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Building a Just and Sustainable World

EDUCATION CONNECTION | VISUAL LITERACY

Images, photos, and pictures stimulate the mind. For the viewer, they offer a chance to connect and question. They also offer potential for play and imagination, and pulling the observer into purposeful messages.

Most often, newspaper and magazine readers quickly glance at photos and their captions. With this YES! lesson plan, you and your students can luxuriate—and pause—to truly understand an image, its message, and why it's interesting (or not).



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Step One: What do you notice? (before the facts)

Ask your students to make sense of the photograph by trusting their instincts of observation and inference. In doing so, the photograph offers possibilities and interpretations beyond a typical reading where the reader glances at the picture to reinforce their interpretation of the picture's title or caption. Do not introduce any facts, captions, or other written words outside of the image. You may hear: bike, corrugated metal wall, blue paint.

Step Two: What are you wondering? (thinking about the facts)

After you've heard what your students are noticing, you'll probably hear the peppering of questions (Where is this? What are those blue spots? What's so special about the bike?) That's curiosity or wonder—the intermixing of observations and questions. This is a good time to reveal the photo's caption, accompanying quote, and facts about the actual situation. Watch how the conversation shifts from what they believe to be true to discerning the facts about the photo.

Photo caption:

“A bamboo bike in front of the Bamboo Bike Studio where students build bikes in just two days.” In addition to running a bike-making workshop, the program is currently working to develop bamboo bike factories in developing countries including Ghana, Kenya, and Ecuador. Photo courtesy of the Bamboo Bike Studio, Brooklyn, NY.

Photo facts:

Humans can walk at a rate of about 2 miles an hour and ride a bicycle 10 miles an hour. In developing countries, where basic resources can often be a day's walk away, bicycling can boost access to crucial needs and economic and social activities like schools, water sources, and food markets.

Bamboo is the fastest growing plant on earth and is often considered a weed. It can grow up to 60 centimeters or more in one day. Because of its rapid growth cycle, bamboo is considered to be a sustainable resource.

In 1969 about half of all US students walked or biked to school. Today the number is less than 15%. One quarter

of all students ride the bus and over half arrive in private vehicles.

One hundred bicycles can be produced for the same energy and resources it takes to build one medium-sized automobile.

Just 3 hours of biking each week can reduced the risk of heart disease and stroke by 50%.

Step Three: What next? (jumping off the facts)

Learning more about a photo leads to bigger questions and an opportunity to discuss broader issues and perspectives.

1. In the 1900s' the Arts & Crafts Movement grew out of a reaction to industrialism and a desire for individuality. In the 40s, the motivating force for making things from scratch was cost-savings. Today, it seems we've come full circle. DIY hands-on projects give people pleasure and an opportunity to connect with the physical world, let alone make something that says, “This is me!” When is the last time you made something from scratch? Why did you do it and how did you feel? What is a DIY project you've been itching to dive into?

2. Kona Bikes and HopeFirst Foundation have partnered to deliver 300 Kona AfricaBikes to middle schoolers in rural Gambia. Most secondary schools are located outside most villages and with no public transportation, some children have a 12 mile round trip walk. The Bamboo Bike Studio now also plans to build bamboo bike factories in developing countries. In what ways do you think this will impact these developing countries?

More resources around the image

See a slide show at www.yesmagazine.org/bamboo-bikes

Read more at www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/brooklyns-bamboo-bikes/

For more inspiring action check out www.sundancechannel.com/big-ideas/

Thank you to educator Barry Hoonan for contributing to and shaping this lesson.