

Removing the Background

Photoshop Combination of Tools, Page 1

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The qualities of this image are such that no single technique is going to be very effective. The background is so close in color to parts of the girl's blouse that it makes the background eraser difficult to work with. The bottom half of the image is simple enough that the pen tool would be ideal, but the girl's hair presents some problems. I decided to use a combination of techniques; first, expanding on the channels trick used in the [fireworks example](#) and using levels to refine the mask, and then using the pen tool to isolate the girl's arms and sleeves to further refine the mask for the lower portion of the image. The entire process took approximately twenty minutes.



I started out by drawing a loose selection around the girl's hair with the freehand lasso tool.



Next I looked at the individual color channels to find the one that had the most contrast. You can see from the thumbnails to the right that the red channel clearly has the most contrast. So initially we'll use a duplicate of the red channel to create our alpha channel mask.

In the channels palette, drag the red channel to the new channel button to create a duplicate.



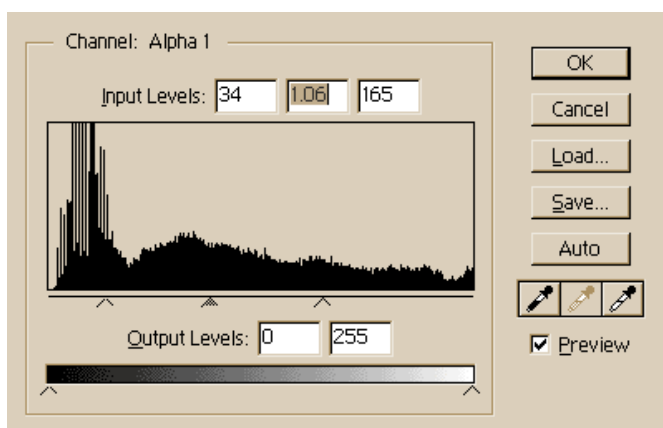
A duplicate channel is created and named Alpha 1. This is what we'll be working with as a selection mask.



The loose selection we made with the lasso tool should still be active and we want to be working only in the Alpha 1 channel.



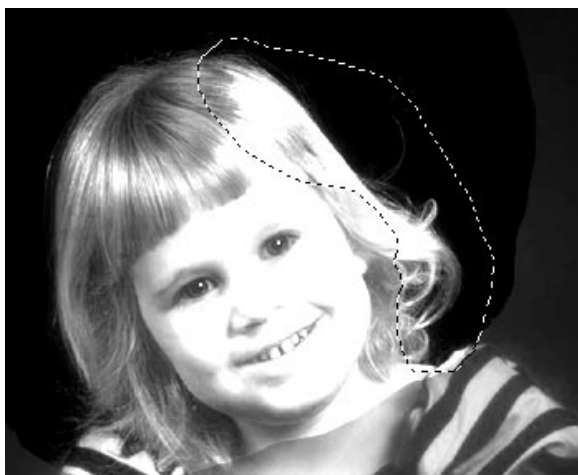
Go to Image > Adjust > Levels to bring up the levels adjustment dialog. Drag the left and right sliders under the histogram toward the center...



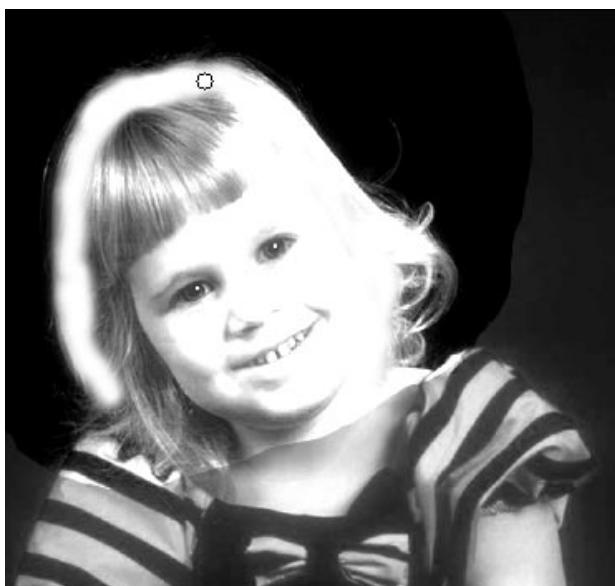
...just enough that you increase the contrast as much as possible without losing the fine wisps of hair. When you start to lose the strands of hair, you'll need to back off some and stop there.



Next you can make another selection and adjust the levels again to increase the contrast even more. You can select different areas and repeat this as needed to make the best possible selection.



Once you've gone as far as you think you can with the levels adjustments, use the paintbrush to fill in the rest of the face and hair with white. Take care not to go too far out to the edge and paint away the fine strands of hair. I got a little too close here on the left side of the girl's head.



Once the face is filled in, we can switch to a larger brush and fill in the lower part of the girl's dress and arms.



Continue on to the [next page](#) to see how the mask was completed for the bottom portion of the image.

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