Adding Dramatic Lighting in Photoshop

1.   Open a photo in Photoshop. The photo should have a clear and distinct subject.

2.   Duplicate the background layer by pressing Ctrl J.

3.   To make the filter editable later, choose Filter>Convert to Smart Filters. A message about editing smart filters may appear, so click ok to close it. The page icon in the layer's corner indicated that it is now a smart object. Any filters will show up below this layer.

4.   Choose Filter>Render>Lighting Effects. This opens an entirely new panel and view. The preview of the photo should be much darker now. Along the left side of the window, in the tool options, there is a presets menu. This changes the lighting effects in the photo. There will be three circles over the image. The big one acts similarly to a vignette, affecting how much of the image is dark, changing the width. The smaller, inner circle moves the lighting effect. Finally, the very tiny, lens looking circle in the preview is for the intensity level. Clicking and dragging the circular scale makes the lighting more intense. Move these three until the subject is visible and the lighting effects are pronounced and dynamic. The other settings in the properties box can be left alone.
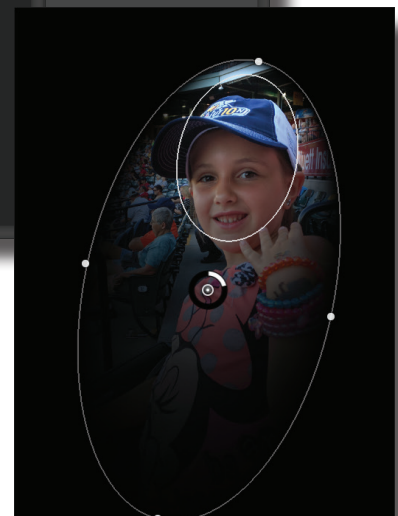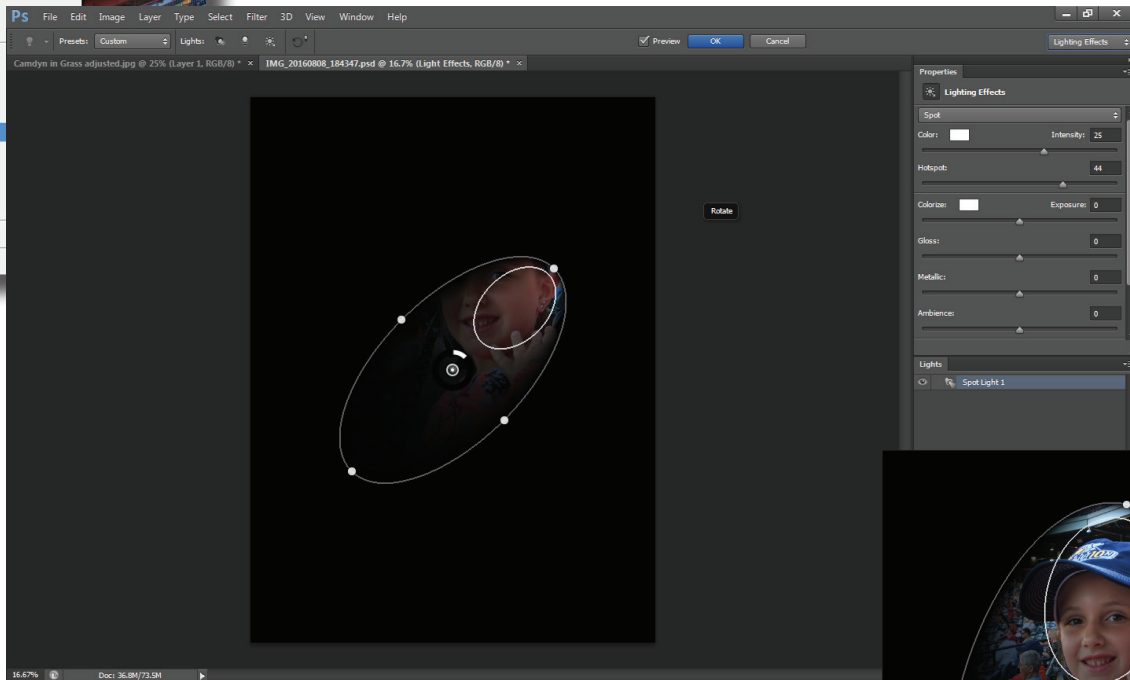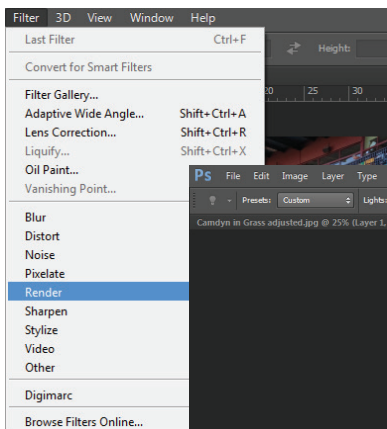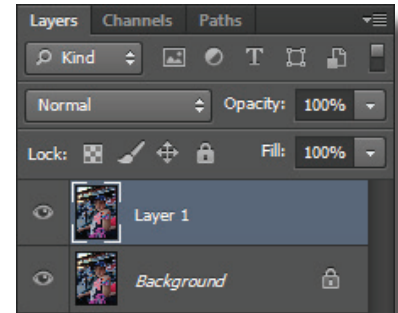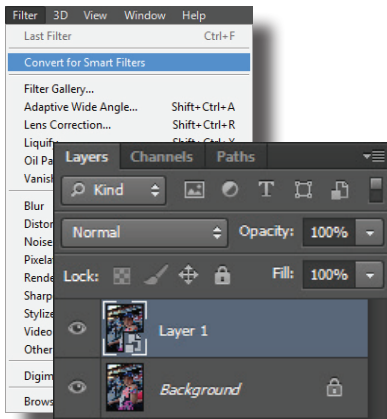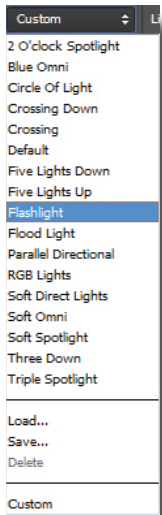
5.　　　For best results, the Flashlight preset might work best. Choose it from the presets window and drag the round target over the subjects face or focal point of the picture.

6.　　　Now adjust the intensity by clicking on the small circle made in part with the white slider. Adjust the photo so the intensity on the subject is not too intense but yet good enough for the background to look suitable.

7.　　　Some of the light will naturally go beyond the subject and light the surrounding background areas but this can be minimized by reducing the scale of the flashlight. Hover over the green ring and it should turn yellow and say "scale." Click and drag the circle to adjust the diameter of the light. It may be slightly touchy, so if it doesn't work the first time, try again.

8.　This Flashlight effect can be compounded with other lights to revel more of the subject or just make the lighting more unique. Click on the light bulb icon in the options bar. This should add a point light to the photo. Move the flash light, adjust the scale and intensity as is necessary for the photo. In the example photo, 3 flashlights were used to get the desired light over the subject.
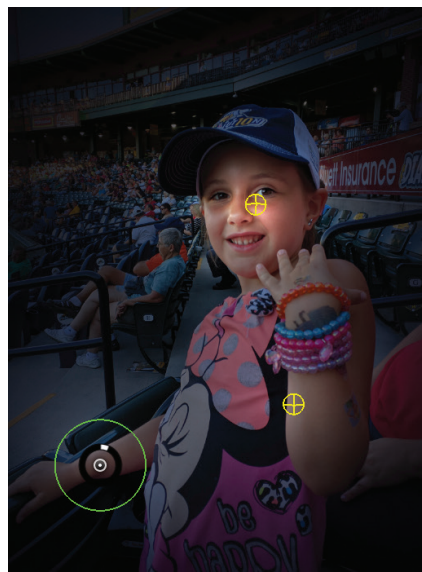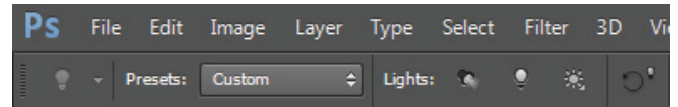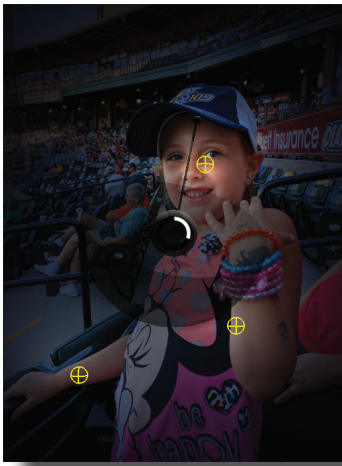
9. The third icon on the options bar is the Infinity Light. Hide the other three lights and apply an Infinity Light. Unlike the others, the Infinity cannon move from the center of the image, but the direction that it faces can change. Dragging the bowl shape will change the direction.

10. The lights Properties panel along the right side of the screen will show each of the lights that are in use for the photo. Here the lights can be hidden, deleted, or re-edited.

11. There are some more things to know about the lights properties. To change the color of the light, choose the color swatch and use the color picker to select a color. The entire image will change accordingly. The intensity slider works just like it did on the circle over the image. The Hotspot slider controls the most intense area of the light (the hot spot). The Colorize slider controls the color cast of the darkened part of the photo. The Ambience slider controls the amount of darkening in the shadow area. The exposure slider change allows the highlights or shadows to be adjusted.
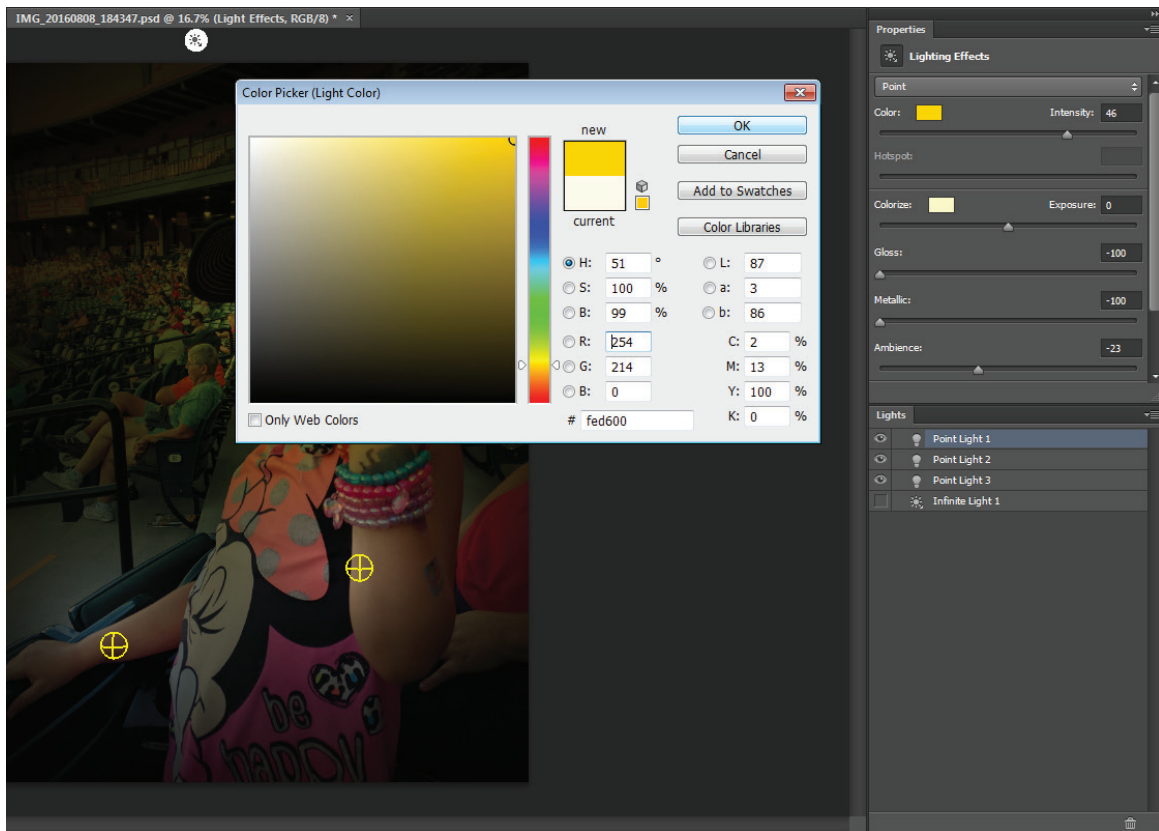
12. Toward the bottom of the Properties Panel is the Texture menu. Here a color can be selected to pop more and make the image appear embossed. From the menu, select a color to make pop. Just below the menu is the Height slider. Dragging this slider changes how pronounced the pop is. Metallic and Gloss enhances the amount of reflection or shine in the image. In most situations, they aren't very effective, but may work more depending on the photo and how much glass or metal is in it.
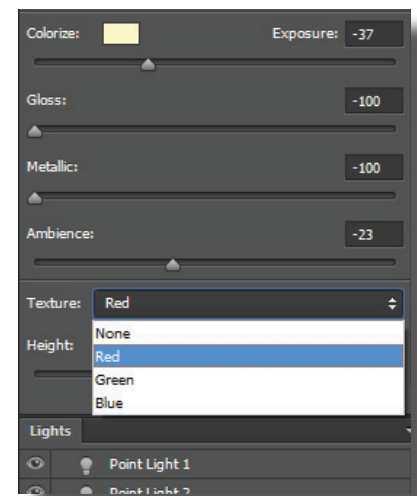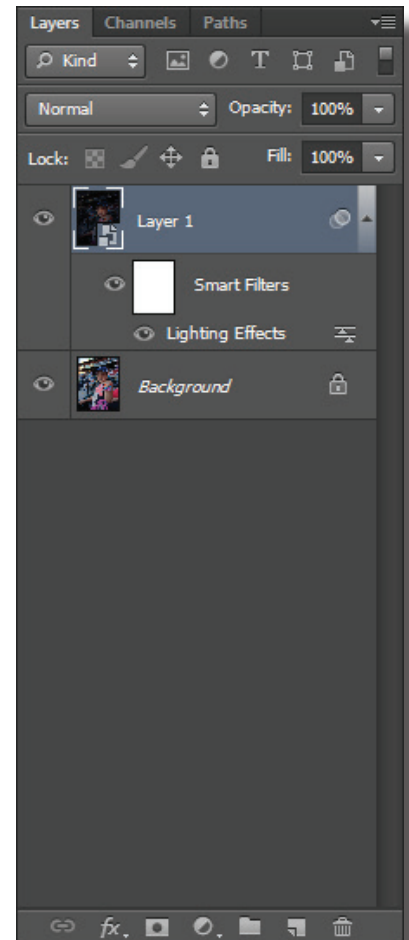
13. When satisfied with the effects of the light, click along the top in the Options Bar. This will exit the editing mode and show the effect in a Smart Layer, with a Layer Mask below it. To remove the effect from some of the areas of the photo, click on the white Layer Mask icon and use the Brush Tool to change how much of the light is showing.
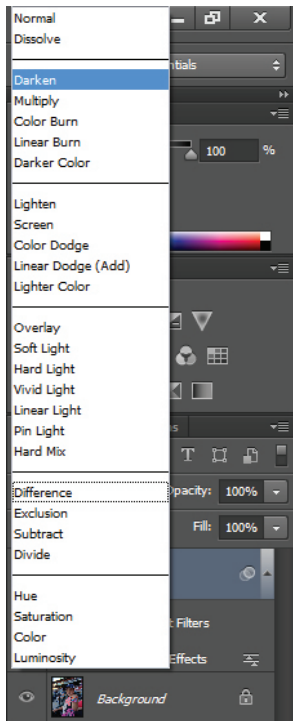
14. Often the highlights of the subject's face will appear a little too bright so in the Layers Panel, change the Blending Mode on Layer 1 to Darken. This will slightly darken those highlights by softening the light.

15. Since this is a smart object, any and all of the changes can be retouched or removed if the final result is too dark or powerful.

16. The effect is now complete! Save the image as a PSD file so that it can be re-edited if necessary and a PNG so that it is ready to post and share.

Before

After