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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 take a quick 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

Don't Jump the Gun

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: *shiny, metallic stump, bent strips of gold, ribbed slab of silver.*

Step 2: What are you wondering?

After you've heard your students' first observations, you may hear a peppering of questions: *Is this an art sculpture? Is this worth a lot of money? Why is it falling apart? What is the brown stuff on top?*

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

Photo caption

"This is a bullet after being fired into a tree for forensic analysis. The vertical streak marks on the outside of the bullet indicate it was fired from a Glock G30, a handgun typically carried by law enforcement officers. The brown patch on top of the bullet is bark from the tree."

Photo by Mark R. Smith for Macroscopic Solutions, a scientific imaging company.

Photo facts

- Bullets are made of a combination of metals, including lead, copper, brass, bronze, steel, and aluminum. Twenty-four states have banned the production of lead bullets because the metal contaminates groundwater and can cause brain damage. By 2018, the military plans to phase out lead-based bullets, and will use copper-based instead.
- Bullets identify guns in the same way that fingerprints identify people. Different firearms leave unique marks on bullets after firing, and forensic scientists call this "ballistic fingerprinting."
- The average bullet travels 2,500 feet per second, or 1,700 miles per hour. To successfully dodge a bullet, you'd have to be at least 500 feet away.
- Contrary to what one might think, deaths from mass shootings, such as Sandy Hook Elementary and San Bernardino, California, make up only two percent of 30,000 gun deaths per year in the United States. Suicide is the leading cause of gun-related deaths in this country.
- Guns are the second leading cause of death among children and teens (the first is accidental injuries, such as driving accidents). Every half hour, a child or teen is injured or killed by a gun.

Step 3: What next?

1. What does being a responsible gun owner mean? What restrictions, if any, do you think should be enforced? What are gun control laws in your state?
2. Studies show that a lower IQ and a previous exposure to violence are two main factors that make someone become violent. What can schools do to help youth who have experienced violence, and to teach them better ways to deal with conflict?
3. In Oakland, California, there are six times as many police officers in schools as there are counselors. What message do you think this sends to youth? Do you think that more police on your campus means a safer student body?
4. Many hunters say they like to hunt because of the connection to nature and the food they eat. When it comes to gun rights, do you view hunters differently from other gun owners? Why or why not?
5. There are many reasons why people own guns. One reason is that a gun can give someone the confidence to feel safe, protected, and in control. What are ways that you feel safe, protected, and in control of your life?