

DOCUMENTING THE EVERYDAY

AUDIENCE

Students grades 5–12

TOPICS & THEMES

- Storytelling through visual documentation
- Everyday architecture plays an important role in life
- Respond to Biennial exhibition themes of Rights and Civic Life

SKILLS

- Learning to look closely at the built environment
- Using photography as a documentation tool
- Understanding the design principles of photography to construct a story
- Making connections between photographs and a story by writing a narrative

MATERIALS

- Copies of Visual Survey questions, 1 per student
- Pencils
- Clipboards
- Blank paper
- Digital cameras, or students' camera phones

STANDARDS

- CC.K-12.W.R.3
- VA:Pr6.1.5 through VA:Pr6.1.III



Overview

Inspired by the photography of Chicago Architecture Biennial contributor Akinbode Akinbiyi, students will use photography and creative writing to explore their surroundings and look closely at everyday architecture that is commonly overlooked.

Activity Steps

1. Take your students on a walk around the block (or around an interior space). As you walk, stop and talk at different points to have an interactive discussion about what they see and think. Use the suggested Visual Survey Questions provided, and/or add any to best engage your students. What do they walk past everyday and never seem to notice? What are the little, overlooked details that define a place?
2. Utilizing cameras, ask your students to take photos of the areas you have surveyed together. Encourage students to look closely from numerous angles. Snap photos of the cracks in the concrete, rust on the railings, the plastic bag caught in a tree. Students should aim to have 10 images each.

BIENNIAL EXHIBIT
CONNECTION:

Easy like Sunday Morning
– North Lawndale
By Akinbode Akinbiyi
(Berlin, Germany)

This project presents a series of photographs taken during an extending stay in Chicago's North Lawndale neighborhood and explores how small details define a place.

View the project online at:
chicagoarchitecturebiennial.org/current/contributors/akinbode_akinbiyi

VOCABULARY

Composition: the way things are arranged in an image

Focal point: the center of interest or activity in an image

Civic: Of or relating to a city or town or the people who live there

Urban: Of or relating to cities and the people who live in them

3. Once back from taking photos, discuss how images can be used to tell stories, and how those stories can differ depending on who is looking at the image. Consider displaying images from other artists to guide a discussion.
See Discussion Questions.
4. Ask students to look through their images and select one to write a story about. Prompts to help them brainstorm:
 - A. This photo reminds me of...
 - B. Write a description of the image and detail the space around the photo that is unseen.
 - C. For someone who has never been to this neighborhood, it is important they see this image to better understand...
 - D. I thought it was important to record this image because...
5. Once completed, have the students share their stories with others along with their images.

Activity Tips

If possible, break up into smaller groups for better mobility and open discussion.

Any type of camera will work. If digital cameras are not available allow time to print photos. If cameras are not available this activity can be done as a sketching exercise.

Depending on your grade level and location, students could take photos intermittently on the walk, or break out into small groups after a shorter group walk to take photos on their own.

This activity can be completed indoors, around the school campus if need be.

VISUAL SURVEY QUESTIONS

Observation

- Describe the area you have stopped to look at. Use descriptive words.
- What shapes do you see?
- What kind of materials is the object/area made from? (wood, brick, concrete, steel?)
- What is located on either side of this object/area?
- Does the building/object sit close to the street or is it set back?
- Do you see any trees, grass, or other landscaping? Where?
- Is the street busy and noisy or is it a quiet street?
- Take a closer look at _____. Have you noticed this detail before? If not, take a picture capturing what you may have overlooked before.
- Does the object have any unique details? If so, draw or photograph one example.

Interpretation

- Does the object look old or new? How can you tell?
- What do you think was (or is) the function of this object? How can you tell?
- Does this area/object look very similar or very different than what is around it? How?
- How do you think the people who live here might use this space? How do you use this space?

Analysis

- What if this building/object/area could talk? What do you think it would say?
- If you could ask the object one question, what would you like to know? What other information would you like to know about this building?
- Where could you go to locate information about this?
- Who could you talk with to find out more information?
- How could you let other people in your neighborhood know that this special place is here?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is your eye first drawn to in this image?
- What small details do you notice in this image? Did you notice those details when walking outside?
- Where is the image the lightest? The darkest? Where is the center of the image? How might the light and shadows accentuate the main focal point?
- Is the image in color or black and white?
- Does the image evoke any sort of mood for you? If so, what sort?
- Raise your hand if you like this image. What about this image is attractive to you? Be specific.
- Raise your hand if you do not like this image. What about this image is not attractive to you?