



YES! Magazine
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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 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 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: maze, circular symbol, people standing, shadows.

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 (What are those people doing? Why are they standing on the maze? Are they playing a game?). That's curiosity or wonder—the intermixing of observations and questions. This is a good time to reveal the photo's caption, 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:

Labyrinth Garden, California Pacific Medical Center.
Photo by David Razavi.

Photo facts:

Medieval labyrinths have become valued features of healing environments. California Pacific Medical Center led the way in 1997 with a replica of a stone labyrinth laid on the floor of the Chartres Cathedral in France over 800 years ago. Since then, more than 60 health care facilities across the country have installed them for use by nurses, doctors, and patients.

The story of the labyrinth originally began with the legend of Minotaur, the half man half bull creature who was trapped inside and eventually captured by Theseus, king of Athens. Throughout time, labyrinths have evolved into a symbol of a pilgrimage where one can walk the path in hopes that the mind can achieve a sense of calm and balance.

Labyrinths appear in a wide range of places, cultures, and religions, from cathedral floors to medieval gardens to modern day computer and video games.

Mazes and labyrinths may look similar, but they are actually very different. A maze confuses, traps, and excites. A meditative labyrinth, with a single path and no intersections or dead ends, calms, heals, comforts, and balances. It is something that medical patients, health care providers, visitors, and local community members can use and enjoy.

The new, more holistic direction of health care looks at the color of walls and waiting rooms, the natural view from multiple windows, and architecture that feels like home. Labyrinths are becoming a familiar addition to this approach.

The benefits of walking a labyrinth depends on what you bring into it. It could be an answer to a problem, a new sense of direction, a release of disturbing emotions, or a cleansing of the spirit. In most cases, people experience a sense of peace and wholeness.

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. What kind of activities (physical or other) do you or others you know engage in when feeling angry, lost, sad, or confused? What grounds you or gives you a sense of calm?
2. Chromologists (those who study the impact of color) and many medical professionals believe that color can influence physical and mental well-being. What color is your bedroom and what kind of mood does it put you in? If you could choose to paint your room another color, what would it be and why?
3. Having a serious illness or taking care of someone suffering from a terminal disease can be stressful and exhausting. What are ways that individuals or families can feel like they're not alone in these situations?
4. Access to nature has been identified as a high priority in health care design. What role does nature have in your life? How often do you get outdoors and what do you do?

More resources around the image

More healing art at www.yesmagazine.org/healingarts
Read about training your mind to be happy and tips for a long healthy life at www.yesmagazine.org/happy-brain
and www.yesmagazine.org/keep-your-marbles.