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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 take a quick scan or snippet 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: kids, soccer balls, signs with doves on them, men with dark skin.

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 do the signs mean? What country is this?). 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:

Week of Nonviolence in Iraq. Sports were promoted at various events during the week as a way to interact peacefully with other youth. This soccer tournament took place in Al-Muthanna. Photo by Iraqi LaOnf members.

Photo facts:

This photo was taken during the 2008 Week of Nonviolence in Iraq, a week of peace-building activities with the goal of reducing violence in the January 2009 elections.

All of Iraq's 18 provinces and over 100 citizen groups participated in this nation-wide celebration of nonviolence, hoping to encourage a peaceful election in January 2009.

The Week of Nonviolence is the work of Iraqi activist network La'Onf. This coalition of civilian activists uses non-violent action to work towards a peaceful, prosperous future for an Iraq free from occupation.

The Arabic phrase La'Onf translates literally to “no to violence.”

“Within the polarized and dangerous political environment of Iraq... if you speak about resistance you are accused of supporting terrorists... but if you speak about nonviolence you are accused of supporting the occupation,” says Ismaeel Dawood, a La'Onf founder.

Other resources around the image:

See the complete photo essay at www.yesmagazine.org/laonf

Read more about the event at www.yesmagazine.org/yes48carlsen

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.

You are organizing an event to promote non-violence. Like the soccer game, what sort of activity would you organize?

What would it be like to live surrounded by violence?

Members of an American organization called September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows have traveled to Iraq and other countries targeted in the “war on terror” in order to meet with victims of the United State's aggression. They communicate with peace organizations worldwide to spread the word about La'Onf, and organize events with La'Onf. How could you reach out to victims of war and violence?

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