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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 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).



What Was Saved

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 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: *a color photograph of a girl, USB cables, darkness, a plastic bottle.*

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

After you’ve heard your students’ first observations, you may hear a peppering of questions: *Is this a collage? Was this staged, or is this real? Where is this, and why is all this junk here? Why is there a photograph in the middle of the cables? Why is the person in the photograph in color?* 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:

“Souvenirs, photos, etc: none of these were considered worth rescuing from the rubble. Only CPUs, screens, and filing cabinets were separated and cautiously rescued from one of the hardest hit areas of Santiago, Chile.” Photo by Juan Espinoza, journalism student and photographer.

Photo facts:

Chile lies on the border of two tectonic plates, the Nazca Plate and the South American Plate. An earthquake occurs when the South American Plate collides with the Nazca Plate.

On February 27th, 2010, Chile was hit by an 8.8 magnitude earthquake that claimed over 7,000 lives and left 2 million people living on the street. It caused severe destruction near the country’s capital, Santiago, and triggered a tsunami that hit Chile’s coastal region. NOTE: Since this earthquake, there have been three more major earthquakes: magnitude 6.2 on May 25, 2011, 6.6 on Dec. 31, 2013, and an 8.2 on April 1, 2014.

On March 6th, 2010, photographer Juan Espinoza was sent to photograph the damage at an ad agency office in Santiago and rescue its electronic equipment. He was touched by the personal belongings that decorated employees’ desks. Espinoza decided to edit his photos to highlight people instead of material goods in order to make a statement about what is most important.

Electronic devices are separated in natural disasters for two main reasons: to salvage as much data as possible from electronic equipment, and to protect civilians and relief workers from the toxic material that this equipment can leak. This toxic material includes lead, cadmium, and other metals that can seriously harm human health and pollute the environment.

Step 3: What next?

1. An earthquake is an unexpected event that causes destruction. Have you ever witnessed a natural disaster? How did you react? If you live in an area where natural disasters can occur, why do you continue to live there? Is your family prepared for a disaster?

2. This photograph highlights a contrast between the objects rescued and the objects forgotten in the earthquake. What kind of objects and possessions would you choose to save if you could take only what you could carry? How would you decide what is worth saving?

3. Disaster relief is an essential component of dealing with the aftershock of a natural disaster. Have you ever donated to a disaster relief organization or to someone you don’t know? Describe who you helped and what inspired you to give.

4. In times of disaster, people may act differently than they would under normal circumstances, for example looting food and first aid supplies from the local grocery store to survive. How do you think you would act in a similar situation? What is the difference between looting and stealing? In dire circumstances, is it excusable to steal from a store or business? What about from an individual?