

LESSON 5

Editing Images with Canva, Part 1: Crop, Resize and Adjust

40 minutes

Make It Yourself

WHAT THIS LESSON DOES

Students edit a digital image in Canva, a free browser design tool, learning what each edit does to how the image reads. They crop to change what the viewer's eye lands on, resize for where it will be seen, apply a filter, adjust brightness and contrast, stack elements as layers, and export. The lesson closes on the ethics of the crop: deciding what a viewer never sees is a real editorial choice.

WHAT STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO

- Edit an image using cropping, resizing, filters and layers, and explain what each edit changes

BEFORE THE BELL

- **CANVA NEEDS AN ACCOUNT.** Students sign up free with their school email. Sort this out BEFORE the lesson: if the class signs up during the period you will lose ten minutes and some students will not get in at all. Check your school allows the sign-up and that the email domain works. Canva's labels were checked on 14 Aug 2026 and all still exist. Three things sit differently to how you might expect: Create a design is in the top LEFT on a laptop, the crop control is an icon whose label only shows on hover, and you scroll down the edit panel to reach Filters. Everything else is where the lesson says. The practical work is steps 3 to 5. Keep step 2 tight so it survives. Run step 6 as a discussion, not a lecture. The crop question is the one that makes this a media literacy lesson rather than a software tutorial.

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HOW THE LESSON RUNS

4 min	introduction	Start
5 min	content	The Words Editors Use
11 min	activity	Open Canva and Crop an Image
8 min	activity	Filters, Brightness and Contrast
8 min	activity	Layers, Then Export
3 min	content	Before You Go
1 min	summary	What You Covered

TEACHING MOVES

- 1. Start. Show both crops side by side and ask what each version says happened. Draw out that nothing was faked, only left out. Do not name the meaning-changing detail yourself, let them spot it.
- 2. The Words Editors Use. Keep this to a couple of minutes on the board. Land pixels versus resolution and JPG versus PNG, then move to the doing before it drags.
- 3. Open Canva and Crop an Image. Walk the room during sign-in. Anyone not logged in by the end of this step is locked out for the whole lesson, so fix it now, not later.
- 4. Filters, Brightness and Contrast. Students will pile on filters. Ask each one to justify the filter they keep: what feeling does it add to this image?
- 5. Layers, Then Export. Canva has no layers panel, so layers are the stacking order. If a text box vanishes it is behind the photo: right-click and bring it forward. Do not let anyone finish without exporting.
- 6. Before You Go. Protect three minutes for this spoken discussion. Push on the second question: does it matter that the photo shows a real event? This is the beat that makes it a media lesson.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Students think a finished-looking design in Canva is a saved file they can use elsewhere. Show that a design left in Canva is not a picture file. Have everyone export a PNG or JPG and confirm they can find it before the lesson ends.
- Students believe cropping is neutral tidying, not an editorial decision. Return to the two crops from step 1. Ask what the tight version made the viewer believe. Cutting is a choice about what a viewer never sees.
- Students expect a layers panel and get lost when a text box disappears behind an image. Explain layers are the order things were added. Model right-click, bring forward or send backward, so they can fix overlaps themselves.

DIFFERENTIATION

- Emerging: Sit beside them through sign-in and the first crop so they are not left behind at the start. Give one clear task at a time: crop first, then come back for filters.
- Developing: Ask them to say aloud what each edit changed and why they kept it, so the choices become deliberate. Prompt them to check their export actually saved as a usable file.
- Proficient: Have them crop the same photo two ways to tell two different stories, then explain the difference. Ask them to justify JPG versus PNG for their specific image.