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Building a Just and Sustainable World

EDUCATION CONNECTION | VISUAL LEARNING

Images stimulate the mind and often elicit strong reactions and questions. They also can deliver powerful messages that provide opportunities for contemplation and action.

Most often, newspaper and magazine readers quickly glance at photos and their captions, relying on the written description to interpret an image. With this YES! lesson plan, your students can pause and try to understand an image, its message, and why it's interesting (or not).



EDUCATION CONNECTION | VISUAL LEARNING

High and Dry

Step One: What do you notice?

Ask your students to make sense of the photo by trusting their instincts of observation and inference. Do not introduce any facts, captions, or other written words outside of the image. You may hear: *red-orange strings, worms, steel rod, chili peppers, lime green light, silver and black stripes.*

Step Two: What are you wondering?

After you've heard what your students are noticing, you'll probably hear a peppering of questions: *Are those animal parts? Maybe earthworms or chili peppers? Why are they hanging? Are those bigger things fish skin?* This is a good time to reveal the photo's caption and other facts. Watch how the conversation shifts from what they believe to be true to dissecting the facts about the image and situation.

Photo caption:

Salmon hangs in a smokehouse at a fish camp near Emmonak, a Yup'ik Eskimo town on the Western coast of Alaska where families are struggling to maintain the subsistence lifestyle of their ancestors. Photo by Elias Koch.

Photo facts:

Emmonak is a Yup'ik Eskimo village located at the mouth of the Yukon River just 10 miles from the Bering Sea with a population of 762. The village economy is based on seasonal fishing and hunting of salmon, moose, beluga whale, seal and waterfowl. Most of the community travels to fish camps during the summer months to catch, cut, dry, and smoke salmon for the winter.

Kwik'pak Fisheries employs about 100 youth each summer ages 14-17 through their Youth Employment Project. Youth work in a variety of positions, from the office to the packing rooms. The mission of this program is to give youth a basic skills foundation and help them save money for college.

Yup'ik processing and preservation methods include dehydration, smoking, storage in oil or cold water, fermentation, and freezing. Some foods are eaten raw. Salmon, herring, smelt, halibut, flounder, tomcod, pike,

and capelin are usually air-dried or smoked. Storing preserved food is considered "putting money in the bank."

According to a recent study that examined eating habits and health in the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta Region, a diet of Alaska salmon rich in Omega-3 fatty acids can protect even obese individuals from diabetes and heart disease.

Preservation by dehydration is a race between bacterial growth and water removal. Dehydration removes the water needed by microorganisms to thrive on decomposing tissue. Spreading blood on the meat is one method used to seal the surface and prevent spoilage until the fish begins to dry.

Step Three: What next?

1. In Yup'ik culture, sometimes three and four generations will fish together and preserve their catch in traditional ways such as air drying and smoking their salmon strips. What are some traditional activities that you do with parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents?
2. A diet comprised primarily of fish has provided many health benefits for the Yup'ik. How much fish do you include in your diet? Does your diet put you at risk for diabetes and obesity? If so, what steps can you take to be healthier?
3. Emmonak elders are concerned for the youth who have become disconnected from their traditional culture. Reality TV and iPods have replaced Yup'ik song and storytelling. Why do you think traditional culture is so important to these elders? Why do you think it is—or is not—so important to youth?
4. Kwik'Pak is the largest youth employer in Alaska, with a number of programs intended to build the skills and confidence of young people in the community. As a young person, what are the benefits of having a job?
5. Emmonak is geographically isolated; it is accessible only by air or water. It can be overwhelming for youth to leave the village—many return because they cannot adjust to the stark differences of the "outside." Can you relate to this? How do you feel about leaving your city or town?