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# PLAYING IN THE GARDEN



# CASE STUDY 7.

## **PLAYING IN THE GARDEN**



# STORY BEHIND THE IMAGE

An open and peaceful space in nature, like a garden or field, offers a beautiful place for children to run around and play with their toys. Plus, you can utilize broad natural light and highlight the colors each season brings.

## LOCATION

You can take this photo anywhere the child is safe and willing to play. Places like your own garden will be best because it's easily accessible and secure. You can also choose a nearby field or a meadow. However, ensure that any plants, flowers, or grasses are safe for the child to play in, and the foliage is not too tall to obstruct your view of them.

You should make sure that it's an open space without high trees around you because that would block the light needed on the child's face. At the same time, look for somewhere with trees and bushes some distance behind the child that you can blur to create an interesting background.

## PREPARATION

Bring a toy that the child can play with. I chose a plane for this photo. Choose a small toy, easy to carry with you and easy for the child to hold.

## LIGHT

For this shot, you need good quality, natural light. Have the photo shoot in the late afternoon if it's sunny out, just before or after sunset. Another vital detail to consider is the direction of the light. Place the sun behind the child, forty-five degrees to the left or right, to avoid any glare or backlight. If it's an overcast day, these details won't matter that much because you'll have a soft umbrella of light to use.

## PROMPTING A POSE

The best thing about this setup is that you don't need to direct the child a lot. It's even better to wait for the child to play by themselves. Trying to lead the child too much, in this case, may end up with the child losing patience and running off to play somewhere else.

I've also learned, with my children, that it was better not to give them the toy before reaching the location because they were more interested in it if it was new to them.

# COMPOSING THE SHOT



▲ Fig. 7.1 Uncropped.

Creating a perfect composition can be difficult because this might be a very dynamic scene with a child running around and moving a lot. Take shots at different angles and distances, close-up and faraway, for a good variety.

In the original photo (Fig. 7.1), you can see how the composition looked before I cropped it in Lightroom. It was not a strong composition out of the camera. It's good to try and take photos using the recommended composition rules. I like to use the rule of thirds. But it's okay if you don't get a perfect shot and fix it afterward.

**TIP:** I recommend turning on the grid lines in your camera viewfinder for the rule of thirds. Or you can experiment with other rules of composition. Then try and place your subject somewhere on those lines or intersecting points.

Usually, you should leave more space in front of your subject's face. But in some cases, you can break that rule to create a stronger image (see "[Composition Rules](#)").

# TAKING THE PICTURE

As with every candid shot, be quick and take a lot of photos. With some mirrorless cameras, you can set them up to automatically follow and focus on the subject's eye, and you'll take excellent, sharp images.

My mirrorless camera shows which lines in the photo are sharp by highlighting them in the viewfinder or on the screen, making this kind of shot less difficult for me. If your camera doesn't have these functions, you'll still be able to capture the moment, but it may take more time and practice.

If you're using a DSLR with manual focus lenses and such a shallow depth of field, it will be more difficult because you must trust your eyes to properly adjust the image into focus. However, don't get discouraged. I used to take photos like this with a manual lens—it was a bit more difficult and time-consuming—but possible.

## OTHER LENSES YOU CAN USE

- 85mm f/1.4 or f/1.8
- 135mm f/2.0
- 105mm f/1.4
- 70mm to 200mm f/2.8
- 200mm f/2.0

# PERFECTING IN POST-PRODUCTION

## SELECTING A SHOT TO EDIT



▲ Fig. 7.2 Sample shots.

As you can see in the garden shots (Fig. 7.2), the kids moved around, so I took as many photos as I could. My idea was to place the girl and the boy in the shot together. But I thought the girl looked great in one of the photos and decided to crop the boy out to create a stronger composition using the rule of thirds.

## LIGHTROOM EDITS

1. I liked the sunlight on the girl's hair. To emphasize and contrast that light coming from behind her, I brightened and unfocussed the area above her head using a **Graduated Filter** (Fig. 7.3). I **increased Exposure** (1.98). I also **lowered Clarity** (-61) and **Dehaze** (-64) to create further separation of the background and emphasize the focussed detail of her hair.
2. In the **HSL** panel, I **lowered Saturation** in **Yellow** (-59) and **Green** (-81) to create a more exciting color tone (Fig. 7.4). I was aiming for a complementary color harmony to go with her skin tone. I wanted to introduce blue tones to the grass, so I needed to get rid of yellow and green tones to do that. Blue is also analogous to her dress.
3. Using an **Adjustment Brush**, I **decreased the Exposure** (-0.75) to darken the bottom of the shot (Fig. 7.5). I wanted to balance the bright light I created at the top.
4. Finally, I did some minor **Color Grading** at the end (Fig. 7.6, Fig. 7.7). I wanted a complementary color harmony, so I chose blues and oranges:
  - **Midtones:** her skin got a little bit of **orange**.
  - **Shadows:** the grass got some **blue**.
  - **Highlights:** the top part of the image got some **blue**.



▲ Fig. 7.3 Highlighting light.



▲ Fig. 7.4 Introducing blue tones.



▲ Fig. 7.5 Darkening.



▲ Fig. 7.6 Pulling blues and oranges.

# BEFORE AND AFTER SHOTS



▲ Before.



▲ After.

# VARIATIONS AND INSPIRATION

You don't necessarily need a toy to capture a child in play in a garden scene. You can have them water some flowers (Fig. 7.7). You can ask children to run, jump, and skip through fields of flowers for a beautiful summer shot (Fig. 7.8).

And if it's clear what the child is doing, it's okay to have their head turned away from you. You also don't need to show the child's face in every photo (Fig 7.9). While it may be less personal, it can also help portray the world of the imagination a child gets caught up in.



▲ Fig. 7.7  
f/1.8 | 1/640 s | ISO 100



▲ Fig. 7.8  
f/2.0 | 1/5000 s | ISO 80



▲ Fig. 7.9  
f/1.4 | 1/200 s | ISO 100

Dreamy Childhood Portraits

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