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



Heart and Sole

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: *khaki pants, white tennis shoes, brown boots, rows of shelves or cubbies.*

Step 2: What are you wondering?

After you’ve heard your students’ first observations, you may hear a peppering of questions: “*Why are the clothes and the tennis shoes the same? Is this part of a men’s uniform? To whom do they belong? How come some of the pants are folded and others are crumpled?*”

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

In these cubbies are uniforms belonging to the inmates of a Rhode Island men’s prison. This particular prison is unique for its use of mindfulness. The Prison Mindfulness Project works with inmates to use meditation as a means of reaching for forgiveness, inner peace, and freedom behind bars.

photo from the Global Oneness Project

Photo facts

- The number of prisoners per 100,000 people is higher in Rhode Island than it is in most countries. 285 in Rhode Island, 148 in the United Kingdom, and 83 in Afghanistan.
- The rate of return—otherwise known as the rate of recidivism—is 40 percent nationally. The rate of return is 10 percent in New York State prisons with Rehabilitation through the Arts, an arts-based program that offers prisoners “tools to change their lives” and “skills they can take over the wall.”

- Meditation works through the practitioner becoming more aware of thought patterns and accepting of life circumstances. Research has shown meditation can improve one’s immune system and memory and reduce depression and stress.
- The classic black-and-white-striped uniform was designed to remind prisoners that they were behind bars. Seen as a badge of shame, the uniforms were later abolished by New York State in 1900 in an attempt to “reform the prisoner,” not humiliate or irritate them.
- It’s common thought that most prisoners wear orange jumpsuits, but in reality, orange is reserved for short-term inmates or prisoners awaiting trial or transfer to another facility. Work clothes like khakis and denim shirts are worn by long-term inmates for comfort and durability, and to instill the concept that honest work can help transform a prisoner into a productive citizen.

Step 3: What next?

1. The number of Americans in prison—less than 1 in 100 people—may seem low, yet the incarceration rate in the United States is the highest in the world. Do you know anyone who has been to prison? How would you react if you were sent to prison? When you think of a typical prisoner, whom do you picture?
2. Many prisons offer education programs to inmates so they can better succeed when released. In your opinion, should inmates be rehabilitated, or should they be punished for their wrongdoings?
3. Mindfulness is a method for handling emotions—learning to let go and open up so you can cope with everyday life in a healthier way. Studies show that mindfulness has lots of benefits, including lowering stress and getting better grades. What do you think of mindfulness practices like meditation and yoga? Do you think it’s only for hippies and Buddhists?
4. This photo captures the uniforms prisoners are required to wear at a Rhode Island prison. What do you think is the purpose of uniforms? Do you wear uniforms in any part of your life? If so, does your uniform make you feel proud, or stifled?