



Published by
Positive Futures Network
P.O. Box 10818
Bainbridge Island, WA 98110-0818
206/842-0216
www.yesmagazine.org

FAX: 206/842-5208
subscriptions: 800/937-4451
email: yes@yesmagazine.org

Building a Just and Sustainable World

EDUCATION CONNECTION | VISUAL LEARNING

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).



EDUCATION CONNECTION | VISUAL LEARNING

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: blue, desert, mountains, people, tarps, power line, sagebrush.

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: What's the significance of the blue? Why are the people there? What are they holding? Where are they? 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:

The Santa Fe Art Institute and community members colored the dry Santa Fe riverbed where water could potentially flow.

Photo by the Santa Fe Art Institute, from the "Big Problem, Big Art" photo essay.

Photo facts:

The Santa Fe Art Institute brought together 500 community members near the Village of Agua Fria to create "Flash Flood for a Living River", part of a global art project sponsored by 350.org. People filled the dry riverbed and held up blue plastic tarps, cardboard, towels and sheets to represent the river that once flowed freely year round.

The Santa Fe River in New Mexico was named the country's most endangered river in 2007 by the environmental group American Rivers. The river provides 40 percent of the water supply for the city of Santa Fe, but runs dry most of the year.

The average person in the United States uses about 80-100 gallons of water per day.

350.org is an international campaign that's building a movement to unite the world around solutions to the climate crisis. Their website explains 350 as "the number that leading scientists say is the safe upper limit for carbon dioxide—measured in 'Parts Per Million' in our atmosphere. 350 PPM—it's the number humanity needs to get back to as soon as possible to avoid runaway climate change."

More resources around the image

EXPLORE :: www.350.org

LEARN :: 3 Big Ideas to Make Water Last

READ :: Climate Heroes: Meet the people on the front lines of climate action.

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. Do you know where your water comes from? What is the health of your local water?
2. Think about all of the things that produce carbon dioxide in your everyday life: electricity used to stay warm and to cook, the family car, plastic bags, and more. What are some things you could change in your daily routine to reduce your carbon footprint and help the planet move closer toward 350?
3. Do you think public demonstrations like the Santa Fe Art Institute's "Flash Flood for a Living River" are effective? What is an issue or cause that would motivate you to speak up or act up in public?
4. How can art bring people together to discuss—even confront—issues that we face today? Share some examples.