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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 of or 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 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: fancy dresses, bright colors, hangers, ruffles.

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 (Where is this? Who will wear these? Are these prom dresses?). 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:

“Women may have to be covered up in public but what they wear in private is a different story!” Photo by Abdi Sami, from “Eighteen Days in Tehran” photo essay.

Photo facts:

This photo is part of a slide show that photographer Abdi Sami created after a recent trip to Iran. He says about his trip: “Having watched the post-election turmoil in Iran on television, I wondered what it would be like to walk the streets and talk to young people. In Tehran, one witnesses contradictions in everyday life: the opposites of modern versus traditional, religious versus secular. [...] The youth are the future of Iran. Most of them were not born before the Islamic Revolution of 1979. They see their future not based on the values of the past, but based on how they envision their future.”

Of Iran's 70 million people, well over half are under the age of 30.

The word hijab literally means curtain or cover in Arabic, and is often used to refer to the Islamic dress code of modesty, while also referring to the headscarves or covering worn by women to comply with the code. In religious states, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, covering up outside of the home is enforced by religious police.

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.

- In what ways does our society have similar rules about “modest dress?” Are there items you are not permitted to wear in public or at school? Why?
- Just as you may have been surprised by what Muslim women may and may not wear, share a story where you learned something surprising and unexpected about a new place or culture.
- Rick Steves calls travel a “political act” because it inspires creative, new solutions to persistent problems facing our nation. Have you ever experienced this connection or “aha” moment where you've seen a different or better way of doing things?
- What do you know about the picture people in other countries have of Americans? How realistic is that image?

More resources around the image

SEE: the complete photo essay at www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/eighteen-days-in-tehran

READ: an excerpt from Rick Steves' *Travel as a Political Act* www.travelasapoliticalact.com/excerpts/understand-iran.html

LEARN: How Not to Travel Like a Tourist www.yesmagazine.org/issues/latin-america-rising/5-ways-not-to-travel

Thank you to educator Barry Hoonan for contributing to and shaping this lesson.