

## *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).



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### Step One: What do you notice? (before the facts)

Ask your students to make sense of the image 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 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: *lots of chickens, red splotches, stacks of cages, broken and bent cage bars, rpes and metal hooks.*

### 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: *Are those chickens dead or alive? Why are they all lying down? Do these chickens lay eggs or are they on their way somewhere to become dinner? Is this a factory farm?* This is a good time to reveal the picture'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.

#### Painting caption:

*Chicken Truck, Sunaura Taylor, 2008. Oil on canvas, 10.5' x 8'. "Chicken Truck is a painting of more than one hundred egg-laying chickens in a truck en route to the slaughterhouse."*

#### Painting facts:

The hens depicted in this life-size painting—having exhausted their egg-laying productivity—will be processed into ground chicken for soup, or cat or dog food. Their bodies can't sell as whole meat because they are so bruised and scarred.

Artist, activist, and writer Sunaura Taylor was born with arthrogyposis—a rare congenital disorder that is characterized by multiple shortened joints or muscles. Taylor uses a wheelchair and paints entirely with her mouth, "When something is carried between one's teeth, it means it must have, at one point, been staring them in the eye. This is how I learned to see detail, to pay attention to my visual world, to, in effect, fall in love with the act of seeing." She began painting *Chicken Truck* in Georgia, where chicken trucks are a common sight. An employee at the chicken factory a couple blocks from her home offered to take photos in preparation for the painting—and was fired the next day for taking them.

According to *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals* (PETA), 452 million hens lay eggs for human consumption, and over 7 billion chickens are killed for meat in the United States each year. Ninety-nine percent of factory farm chickens spend their

whole lives in confinement—in cages of 68 inches of space where they are unable to spread their wings or move forward or backward.

### More resources around the image

EXPLORE: Sustainable Table Curriculum

VISIT: Sunaura Taylor

READ: *Humane Meat? No Such Thing* by Sunaura Taylor

### Step Three: What next? (jumping off the facts)

Learning more about an image leads to bigger questions and an opportunity to discuss broader issues and perspectives.

1. Taylor painted *Chicken Truck* as a memorial to the chickens that were slaughtered shortly after the photo was taken. Look at the painting closely—or from afar. What message do you think Taylor is trying to convey?
2. How much information do you want to know about where your food comes from or how it was made? Should the public have access to this complete information or should they be protected from it?
3. A basic tenet of animal rights is that animals are thinking, feeling beings and can experience deep suffering and pleasure. Is eating meat moral—even if it comes from a small family farm?
4. Four companies that operate their own slaughterhouses process most of the meat and poultry eaten in this country. Costs for permitting and compliance—overseen by the U.S. Department of Agriculture—are prohibitive to most small, independent poultry growers, causing them to go out of business or hike up their selling prices. Does this seem fair?