

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).



EDUCATION CONNECTION | VISUAL LEARNING

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: paper cranes, origami cranes, trees, girl, folding, grass, string, box.

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: Why are the cranes hanging from strings? How did someone hang them? What is the significance of the cranes? Is this a special occasion? What is the girl thinking about? 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:

A Tallahassee, Florida-based group, "Tallahasseeans Who Believe It's Time to Come Home," advocating an end to the U.S. war in Iraq, hung more than 4,000 peace cranes in a sculpture garden in downtown Tallahassee.

Photo by Louise Reid Ritchie

Photo facts:

On December 7th 2007, "Tallahasseeans Who Believe It's Time To Come Home" hung 4,000 white origami cranes to represent the number of soldiers who have died in the Iraq war. It also served as a memorial to Julian McMackin Woodall, a local Marine who was killed in Iraq in May 2007. Woodall loved to make these cranes as a child.

Number of U.S. military deaths in Iraq since 2003: 4436
Number of U.S. military deaths in Afghanistan since 2001: 1462

Activist poets from Split This Rock held the event "Poems of Provocation & Witness" on March 23, 2008 in front of the White House to mark the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. Poets created a spontaneous collage poem, called a Cento, for peace and new priorities. Each poet contributing one line of up to 12 words.

The Japanese word "origami" is a compound of two smaller words: "ori", meaning to fold, and "kami", meaning paper. For thousands of years, the Japanese culture has treasured the crane as a symbol of honor and loyalty.

More resources around the image

EXPLORE: Split This Rock

READ: How to Fold a Paper Crane

LEARN: Split This Rock Cento Poem

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.

1. The crane is a symbol for peace, honor, and loyalty. What are other symbols associated with peace?
2. The 4,000 origami cranes in Tallahassee was a memorial to soldier Julian McMackin Woodall. What is the purpose of public memorials? Think about the most striking or emotionally moving memorials you have seen or heard of. What makes them memorable?
3. Do you agree that all Americans share responsibility for the war in Iraq? Even if you are against the war, what are some ways you might support soldiers?