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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 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: *long curving rope-like things, blue space, brown-white chunky coils, rusty orange slab, patterned texture.*

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 snakes or hoses? Are they wet? Are they alive? Is that blue stuff water?* 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:

June 2010. "Hundreds of feet of booms—large floating barriers that round up and contain or absorb surface oil—lie linked together, waiting to be placed off the coast of Louisiana to protect surrounding fragile islands. The once-white booms absorb oil, while the rust orange boom contains oil." Photo by Kris Krug.

Photo facts:

Vancouver B.C. photographer Kris Krug snapped this picture from a small motorboat in the Gulf of Mexico in June 2010 to document the devastation caused by the BP oil spill. For Krug, capturing the horrifying impact of our dependence on oil was "my chance to take a little bit of my power back." To those who feel emotionally overwhelmed by the disaster, Krug advises: "Do something. Action is the antidote to that despair you're feeling."

On April 20, 2010, an explosion on the BP-operated *Deepwater Horizon* oil rig resulted in the continuous leaking of oil into the Gulf of Mexico for three months. Between 53,000 and 62,000 barrels of oil leaked from the gushing wellhead every day. It was the largest accidental marine oil spill in the history of the petroleum industry.

The absorbent booms used in the Gulf of Mexico worked like sponges and were filled with straw or hair. One pound of hair can absorb one quart of oil in one minute. Pet groomers and salons all over the country donated hair that was stuffed into

nylon stockings to make "hair booms." About 600,000 feet of containment booms were used during the cleanup process.

Some islands affected by the BP oil spill are rookeries for the Brown Pelican. The Brown Pelican was removed from the endangered species list only five months before the spill, and miraculously remains off the endangered species list due to years of successful protection.

More resources around the image

EXPLORE: YES! Recommended BP Oil Spill Curriculum & Resources

VISIT: Kris Krug

PHOTO ESSAY: The BP Oil Spill—photos and audio by Kris Krug

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. How might an oil spill affect human lives? There are fisher-people, cleanup workers, marine biologists—who else?
2. The BP oil rig exists because we rely on oil to fuel our economy and our way of life. Does the BP oil spill change your thoughts about oil dependency?
3. Has disaster—natural or human-made—ever touched your community? How did people respond? What do you think needs to happen after a disaster to rebuild lives?
4. Photographer Kris Krug has shared his BP oil spill photos at conferences and in numerous magazines, including *National Geographic*. Why is photojournalism powerful? How are Krug's photos different than photos you might find in the newspaper?
5. In 1973, Congress established the Endangered Species Act. Many states struggle deciding which fish, birds, reptiles, and mammals need extra protection from hunting and development because they face possible extinction. What animals are endangered in your area or state? How have endangered animals disrupted the economy? Hint: think Spotted Owl.