



## Fresh Takes on a Flat World

### The Stories Photos Tell



### Overview

In these lessons, students use photos—taken by other students worldwide—to:

- Appreciate and analyze the stories photos tell
- Develop and improve observational skills
- Expand cultural understanding
- Hone critical thinking skills
- Practice writing

The photographs represent a compilation of images taken by youth ages 12 to 19, as part of a global multi-year collaboration between Adobe Youth Voices and What Kids Can Do, Inc.

### Grade Level

Grades 5 to 12, adapted by the teacher as necessary.

### Materials

- 8" x 10" color photographs from the "Fresh Takes on a Flat World" collection
- Large sheets of chart paper or poster paper; tape; pencils

### Choosing and printing photographs

It is up to you to choose and print the photos you would like to use with your students. We have grouped the photos into three sets, to match the three lessons in this mini-curriculum:

- Worth a Thousand Words
- Other People's Lives
- Side by Side

Photos can be printed directly from the online PDFs that accompany this curriculum (note that these files are large and will take several minutes to download) or from our "Fresh Takes on a Flat World" DVD. Ideally, they should be printed (in color!) on matte photo paper or heavyweight (e.g., 28 lb.) multipurpose paper. The photos for "Side by Side" should be printed on legal size paper (14 X 18.5).

## Captions

Every photo in this collection has a caption or an artist statement, provided by the youth photographer(s) who took the picture. However, the first and third lessons ask that you provide students with photos *without* their captions, so that their understanding comes from visual input only, not words. In the second lesson, include the caption with each photo; students will need this information to complete the assignment.

## Time required

Each lesson is designed so that it can be completed in one to two class periods (approx. 45 – 90 minutes). The lessons could be spread over several weeks or completed in a single unit.

We've included enough photographs with each lesson so that, in most cases, you can do the same lesson twice, with a new set of images (which would extend the number of class periods devoted to the mini-curriculum).

## Adapting these lessons

We strongly encourage teachers to adapt the lessons that follow to your circumstances and students. You can use these photographs at different grade levels, across or within disciplines, and/or with English-language learners. In creating these lessons, we have drawn ideas and language from a photo-based curriculum that is part of the Learning Network at The New York Times: "Picture This! Building Photo-Based Writing Skills"

## About Adobe Youth Voices and What Kids Can Do (WKCD)

More than 100 young people took the photos at the heart of this mini-curriculum. They were all participants in a multi-year collaboration between Adobe Youth Voices (AYV), What Kids Can Do (WKCD), and some three dozen schools and nonprofit partners, from Seattle, Washington to Bangalore, India. AYV is a global philanthropic initiative that empowers youth in underserved communities to explore and comment on their world, using the powerful tools of video, digital photography, multimedia, web, and animation. WKCD works with youth—and their adult allies—around the globe to showcase their ideas, vision, and voices, online and in print.

The AYV/WKCD collaboration has yielded a number of products:

- An online multimedia showcase of all the student work created to date (<http://www.wkcd.org/specialcollections/adobeyouthvoices/index.html>)
- An international photo competition ([http://www.wkcd.org/AYV\\_Photo\\_Competition/Home\\_\\_.htm](http://www.wkcd.org/AYV_Photo_Competition/Home__.htm))
- Two books: *Fresh Takes on a Flat World: Youth Photos from Across the Globe* (Next Generation Press, 2009) and *India in a Time of Globalization: A Photo Essay by Indian Youth* (Next Generation Press, 2008).

By and large, the young people whose photos we share come from families with few or modest means. Some had never held a camera before. There are over 15,000 images in our photo bank.

## LESSON 1: WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

We hear all the time that “a picture paints a thousand words.” In this lesson, students get a chance to see if this is true—and, if so, why.

Put students into groups of 4 or 5. Give each group a photo from the “Worth a Thousand Words” collection, mounted in the center of a large piece of paper so that students can write around it.



Tell students that they will be doing what’s called a “text on text” exercise. Their task is to write comments in the space around the photo, leaving room for comments by other groups as well. Their goal, as a class, is to decipher as completely as they can what’s going on in each photo. The lesson is intended to be a generative exercise as much as it’s about coming up with the “right” answers.

Post the following three prompts so that all students can see them as they work:

- ✓ Jot down observations about the photo.  
*For example:* “They’re all wearing red hats and white t-shirts. Maybe they’re part of a group. No cars. Chinese writing.”
- ✓ Write one or more questions the photo brings to mind.  
*For example:* “Why are these men marching in a line?”
- ✓ Guess where the photo was taken. List these options next to the prompt. You may want to show students a world map and locate—or have them locate—these geographies.

United States  
China

Eastern Europe  
Great Britain

East Africa  
Vietnam

Each group should designate one person as a recorder who will write on the paper surrounding the photo. Allow 5-10 minutes for the group to agree what to record as its responses. Then, have each group pass its photo and paper to a neighboring group, which will add its comments to those already there. The new group can contribute new observations and questions. And/or it can respond the previous group’s question(s) with a guess: (“We think . . .”)

Continue this process until all the groups in the room have seen and commented on all the photos. (Make sure each photo is returned to the group that had it originally—part of the fun of this exercise is reading the responses to the first comments students made.)

Ask class members to discuss how their relationship to the photos changed and their understanding of what each photo “says” deepened as they wrote and responded to what others wrote. How true do they find the saying, “A picture paints a thousand words”? Why?

Finally, read aloud the captions that came with the photos. Ask students to guess which photo goes with which caption.

### **An alternative caption exercise:**

Hang the photos (with the written conversations on them) around the room, give each small group or pair of students a set of captions on strips, and let them go around matching captions to photos before revealing the actual answers.

## **LESSON 2: OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES**

It's hard to imagine lives that are very different from one's own. In this lesson, we ask students to do just that.

Put students into groups of 3 or 4. Give each group a photograph from the "Other People's Lives" set, this time including the caption that goes with it. The photographs don't need to be fixed to a large sheet of paper as in the previous exercise; just the photo is fine.



Ask students to put themselves into the shoes of the subject(s) in the photograph. Challenge them to imagine what their circumstances and lives are like.

Post the following two prompts so that all students can see them and write down their responses:

✓ Bring us inside the moment.

- (1) What do you think was happening at the time the photo was taken?
- (2) What might the subject(s) have been feeling?
- (3) What may have occurred just *before* the picture was taken?
- (4) What may have occurred just *after* the picture was taken?

*For example:* "At the time this photo was taken I think the girl was looking after her young brother. They look like they're feeling curious, watching something that is happening in front of them. Before the photo was taken, maybe they were playing with other children in the street next to theirs. Afterwards, maybe they are returning home, hungry for something to eat."

✓ Create a list of questions.

What do you wish you knew about the person(s) in the photo? Think of as many questions as you can, and write them down.

*For example:* "How old are the boy and the girl. Are they brother and sister? Does the girl often watch after the boy? Where are their parents? What are their living conditions? Does the girl attend school?"

Give students 5 to 10 minutes to write their responses. Then have students read what they have written to other members of their group.

When the students are done, bring the class together for a large group discussion. Ask them:

What was hard about imagining the lives of others?  
What was good about it?

**An alternative** (likely spread across two class periods)

Put the students in pairs to focus on one of the photos, and have them together create the list of questions.

Have students trade photos and questions, so that each pair is now looking at a different photo and has the accompanying questions.

Have students individually or in pairs write from the point of view of one of the subject(s) in the photo. They would use the first person voice to answer the four questions listed above, plus the questions from their classmates. If students wrote individually, have them compare with the classmate who was writing about the same photo.

Ask students:

What did you learn about yourself?  
What did you discover about the human experience?"

**LESSON 3: SIDE BY SIDE** (likely two class periods)

The author Thomas Friedman says we live in a “flat world.” Many of the youth participants in our photo projects would agree. They would point to how we see mobile phones, jeans, fast food, CDs and DVDs on the streets of San Francisco and also in villages in Hungary.



They would also show us how the old and new, Eastern and Western, traditional and modern, global and local compete for space in cities across the globe—from Beijing, China to Nairobi, Kenya. And they would tell us, in pictures and words, how the gap between the rich and poor, the developed and the developing world seems to have grown as much as it has shrunk.

In this lesson, students are asked to explore these “side-by-side” images and the dualities they reveal.

Again, put students into groups of 4 or 5. This time, give each group a pair of photos from the “Side-by-Side” collection—printed on legal size paper (14 X 8.5). Fold the paper in half so that only one image is showing at a time.

Then ask students to:

- ✓ Jot down all the words that come to mind with the first image, then with the second image. What do you notice?
- ✓ Open the folded paper to see the two photos side by side. How are they similar? How are they different? (Have the students appoint a recorder to write down their responses.)

*For example:* “In the photo on the left, the men look like construction workers or repair men relying on heavy equipment to do the work. They wear protective clothing. In the photo on the right, one man is pulling while the other pushes, and their cart is filled with heavy sacks. It look like hard labor—and the men are barefoot.” Have the students appoint a recorder.

*An alternative:* Have the students record the similarities and differences on a T-chart.

- ✓ Write a three-sentence caption for your side-by-side pair, using the following framework:

Sentence 1: Something the two photos suggest that is true everywhere in the world.

Sentence 2: How this plays out in the first image.

Sentence 3: How this plays out, differently, in the second image.

*For example:* “Everywhere around the world, men at work fill the streets. In wealthy countries like the U.S., workers can rely on power equipment and safety gear and earn a fair wage. In developing countries, street labor can be a brute test of physical strength, with workers earning barely enough to get by.”

*A tip:* If students use T-charts to record the similarities and differences they noticed in step two, they could circle or highlight important words to help them write their three-sentence captions.

Give the groups 10 – 15 minutes to work with a photo pair. When each group finishes, have it pass its photos to the neighboring group. Continue this way until all the groups in the room have seen and commented on all the photo pairs.

Bring the class back together and hold up the photos, pair by pair, asking one recorder to read their group’s responses until you have gone through all the pairs and heard from all of the recorders. Then read the actual caption that goes along with each photo.

Finally, ask students to join in a large group discussion about these questions:

What have you learned about the world from these “side-by-side” images?  
How flat do *you* think the world is, and why?

## EXTENSION: ELL VOCABULARY BUILDING

Photographs can provide a strong platform for expanding the skills of English Language Learners (ELL). Here is one (small) idea for how to use the photos in this collection as a spark for vocabulary building, conversation, and cultural connections among ELL students. No doubt, you'll have other ideas. We believe the cultural diversity reflected in these photos gives them special meaning for students who come from countries all over the world.



Divide students into groups of three. Give each group a photograph or photo pair—from the “Fresh Takes on a Flat World” collection—taped onto a large sheet of paper.

Ask students to use the space around the photo to write down what they see, in as much detail as possible. Then ask each group to write down one or two questions they have about the photograph. Finally, ask students to pass their papers with photos to the neighboring group.

Continue this way until all the groups in the room have seen and commented on all the photos and have posed their questions.

Then collect the questions, pick one or two questions for each photograph, and use them as a prompt for classroom conversation.

There should be enough photos in our collection to repeat this exercise several times, during additional class sessions.

## EXTENSION: INTERNET RESEARCH AND REPORTING

For every photograph in the “Youth Photos Across the Globe” collection, there’s a story the photo tells—worth, we hope, a thousand words. But there are also facts and figures behind the photo.



Take, for example, the photograph from the public market in Bangalore showing cones of *bindi* in vibrant colors. We learn from the caption that *bindi* is said to retain energy and strengthen concentration, as well as protect against bad luck. Traditionally, it also indicates a person’s religious beliefs, position in society, or marital status. What more might we learn about *bindi* and its role in India’s enduring caste society? Who continues to wear *bindi* today? Is this a tradition that will die with time and social change?

Or take the photograph of the bicyclist (plus dog) in the “Critical Mass” parade in Budapest. What is “Critical Mass” and how has it grown as a movement? What cities around the world are its strongest partners? What are the challenges facing proponents of using bikes for transportation in urban areas?

You might ask your students to research, write, and present a report of 1 to 2 pages,

giving their classmates the facts and figures, the issues, and the history behind a specific image. Their main research tool could be the Internet.

Students might do this in groups of three, pooling their research. They could choose the photo they wish to investigate, or they could draw photos at random (assigning each photo a number and having each group draw a number from a bowl).

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