



**Frida Kahlo Through the  
Lens of Lola Álvarez Bravo  
Grades 9-12**

# Frida Kahlo Through the Lens of Lola Álvarez Bravo



**Lola Álvarez Bravo**  
1907 Lagos de Moreno, Mexico—1993 Mexico City, Mexico  
*Frida Kahlo*  
1945  
gelatin silver print

New York, Throckmorton Fine Art

## About the Artist:

Born Dolores Martínez in Jalisco, Mexico in 1907, Lola Álvarez Bravo was considered by many to be Mexico's first professional female photographer. In 1925, she married Manuel Álvarez Bravo and worked as a lab assistant in his newly opened photography studio. In her time working as an assistant, Álvarez Bravo learned the photographic skills that served her well for the rest of her career. Lola and Manuel Álvarez Bravo separated after nearly ten years together, a situation that required Lola to find work to financially support her son and herself.<sup>1</sup> Over the course of her career, Álvarez Bravo defied gender expectations and found work as an artist, a photojournalist, a commercial photographer, and, eventually, the chief of photography at Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura (National Institute of Fine Arts and Literature), a position she held for 30 years.<sup>2</sup> Lola Álvarez Bravo experimented throughout her career with surrealist photography and photomontage, but it was her commitment to capturing everyday scenes and people with as much honesty as possible, for which she is remembered most.

## About the Artwork:

Due to Frida's poor health, she spent many hours in bed convalescing from various surgeries and medical treatments. She had a mirror placed above her bed so she could continue to paint even while confined to her bed. It is no surprise that she is featured as the main subject of many of her works; as the artist herself said "I paint myself because I am so often alone and because I am the subject I know best."<sup>3</sup>

## About the Artwork:

“Friends for many years, Kahlo frequently sat for Lola Álvarez Bravo, who produced striking images of the painter in the last decade of her life. In an interview in 1989, thirty-five years after Kahlo’s death, Álvarez Bravo would recall “I insist that Frida was a special being, not a person one ran into every day. When she spoke, when she moved, when she painted, when she expressed herself, she already was inspiring something. To me, she was like birds and flowers and knitted quilts, a Mexican mood concentrated in an epoch and all expressed through her. She was like that.”<sup>4</sup>

Lola Álvarez Bravo photographed her friend, Frida Kahlo, many times throughout Kahlo’s life, including after her death. Álvarez Bravo sought to capture the person behind the image through her photography, this was especially true of her photographs of Kahlo, who spent a lifetime meticulously constructing her image. The two women enjoyed a long friendship, the closeness of their relationship is notable through the intimacy and sense of respect evident in Álvarez Bravo’s portraits. Although Álvarez Bravo set out to capture the Frida Kahlo she knew and loved, there are a lot of striking overlaps in how Kahlo depicted herself in her own art and the way she is represented in Álvarez Bravo’s portraits. In the photographs, Kahlo is dressed in traditional Mexican clothing and wears her hair in the braids she would become known for. In every image (of those included in this lesson plan) there is either a mirror or a reflection; the idea of duality is a common theme that runs throughout Kahlo’s body of work. Álvarez Bravo carefully chose not to objectify her friend, but rather to attempt to understand and engage her. The portraits are less the product of a photographer and her subject and more the result of a collaboration between friends.<sup>5</sup>



**Lola Álvarez Bravo**

1907 Lagos de Moreno, Mexico—1993 Mexico City, Mexico

*Frida In Front Of Mirrored Wardrobe Keeper*

1944

gelatin silver print

New York, Throckmorton Fine Art



**Lola Álvarez Bravo**  
1907 Lagos de Moreno, Mexico—1993 Mexico City, Mexico  
*Frida In Front Of Mirrored Wardrobe Keeper*  
1945  
gelatin silver print

New York, Throckmorton Fine Art



**Lola Álvarez Bravo**  
1907 Lagos de Moreno, Mexico—1993 Mexico City, Mexico  
*Frida In Her Bedroom*  
1945  
gelatin silver print

New York, Throckmorton Fine Art

## Lesson Description:

An introduction to the life and career of Lola Álvarez Bravo. Students will take a closer look at Álvarez Bravo's portraits of Frida Kahlo, conduct preliminary research on Kahlo, and participate in discussion with peers in order to write an informed interpretation of Álvarez Bravo's work. Additionally, students will take photographic portraits of their own friends to help them better infer Álvarez Bravo's intent in photographing Kahlo.

## Duration:

1-2 Class periods

## Content Area(s):

Language Arts, Visual Arts

## Objectives:

Students will...

- Learn about the life and work of Lola Álvarez Bravo.
- Research Frida Kahlo.
- Write an informed interpretation of Álvarez Bravo's work.
- Create a photographic portrait of a friend.

## Essential Questions:

- What do Lola Álvarez Bravo's photographs tell us about Frida Kahlo?
- What did you learn from your classmates in discussion that you didn't know before?
- How did you choose to represent your friend in your photographic portrait and why?

## Vocabulary:

- Interpretation- The act or the result of explaining the meaning of something

## Activities:

### Active Viewing

1. Before providing them with background information on the artist and/or artworks, divide the class into four groups for discussion. Assign each group one of Lola Álvarez Bravo's portraits of Frida Kahlo included in this lesson plan.
2. Instruct students to look at their assigned portraits of Frida Kahlo with a critical eye. Ask them to interpret their portrait as a group, identifying important visual themes and techniques, and make inferences about what the artist wanted to convey. Students should use a graphic organizer to record their thoughts and ideas.
3. Ask each group to present their findings to the class.
4. Lead students in a discussion about the similarities and differences found throughout Álvarez Bravo's various portraits of Kahlo. Ask students to take notes for a future activity.

### Speaking and Listening/Writing

1. Instruct students to research Frida Kahlo, paying particular attention to how she presented herself in her daily life and what she showed the world through her artwork (assign the research a day or two ahead of time).
2. Divide students into small groups and direct them to discuss what they each learned about Frida Kahlo through their research.
3. Provide students with background information on Álvarez Bravo and ask them to revisit her photographs as a group. Using their graphic organizers and the new knowledge they learned through their research, instruct students to discuss what they think Álvarez Bravo wanted to convey through her portraits of Kahlo and if they think her photography is a good representation of who Frida Kahlo was. If so, how? If not, why not?

Speaking and Listening/Writing continued...

4. Ask students to reflect on what they learned through looking at Álvarez Bravo's photographs, conducting research on Frida Kahlo, and through discussions with their classmates. Ask them to write a 2-3 page paper on their interpretations of Álvarez Bravo's portraits of Kahlo. They should use their graphic organizers and notes from their discussions to write a clear, well organized, interpretation. Remind them to site their sources when appropriate.

Visual Arts

Materials: camera (camera on a phone/computer/tablet), pencil and paper

1. Have students put themselves in Lola Álvarez Bravo's shoes; ask them to take a photograph of a friend (if students do not have access to a camera, they can draw a picture of a friend instead). Students should think carefully about who their friend is, how they see themselves, and how they, the student, can say something meaningful about their friend through their photograph.
2. Instruct students to write one to two paragraphs about their friend. They should include what it is about their friend they hoped to capture in their photograph, how they intended to capture it, and if they think they were successful

### Suggestions for younger students:

- For younger learners, ask students to copy Kahlo's poses from each photograph as best they can with their own bodies. Lead a discussion or ask students to write a short response about how they felt in the poses, what they were thinking about, what they think Frida Kahlo might have been thinking and feelings, and what they think Álvarez Bravo wanted to tell us about her friend through her art.

### Additional Resources for Teachers and Students:

- Lola Álvarez Bravo: Picturing Mexico-  
<https://thesejournal.org/lola-alvarez-bravo/>
- Lola Álvarez Bravo (From CCP-U of A)-  
<https://ccp.arizona.edu/artists/lola-%C3%A1lvarez-bravo>
- Artist Friendships: Lola Álvarez Bravo and Frida Kahlo-  
<https://nmwa.org/blog/artist-friendships-lola-alvarez-bravo-and-frida-kahlo/>
- Contextualizing Frida Kahlo (From LAII-UNM)-  
<https://laili.unm.edu/info/k-12-educators/assets/documents/frida-kahlo/contextualizing-frida-kahlo.pdf>
- Lola Álvarez Bravo "Frida"-  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbNBWqq9ipY&t=693s>

## Standards Addressed:

### Common Core Standards for English Language arts (grades 9-12)

#### WRITING

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7- Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7- Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

#### SPEAKING AND LISTENING

CSSC.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1- Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CSSC.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1- Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

### Common Core Standards for Visual Arts (grades 9-12)

#### ANCHOR STRAND 8: INTERPRET INTENT AND MEANING IN ARTISTIC WORK

VA:Re8.1.1a- Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts.

Standards Addressed continued...

VA:Re8.1.1Ia- Identify types of contextual information useful in the process of constructing interpretations of an artwork or collection of works.

VA:Re8.1.1IIa- Analyze differing interpretations of an artwork or collection of works in order to select and defend a plausible critical analysis.

#### Notes:

1. Annette LePique, "Lola Álvarez Bravo: Picturing Mexico," *The Seen: Chicago's International Journal of Contemporary and Modern Art*, January 3, 2019, <https://theseenjournal.org/lola-alvarez-bravo/>.
2. Ibid.
3. Wall text from the "Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, and Mexican Modernism" exhibition.
4. Ibid.
5. *Art Quick Look*. "Lola Alvarez Bravo" 'Frida'" April 20, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbNBWqq9ipY&t=693s>.



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What do you see?

What do you think/feel?

What do you want to know?









