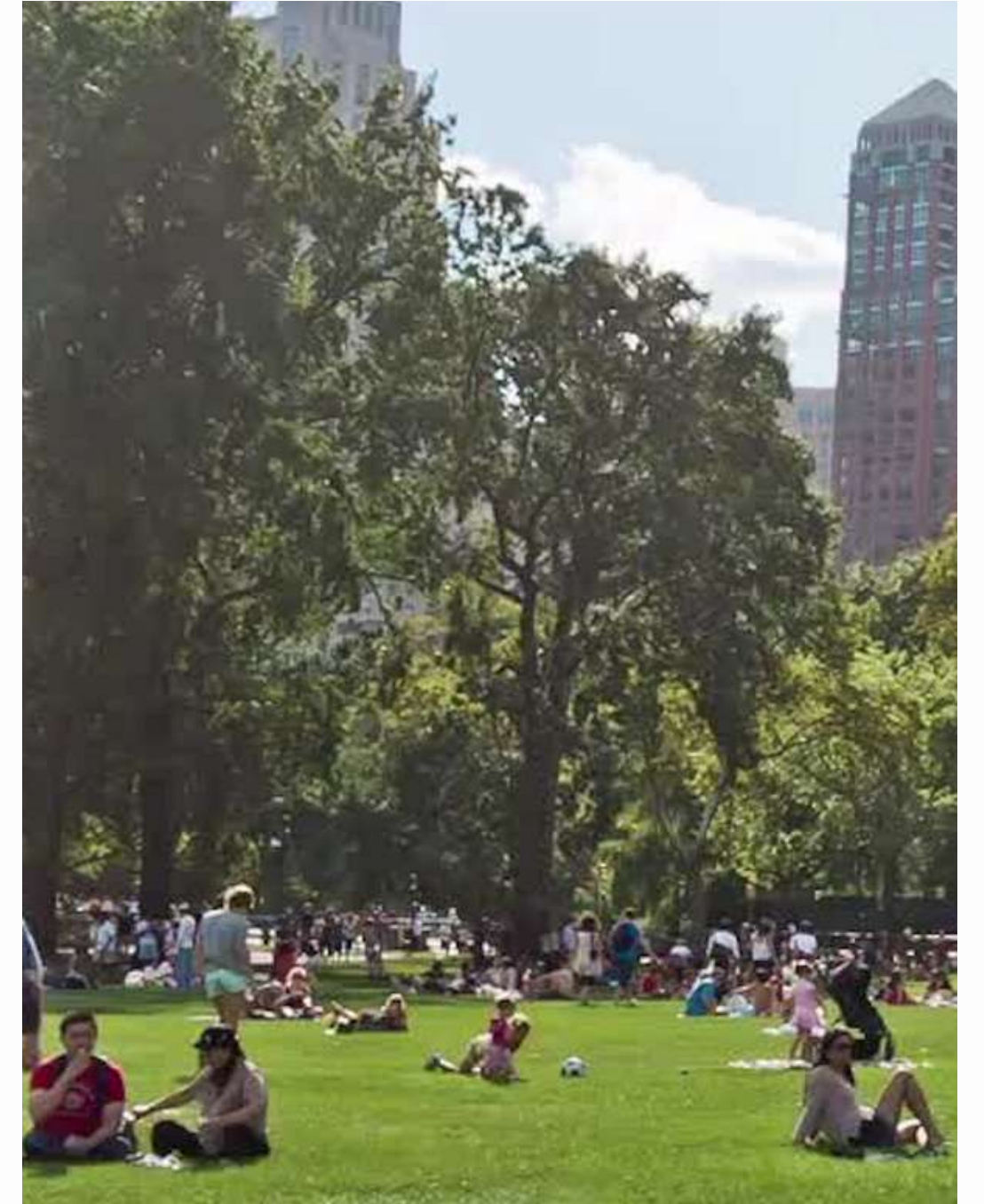
# Patterns

Look for ways to play on repeated colors, textures, shadows, and angles for stunning pattern creations





# Horizon



If you divide your shot into 3 equal parts, the horizon should be on one of the lines dividing the scene. Consider what you want to emphasize when cropping. The “horizon” can go in the middle if reflecting in water (for example mountains reflected in a lake).

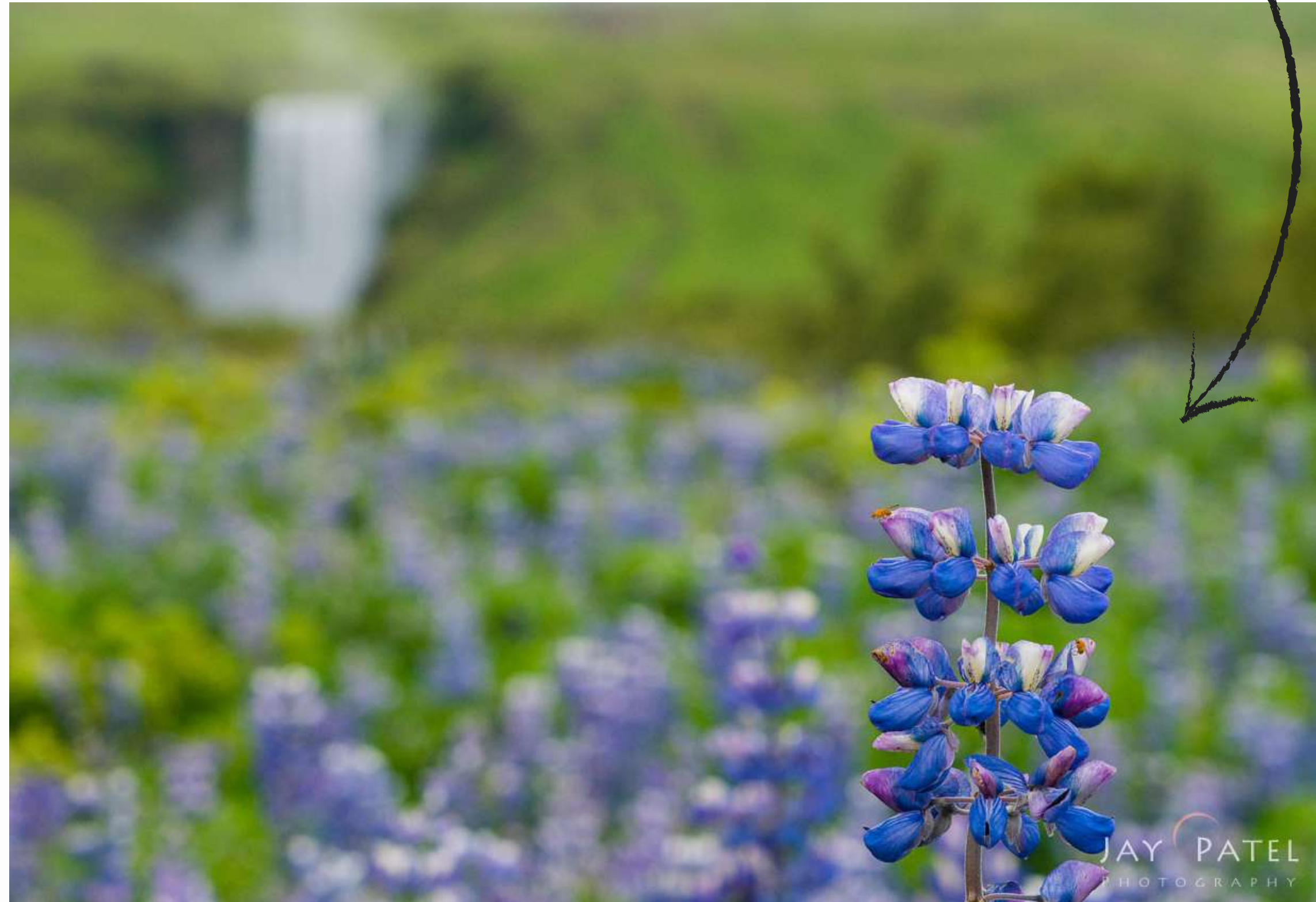


# Foreground Element

Experiment with the end result if you focus on the element in the foreground or the one in the background.

I'd like to see that this image looks like with the waterfall in focus instead of the flower.

This image also employs the Rule of Thirds



# Framing



Framing can make the viewer feel a connection to an image because it draws them in.

- Doors and doorways
- Windows
- Tree branches
- Fencing
- Car mirrors
- People

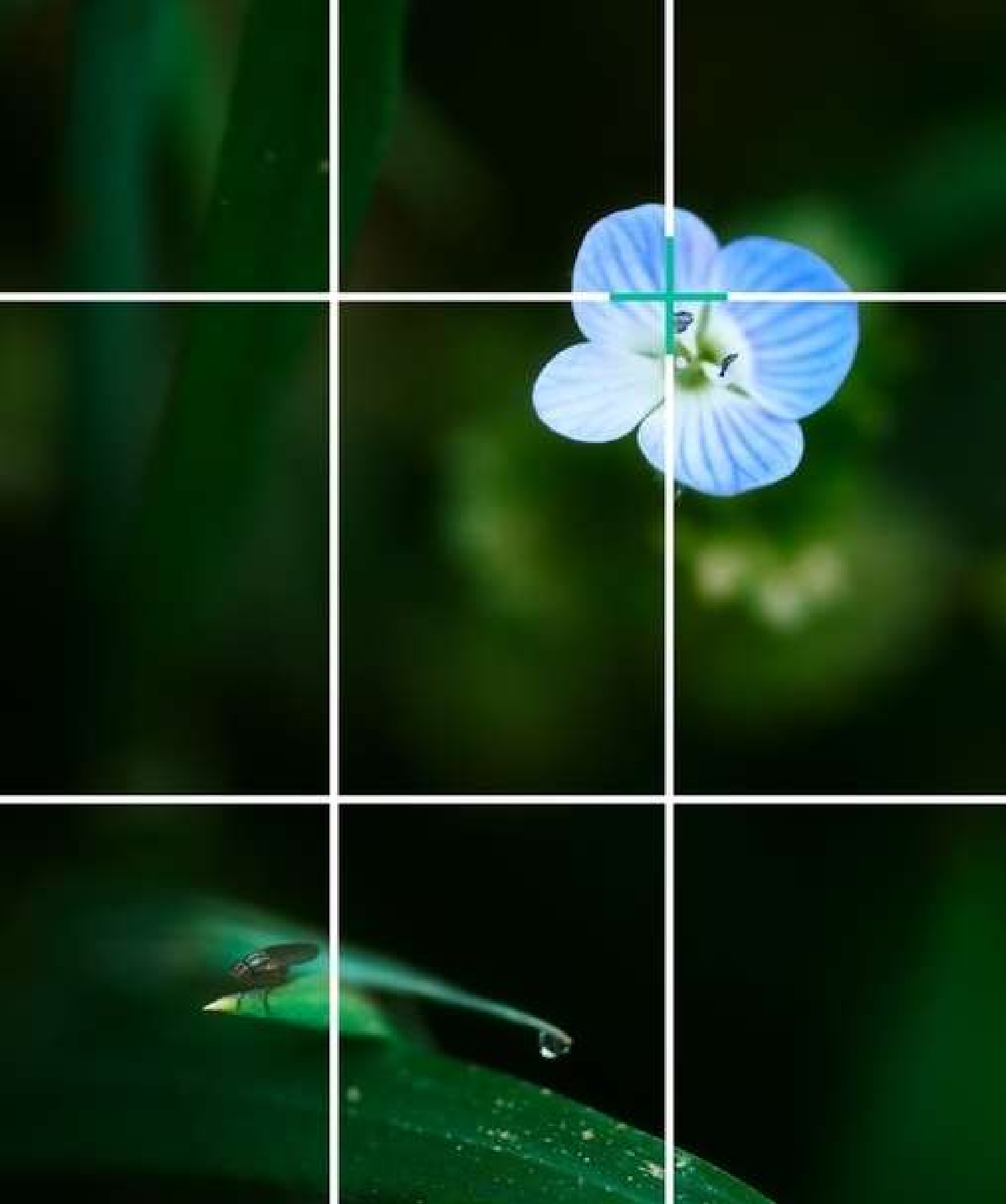


# Balance

Balance is achieved when objects, tones, and colors have equal weight as the eye travels through an image.

The goal for balance (and for all of the composition tools really) is to have the viewer explore the entire scene and to come away with an understanding of the message you were trying to create.





# Rule of Thirds

This is one of the easiest and most impactful ways to step up your photography game.

Imagine a tic tac toe grid on your photo and place a focal where one of the points intersect. This adds visual interest to your composition.

Be careful to make sure your subject has room to look (even if it doesn't have a face!)



Comes from the Fibonacci number, 1.618 (a naturally occurring sequence of numbers)

Found frequently in nature (describes branches in trees, number of petals on a flower, human anatomy, etc). Using the spiral as a guideline, elements in the image lay perfectly balanced in a visually pleasing way. It creates blank space in relation to the focal

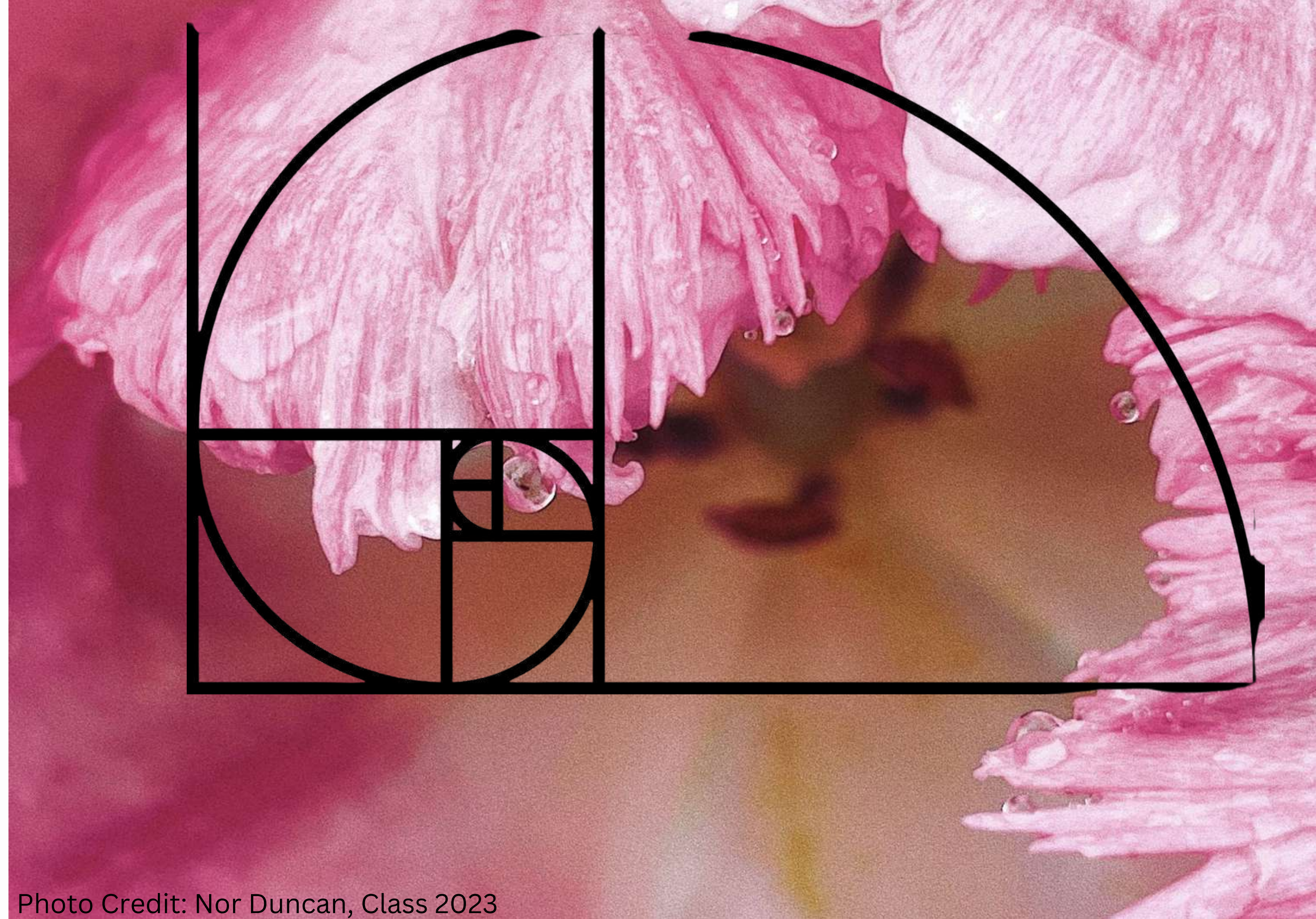


Photo Credit: Nor Duncan, Class 2023

# The Golden Spiral (or the Golden Ratio)





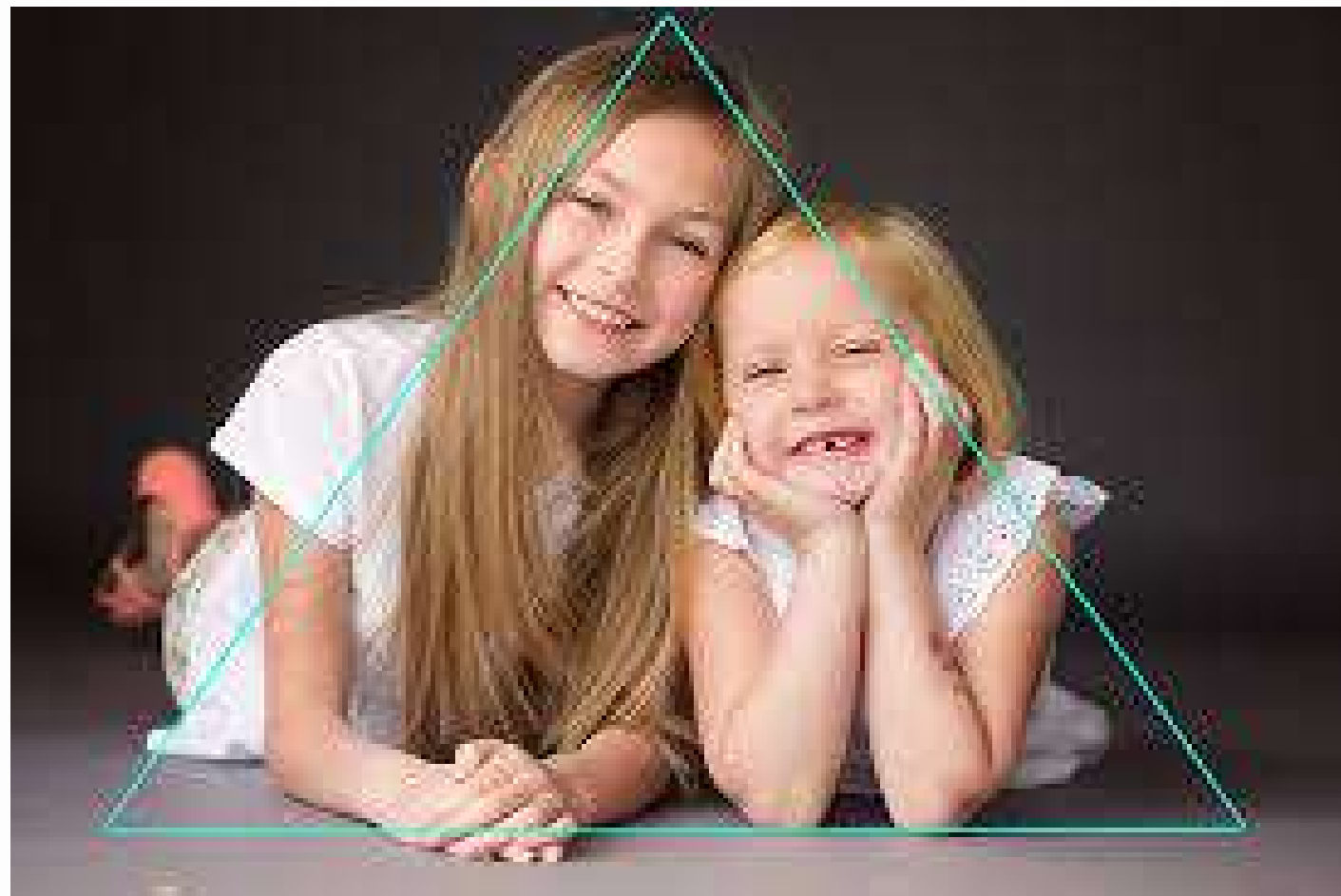
# Diagonal Lines:

- add feelings of movement and tension to an image
- can also add depth
- images with with diagonal lines are often more dramatic



# Triangles

Triangles are all around us and they add a stability to images whether there are physically there or just implied.





# S-Curve

Can be used as a focal  
itself or to frame or  
separate other elements



# Reflections

- Mirror Images
- In water
- Off windows
- Any glossy surface (like shiny plastic, polished wood, leather)
- Through windows
- Off windows (also creates framing)
- Add foreground when reflecting in water





Mixing warm and cool colors can be powerful and make a statement

See a color wheel for opposite complimentary/contrasting colors

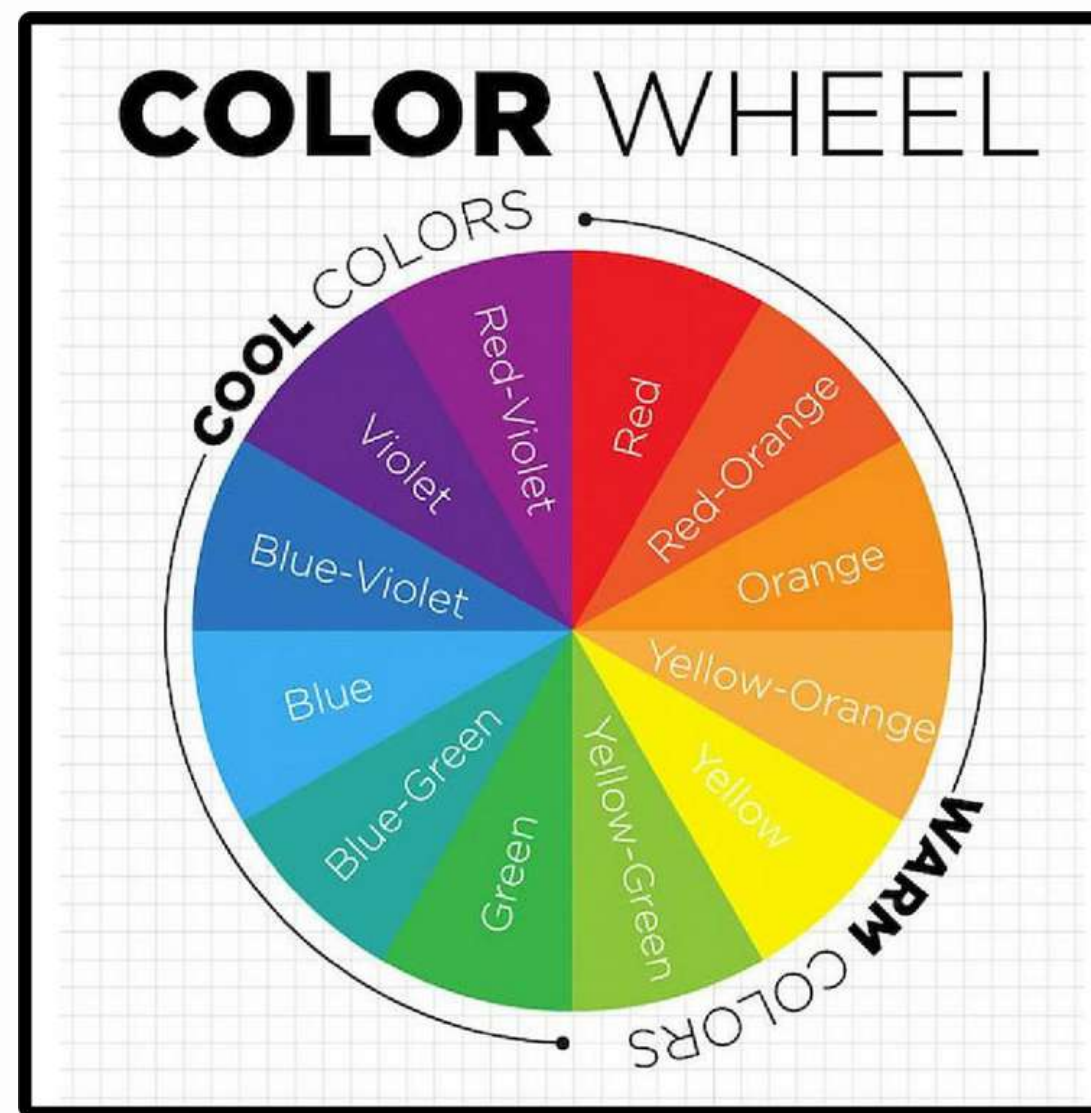
A lot of color tends to grab and keep the viewer's attention for a longer period of time

Blues = cool, feelings of calm/peacefulness

Greens = freshness, lushness, new life

Yellow, orange, reds = warmth and comfort

Before sunrise and 20 min before sunset can offer everything bathed in soft blue light (the Golden Hour)



# Color

