

Photo Within A Photo - Photoshop

Here's the image I'll be starting with:



The original image.

And here's what the final "photo within a photo" effect will look like:

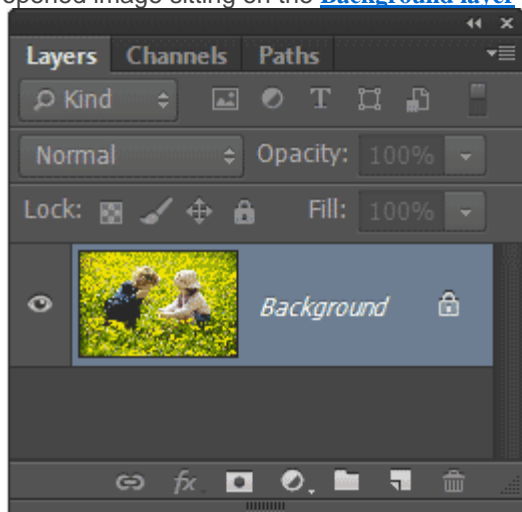


The final result.

Let's get started!

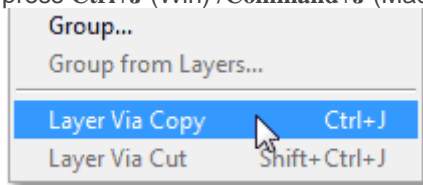
Step 1: Duplicate The Background Layer

Our first step is to make a copy of our Background layer. If we look in the [Layers panel](#), we can see our newly opened image sitting on the [Background layer](#) which at the moment is the only layer we have:



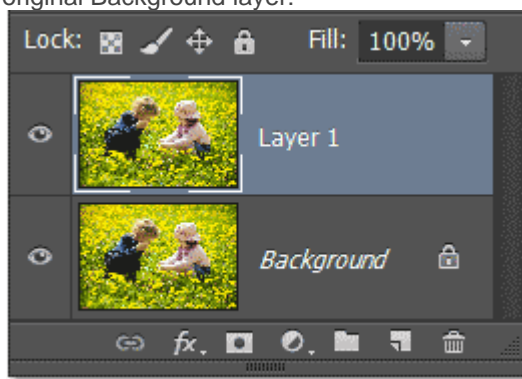
The Background layer holds our original image.

To make a copy of the layer, go up to the **Layer** menu in the **Menu Bar** along the top of the screen, choose **New**, and then choose **Layer Via Copy**. Or, for a faster way to access the same command, simply press **Ctrl+J** (Win) / **Command+J** (Mac) on your keyboard. Either way works fine:



Going to **Layer > New > Layer Via Copy**.

Nothing will appear to happen to the image in the document window, but if we look again in the Layers panel, we see that Photoshop has made a copy of the layer, named the copy **Layer 1**, and placed it directly above the original Background layer:



The copy of the layer appears above the original.

Step 2: Select The Rectangle Tool

Select the **Rectangle Tool** from the Tools panel over on the left side of the screen. Make sure you don't confuse it with the Rectangular Marquee Tool located at the top of the Tools panel. We want the Rectangle Tool – one of [Photoshop's basic Shape tools](#) – and it's found closer to the bottom of the Tools panel:



Selecting the Rectangle Tool.

Step 3: Draw The Shape Of The Smaller Photo

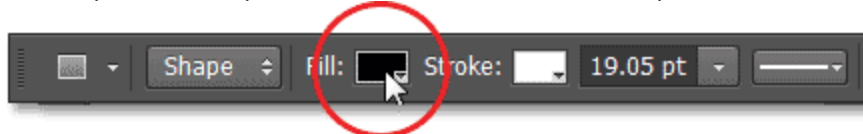
With our Rectangle Tool selected, we're going to draw a rectangular shape around the main subject of the photo, and this shape will soon become the smaller, cropped version of the image. But before we start drawing, we need to set a few options for the Rectangle Tool up in the **Options Bar** along the top of the screen. First, set

the **Tool Mode** option (also known as the Drawing Mode option) on the far left of the Options Bar to **Shape** if it's not set to that already, since we want to draw a [vector shape](#) (as opposed to a path or a pixel-based shape):



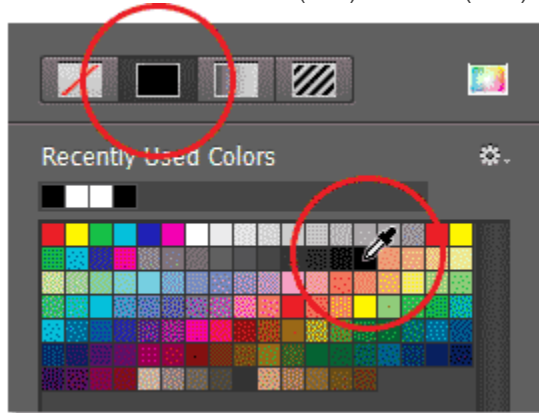
Setting the Tool Mode option to Shape.

Next, we need to choose the colors for the fill and stroke of our shape. Let's choose the fill color first. Click on the **Fill** option in the Options Bar, which is new in Photoshop CS6:



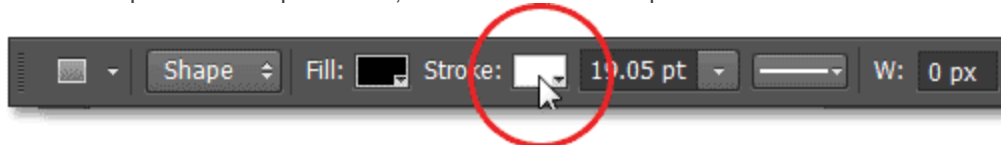
Clicking on the Fill option.

This opens a panel that let's us choose what type of fill we want (a solid color, a gradient, a pattern, or nothing at all). Click on the **Solid Color** option at the top of the panel (second thumbnail from the left), then choose **black** as the fill color by clicking on the black color swatch. Technically, we can choose any color we want for the fill since we won't see it in the final result anyway, but to keep us both on the same page, we'll just choose black. Press **Enter**(Win) / **Return** (Mac) on your keyboard when you're done to close the panel:



Clicking the Solid Color option at the top of the panel, then choosing black for the fill color.

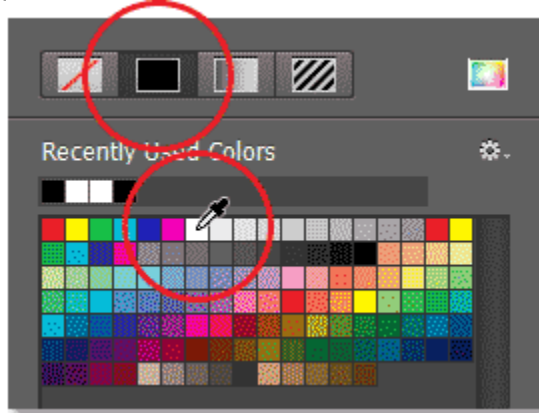
Now we'll choose a color for the stroke that will appear around the shape and serve as a photo border. Click on the **Stroke** option in the Options Bar, also new in Photoshop CS6:



Clicking on the Stroke option.

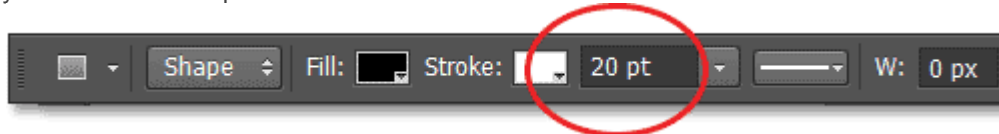
This opens a similar panel to the one we just looked at, except here we're choosing the type of *stroke* we want to apply. Again, we can choose a solid color for the stroke, a gradient, a pattern, or nothing at all. Once again click on the **Solid Color** option at the top of the panel (second thumbnail from the left), and then this time,

choose **white** as the stroke color by clicking on the white color swatch. Press **Enter** (Win) / **Return** (Mac) when you're done to close the panel:



Clicking the Solid Color option again, then choosing white for the stroke color.

One last thing we need to do before drawing the shape is to set an initial size for the stroke. There's no need to worry about choosing the correct size at this stage because Photoshop CS6 lets us easily go back after we've drawn the shape and change the stroke size. I'm using a large, high resolution image here, so for now, I'll enter an initial size of **20 pt** into the **Size** box in the Options Bar. You'll want to start with a lower value if you're working with a small image, but again, we can easily change it later. Press **Enter** (Win) / **Return** (Mac) when you're done to accept the initial size:



Entering an initial size for the stroke.

With all of the options set, I'll click inside my image with the Rectangle Tool and, with my mouse button still held down, I'll drag diagonally across my main subjects to draw a rectangle shape around them. As we're drawing the shape, only an initial path outline is visible:



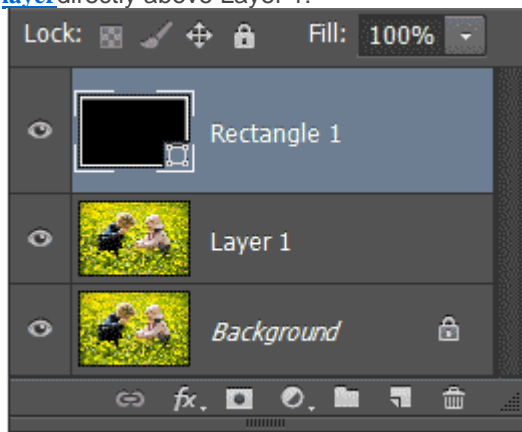
Drawing a rectangle shape around the boy and girl in the photo.

It's not until we release the mouse button that Photoshop actually draws the shape, filling it with black and surrounding it with the white stroke:



Release your mouse button and Photoshop draws the shape.

If we look in the Layers panel, we see that Photoshop has placed the rectangle shape on its own [Shape layer](#) directly above Layer 1:

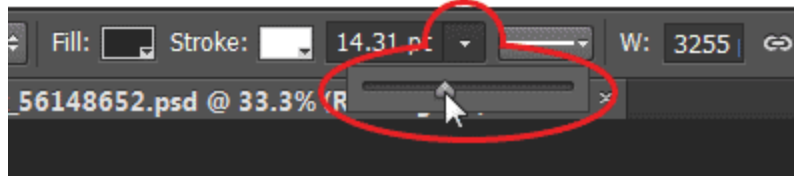


The shape appears on a new Shape layer.

Step 4: Resize The Stroke If Needed

There's a good chance at this point that the white stroke around the shape looks either too thick or too thin for a photo border, so if you need to resize it, make sure the Rectangle Tool is still selected in the Tools panel and the Shape layer (Rectangle 1) is selected (highlighted in blue) in the Layers panel, then click on the

small **arrow** directly to the right of the current stroke size in the Options Bar. This will open a little slider you can drag either left or right to increase or decrease the stroke width. Keep an eye on the stroke as you drag the slider for a live preview of the results. I'm going to decrease my stroke size to something closer to 14 pt, but again I'm working on a high resolution image. Low resolution images will most likely need a lower value:



Resizing the stroke around the shape.

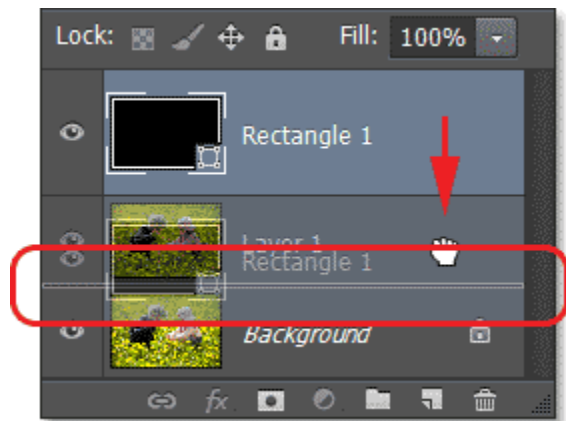
Press **Enter** (Win) / **Return** (Mac) when you're done to close the slider. Here's my image after resizing the stroke. In my case, it's just a little bit thinner than it was before:



The image after resizing the stroke around the shape.

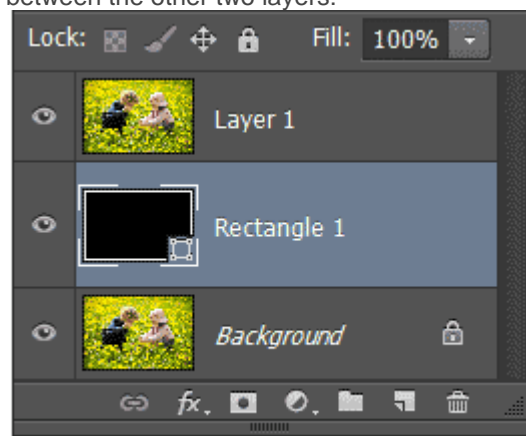
Step 5: Drag The Shape Layer Below Layer 1

At the moment, the shape is completely blocking the photo below it from view. To fix that, we need to move our Shape layer down between the Background layer and Layer 1. To do that, click on the **Shape layer** in the Layers panel and with your mouse button still held down, begin dragging the layer downward until you see a **highlight bar** appear between Layer 1 and the Background layer:



Dragging the Shape layer downward until the highlight bar appears.

When you see the highlight bar, release your mouse button and Photoshop will drop the Shape layer into place between the other two layers:



The Layers panel showing the Shape layer now between the original two layers.

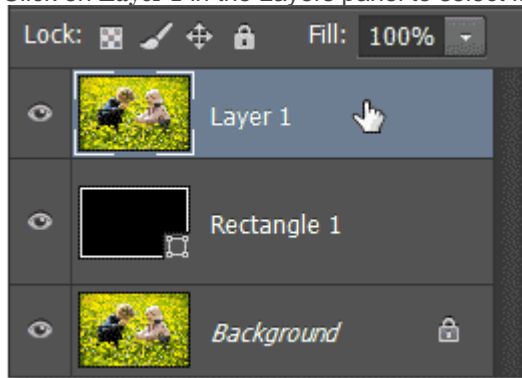
With Layer 1 now sitting above the Shape layer, we can again see our entire photo in the document window, but it may seem like we've solved one problem by creating another since our rectangle shape has now disappeared. We'll fix that in a moment:



The photo on Layer 1 is temporarily blocking the rectangle shape from view.

Step 6: Select Layer 1

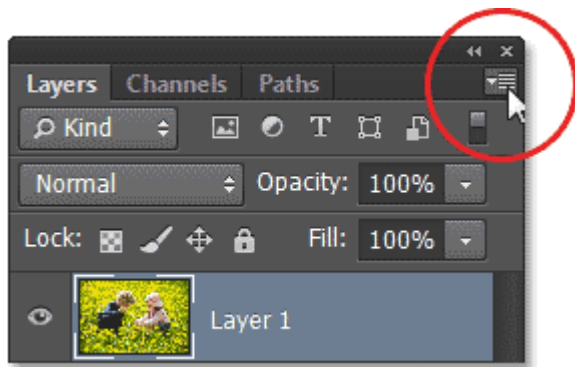
Click on **Layer 1** in the Layers panel to select it:



Clicking on Layer 1.

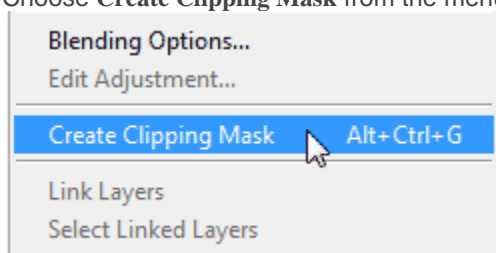
Step 7: Create A Clipping Mask

With Layer 1 active, click on the **menu icon** in the top right corner of the Layers panel:



Clicking on the Layers panel's menu icon.

Choose **Create Clipping Mask** from the menu that appears:



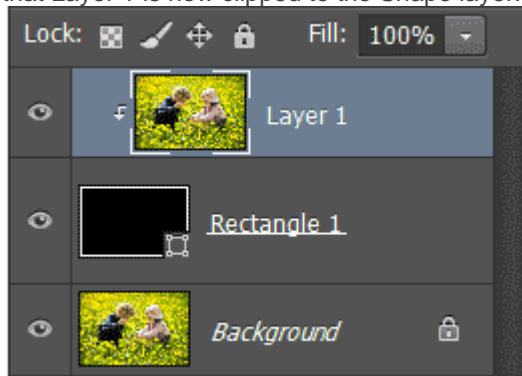
Choosing the **Create Clipping Mask** command from the menu.

This will “clip” the photo on Layer 1 to the rectangle shape below it. If you’re not familiar with how [clipping masks in Photoshop](#) work, it can be a little hard to tell just by looking at the image exactly what’s going on at this point (that’s because Layer 1 and the Background layer both contain the exact same photo), but we can tell *something* has happened because the white stroke around the rectangle shape has returned, giving us the first part of our “photo within a photo” illusion:



The image after creating the clipping mask.

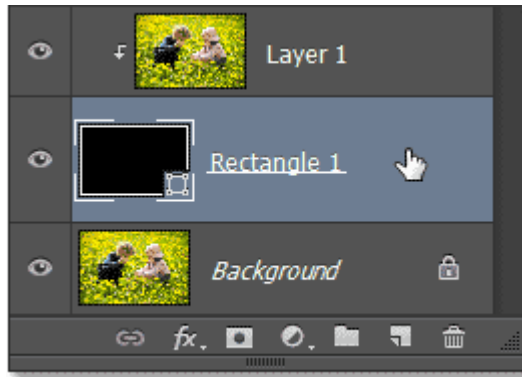
If we take a quick look in the Layers panel, we see that Layer 1 is now indented to the right with a small arrow to the left of its preview thumbnail pointing down at the Shape layer below it, which is how Photoshop tells us that Layer 1 is now clipped to the Shape layer:



The Layers panel showing the clipping mask.

Step 8: Select The Shape Layer

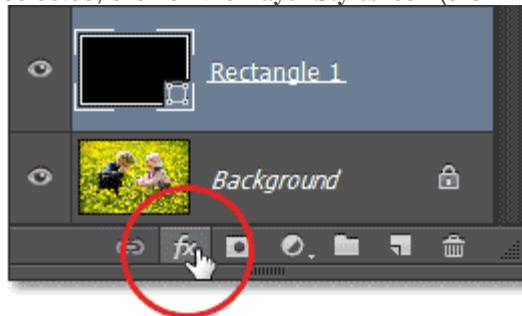
Click on the **Shape layer** in the Layers panel to select it:



Selecting the Shape layer.

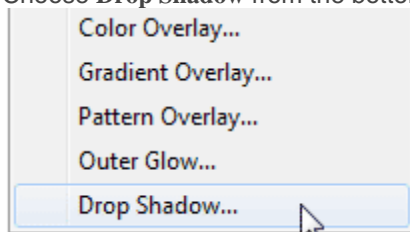
Step 9: Add A Drop Shadow

Let's help the smaller photo in the center stand out more by giving it a drop shadow. With the Shape layer selected, click on the **Layer Styles** icon (the "fx") at the bottom of the Layers panel:



Clicking the Layer Styles icon.

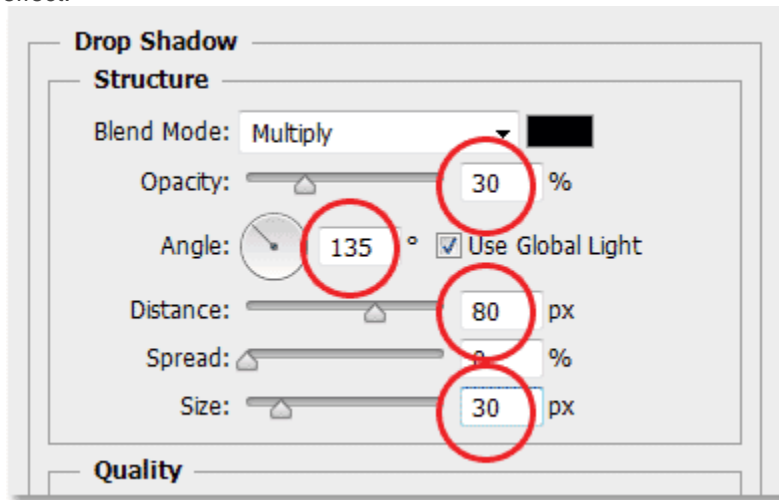
Choose **Drop Shadow** from the bottom of the list of layer styles that appears:



Choosing a Drop Shadow layer style.

This opens Photoshop's Layer Style dialog box set to the Drop Shadow options in the middle column. First, I'm going to change the **Angle** of the shadow to around **135°** so that the light source appears to be from the top left. We control how far the shadow extends out from behind the object using the **Distance** slider. For my high resolution image, a Distance value of around **80 px** works well, but lower resolution images will require a much lower value so you may need to experiment a bit. Fortunately, Photoshop gives us a live preview of the results in the document window as we **drag the slider** left or right to try different values so experimenting is easy. To soften the shadow edges, we use the **Size** option. The higher the value, the softer the edges, but again, the value you'll need depends a lot on the size of your image. For me, a Size value of **30 px** softens the edges nicely, but a smaller value will work better with smaller images. Finally, I'm going to lower the **Opacity** of my

shadow all the way down to 30% so it's nice and subtle. We don't want the shadow to be the main focus of the effect:



The Drop Shadow options.

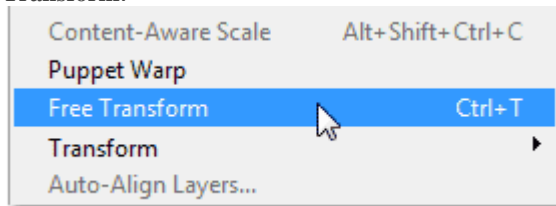
Click OK when you're done to close out of the Layer Style dialog box. Here's what the effect looks like with the drop shadow applied to the smaller version of the photo:



The image after applying the drop shadow.

Step 10: Resize And Rotate The Smaller Photo With Free Transform

To add a bit more interest to the effect, let's rotate the smaller photo a little and resize it if needed at the same time. We can do both of these things with Photoshop's Free Transform command. Make sure the Shape layer is still selected in the Layers panel, then go up to the **Edit** menu at the top of the screen and choose **Free Transform**:



Going to **Edit > Free Transform**.

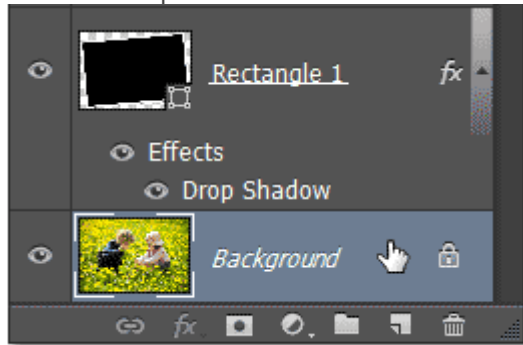
This places the Free Transform box and handles (little squares) around the smaller image. To **resize** it, simply click and drag any of the **handles**. You'll find one in each corner, as well as at the top, bottom, left and right. To **rotate** it, move your mouse cursor anywhere **outside** the Free Transform box, then click and drag left or right. You can also **move** the smaller image by clicking anywhere **inside** the Free Transform box and dragging. You'll notice that it's not actually the image itself being resized, rotated or moved. It's only the white border around the image (as well as the drop shadow) that's affected. When you're done, press **Enter** (Win) / **Return** (Mac) on your keyboard to accept the change and exit out of Free Transform:



Resizing, rotating and moving the smaller image with Free Transform.

Step 11: Select The Background Layer

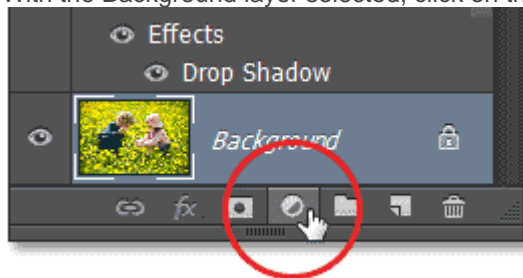
To complete the effect, let's quickly convert the rest of the image – that is, the area surrounding the smaller version of the photo – to black and white. Click on the **Background** layer in the Layers panel to select it:



Selecting the Background layer.

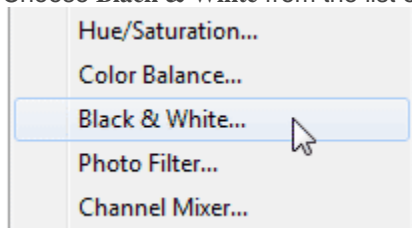
Step 12: Add A Black & White Adjustment Layer

With the Background layer selected, click on the New Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel:



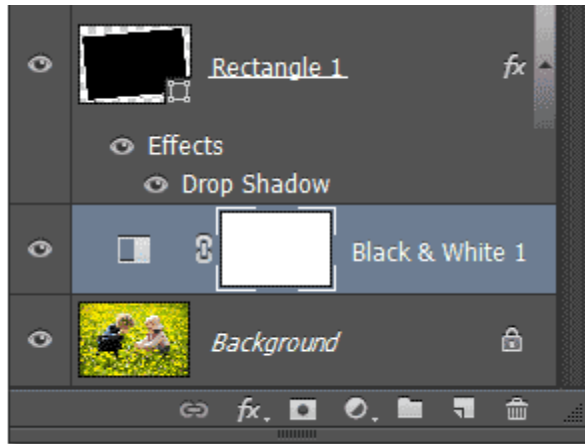
Clicking the New Adjustment Layer icon.

Choose Black & White from the list of [adjustment layers](#) that appears:



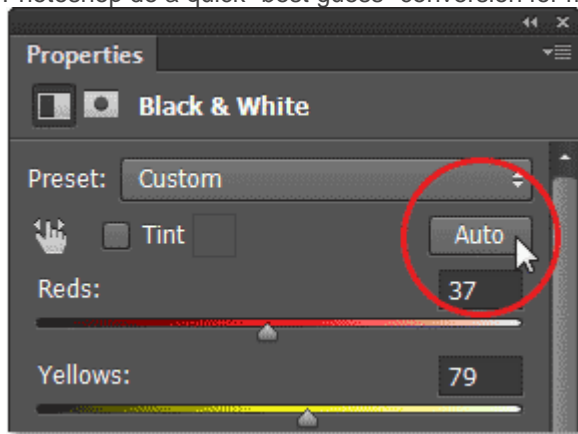
Choosing Black & White from the list.

This adds a Black & White adjustment layer (named **Black & White 1**) to the document directly above the Background layer, as we can see in the Layers panel, which means only the image on the Background layer below it will be affected. The smaller version of the photo on Layer 1, which is higher up in the layer stack, will remain in full color:



The Layers panel showing the adjustment layer above the Background layer.

The controls and options for the Black & White adjustment layer appear in the **Properties panel**. The [Black & White image adjustment](#) was first introduced in Photoshop CS3 and instantly became the best way to convert color photos to black and white. However, since all we're doing here is converting the unimportant areas of the photo to black and white, we don't need anything fancy, so I'm simply going to click on the **Auto** button to let Photoshop do a quick "best guess" conversion for me:



Clicking the Auto button for an instant black and white conversion.

And with that, we're done! The smaller photo remains in full color while the area surrounding it has been easily converted to black and white, creating our final effect:



The final "photo within a photo" result.

And there we have it! That's how to create a simple "photo within a photo" effect, as well as a quick look at the new Fill and Stroke options when working with vector shapes, in Photoshop CS6!