

## Do You See Me?

**I**N THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS I've looked at this photograph hundreds of times, always in front of a crowd of people. It's one of the opening images in the slide lecture I've given to audiences of all kinds: K-12 students, college groups, nonprofits, corporations, Rotarians, Unitarians, and police officers. I am a photographic artist, but I did not take this photo. I am in the middle of the second row, with the buttoned-up paisley shirt.

My presentation usually starts with me telling about growing up in Duluth, being the only Asian kid in my school, and explaining how that experience informed my artistic per-

spective. When this picture is shown I ask the audience: "Do you see me? Raise your hand if you think I stick out." Reactions vary widely.

Fifth graders with no filters will often gleefully point out how different I look. Many middle schoolers will anxiously look around the room to see how others react first. Adults can be even more tentative and awkward than middle schoolers. Some claim to see no difference. Others answer diplomatically, "You stand out because you've got the fanciest shirt." Often it's the non-white people in the room who shoot up their hands with certainty.

Each group I work with is different, however, and even broad generalities should not be made. I am an artist, after all, not a social scientist. My question, I understand, is a loaded one. For most of my adolescence I was oblivious to how I appeared to others. In fact, it wasn't until after college that I started to think seriously about my cultural identity. Through all of my schooling I had assumed I was like everyone else. After all, I am a born-and-bred Minnesotan.

But you don't grow up with a mirror in front of your face. The people around me became my mirror. More important—and more profound—popular culture became my mirror. It took me a long time to understand just how distorted that mirror is.

Who, indeed, determines who sticks out? Do you decide? Do the people around you decide? How much does society shape the idea of who belongs? Looking at this photograph makes me realize that the thousands of photographs I've taken as an artist are my way of answering that question: "Do you see me?"

—Wing Young Huie

*Wing Young Huie in first grade class, Nettleton School, Duluth, 1962*

(MNHS COLLECTIONS)



**WING YOUNG HUIE's** current project, *Chinese-ness* (forthcoming from MNHS Press), explores his identity from a "what if" perspective by photographing Chinese men whose lives he could have had if circumstances had been different (if, say, his family had never left for Duluth and Wing had lived in China his whole life). After photographing these men, Wing asks to put on their clothes and gives them the camera to photograph him.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society, and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or users or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission: [contact us](#).

Individuals may print or download articles for personal use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#). Include the author's name and article title in the body of your message. But first--

If you think you may need permission, here are some guidelines:

#### **Students and researchers**

- You **do not** need permission to quote or paraphrase portions of an article, as long as your work falls within the fair use provision of copyright law. Using information from an article to develop an argument is fair use. Quoting brief pieces of text in an unpublished paper or thesis is fair use. Even quoting in a work to be published can be fair use, depending on the amount quoted. Read about fair use here: <http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html>
- You **should**, however, always credit the article as a source for your work.

#### **Teachers**

- You **do not** need permission to incorporate parts of an article into a lesson.
- You **do** need permission to assign an article, either by downloading multiple copies or by sending students to the online pdf. There is a small per-copy use fee for assigned reading. [Contact us](#) for more information.

#### **About Illustrations**

- **Minnesota History** credits the sources for illustrations at the end of each article. **Minnesota History** itself does not hold copyright on images and therefore cannot grant permission to reproduce them.
- For information on using illustrations owned by the Minnesota Historical Society, see [MHS Library FAQ](#).