

TIME IN A SINGLE FRAME

An activity inspired by Nicholas Nixon's *The Brown Sisters* | *Forty Portraits in Forty Years*

What happens when four sisters pose for the same photograph, in the same order, for forty years?

When we recreate a photograph, we do more than look back at the past. We discover who we were, who we are today, and who we hope to become. A photograph may capture a single moment in time, but a series of photographs can reveal a story unfolding over many years.

From 1975 to 2014, American photographer **Nicholas Nixon** photographed his wife and her three sisters once a year, always standing in the same order. Each photograph resembles the one before it, and yet each tells a different story. We can see the passage of time in their faces and expressions, in children who were born, in people who are no longer with us, and in the relationships that endured.

The photographs included here are from **1975, 1985, 1995, 2005, and 2014**.



It is precisely because the photographs remain so similar that we can see how time changes us—and, alongside those changes, notice the things that remain constant.

The holiday season gives us a similar opportunity to return to a familiar moment year after year. We dress up, gather with many of the same people, take part in familiar rituals, and sometimes even celebrate in the very same place. And yet, each year, we arrive a little different.



A NEW FAMILY TRADITION

1. Find an old family holiday photo. (A close-knit group of friends who have shared many years together can be family, too.)
2. Try to recreate the photo as closely as possible:
 - Return to the same place, if you can.
 - Arrange everyone in the same positions.
 - Include the same people—or as many of them as are able to participate.
 - Recreate similar clothing, objects, or accessories.
3. Take the new photograph.
4. Place the two photos side by side and take some time to look at them together.
5. Make this photo recreation a new tradition—and return to it in the years to come.

LOOKING AT THE PHOTOS TOGETHER

- What has changed since the original photo was taken? What has stayed almost the same?
- What small details tell the story of the time that has passed?
- What emotions do the two photographs bring up? What memories or stories do they evoke?
- Which family traditions have remained over the years? Which have changed?
- What do you imagine this photograph will look like twenty years from now? Who will be in it? What do you hope will remain the same? What do you hope will change?

BONUS QUESTION

If you could recreate any photograph in the world—personal, family, or famous—which would you choose, and why? What would you hope to discover or communicate by recreating it?

