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Positive Futures Network
P.O. Box 10818
Bainbridge Island, WA 98110-0818
206/842-0216
www.yesmagazine.org

FAX: 206/842-5208
subscriptions: 800/937-4451
email: yes@yesmagazine.org

Building a Just and Sustainable World

EDUCATION CONNECTION | VISUAL LITERACY

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 scan or snippet 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).



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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: feathers, people pointing, bare stomach.

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 (What are they pointing at? Where is this crazy thing happening?). That's curiosity or wonder—the intermixing of observations and questions. 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:

Mass pillow fight in New York's Union Square. March 2008. Photo by Waisum Tam, see more at www.flickr.com/photos/urbanblitz.

Accompanying quote:

"Happiness is excitement that has found a settling place. But there is always a little corner that keeps flapping around." E.L. Konisburg, American author and illustrator

Photo facts:

This pillow fight in NYC was one of several taking place throughout the world on March 22, 2008.

Over 25 cities participated in this event, from Huntsville, Alabama to Budapest, Hungary to Beijing, China.

The event was coordinated by Urban Playground. One of its goals is to redefine public space and "free it from the endless creep of advertising." By creating unique

events in public spaces, it hopes to become a significant part of pop culture and get people away from passive activities like watching television.

Some animal rights groups objected to the use of goose and duck down pillows.

Next year's event hopes to take place during a warmer month so other cold-climate cities, like Toronto, can participate. Event organizers will also ask that each participant pick up the remains of at least two pillows before they leave. The leftover trash from this year's event was overwhelming.

Other resources around the image:

Download a pdf document of the quote page at www.yesmagazine.org/yes48konigsburg

Watch a video at www.yesmagazine.org/pillowfight

Read more about the event at www.yesmagazine.org/yes48heroes

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.

Imagine you're the photographer: What would your lens capture in this massive pillow fight?

What words come to mind or pop in your head to describe this image?

How might this activity build happiness?

If you were to create your own "happy" activity to bring people together, what would it be?

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