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## EDUCATION CONNECTION | VISUAL LEARNING

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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 pause to truly understand an image, its message, and why it's interesting (or not).



### Old Leaves, New Wisdom

#### Step 1: What do you notice?

Ask your students to make sense of the photograph by trusting their instincts of observation and inference. In doing so, the image offers possibilities and interpretations beyond a typical reading where the reader glances at a photograph to reinforce its title or caption. Do not introduce any facts, captions, or other written words.

In response to the question, “What do you notice?” you may hear: *straight lines, rows, brown and yellow rods, cracks, frayed edges.*

#### Step 2: What are you wondering?

After you’ve heard your students’ first observations, you may hear a peppering of questions: *“These objects look old—how old are they? Is this bamboo? Or leather? Or an x-ray? What do the patterns and markings mean?”*

This is a good time to reveal the photo’s caption and other information about the photo (below). Watch how the conversation shifts from what they believe to be true to discerning the facts about the photo.

#### Photo caption

I took this photo in 2007 during one of my research trips for the Institute for the Preservation of Medical Traditions. At the Institute, we search for ancient books around the world that have transmitted past knowledge of medicinal plants to the present day.

This photo is from the library of the Monastery of St. John, in Patmos Island, Greece. It shows quite well how ancient manuscripts are exposed to the damages of time and also how difficult is to find them. Manuscripts often bear no title, no author’s name, no date of “publication” (sort of, since they were copied by hand): the only way to know their contents is to open and read them!

photo by Alain Touwaide

#### Photo facts

- The library of St John’s Monastery, on the island of Patmos, has books dating back to the 11th century. An important place for pilgrimages and Greek Orthodox teachings, the Monastery is dedicated to the theologian who reputedly wrote the Book of Revelation in Patmos.

- In Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, and Zambia, the first line of treatment for 60 percent of children with high fever resulting from malaria is the use of herbal medicines at home.
- A U.S. Geological Survey found chemicals from prescription drugs and over-the-counter medications in 80 percent of water samples drawn from streams in 30 states; those waters flow into lakes, rivers, and eventually oceans.
- One of the world’s oldest books is an ancient Egyptian text “The Precepts of Ptahhotep,” written on papyrus and dated approximately 2200 B.C.E. It was written by Ptahhotep, an adviser to the Pharaoh Isesi, and contains moral advice and teachings for the author’s son.

#### Step 3: What next?

1. Ancient texts are clues to what was important in human civilization thousands of years ago. If you were to create a text or a time capsule to be opened a hundred years from now, what would you put in it? Why?
2. Remedies in ancient medical texts can resemble today’s alternative medicine systems, such as naturopathy and homeopathy. These practices have been challenged by the scientific community as ineffective or dangerous. Do you, or someone you know, use any form of alternative medicine? Why or why not?
3. The 10 largest drugs companies control over one-third of the global pharmaceutical market, worth \$300 billion a year. The World Health Organization says there is a “conflict of interest between the legitimate business goals of manufacturers and the social, medical and economic needs of providers and the public.” Is it ethical for a person or company to profit this much from people’s health needs?
4. Indigenous cultures and traditions are vanishing at an alarming rate. Researchers say that one language dies every 14 days. What valuable lessons do indigenous people have to offer you in these modern, challenging times? What is lost when a tradition, a language, or a practice disappears?