http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/09/26/what-we-eat-where-we-sleep-documenting-daily-life-to-tell-stories/?nl=learning&emc=learninga2

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# Our World

Where we eat:
http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/08/01/breaking-bread-everywhere-plentifully-or-pitifully/

Where we sleep:
http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/08/04/where-children-sleep/

## What We Eat, Where We Sleep: Documenting Daily Life to Tell Stories

In August, two slide shows were published on NYTimes.com that both seemed so useful for classrooms that we saved them until the school year began to present together in a lesson.

On the Well blog, Tara Parker-Pope featured 15 photos from a book called "What I Eat: Around the World in 80 Diets" that has become an exhibit at the Museum of Science in Boston. Here's how she described it:

*In an unusual project, Peter Menzel and Faith D'Alusio, a photographer and writer, traveled the world collecting photos and stories about what people eat in a day. They documented the meager meals of a Masai goat herder during a drought, the fast-food diet of an American long-haul trucker and a veritable feast of lamb kebabs and other foods set out by an Iranian bread baker.*

Meanwhile, the Lens blog introduced 20 photos from a book called "Where Children Sleep":

*Mr. Mollison's new book, "Where Children Sleep," had its origins in a project undertaken for a children's charity several years ago. As he considered how to represent needy children around the world, he wanted to avoid the common devices: pleading eyes, toothless smiles. When he visualized his own childhood, he realized that his bedroom said a lot about what sort of life he led. So he set out to find others.*

Here are some ideas for using these extraordinary photos across the curriculum — and some suggestions for including other Times features in which the details of everyday life become an anthropological lens.

**Before Viewing**

What do the ordinary details of our daily lives say about who we are, where we're from and what we care about?

Have students create two lists: on one side of the page, a list of 10 things they remember eating the day before; on the other, a list of 10 things people would see if they walked into that student's bedroom. (If you're only working with one slide show, have students compile only the list that corresponds to it.)

Next, have students work with a partner to compare their lists. Ask partners to discuss these questions: 1) What do you think these lists say about who you are, where you live and what you care about? 2) If, one hundred years from now, a historian or anthropologist was to come upon your lists, what might he or she conclude about you, your life and where you're from? What questions might he or she have?

Have the whole class share observations, then show one or both slide shows, using the questions below.

**Questions**

1. What photographs interested or surprised you most? Why? What questions did those photos raise for you?

2. What can these photos tell you about the lives of the people pictured? What do you think they *can't* tell you?

3. What does the photographer for the food series, Peter Menzel, mean when he says, "We present information to people rather than drawing conclusions … we're trying to educate readers by show and tell"? Could that apply to both sets of photos?

4. In her post about the children's bedrooms series, Kerri Macdonald writes, "As much as the project is about the quirkiness of childhood, it is, more strikingly, a commentary on class and on poverty. But the diversity also provides a sense of togetherness." Where can you see examples of both the social commentary and the "sense of togetherness" in both series?

5. How would you contrast the two series? To what extent are they trying to do the same thing? How do they differ?

**Activity Ideas**

*Document the Lives You Know*

"Imagine gathering all the food you plan to eat today. Now take a picture of it." So begins Tara Parker-Pope's post about the photographs of food. You might be inspired by the simplicity of this

description to take photos of your own bedroom or the food you'll eat in a day, or you might go out into your community and, using these photos as a model, create a similar series featuring people you know.

Or, you could choose another lens through which to depict the universal. Another project the Well blog post describes, for instance, is "Material World," in which families are pictured with their most precious possessions. You could photograph children with their favorite toys; teenagers in their most-loved t-shirts; people with the cars, bikes, skateboards, buss passes or other means of transportation they use every day; or people with their pets. Students might work in pairs to interview each subject as well and write up a short piece to accompany each photo.

*Create a Class Photo Exhibit*

As a class, establish a theme, whether "eating," "holidays," "identity," "family" or anything else, and invite everyone to bring in one or more photos from their own or their family's photo albums that illustrate it. Mount them all, then, as a class, write up an introduction that highlights some of the interesting connections you see between the photos. Invite others to view your photo gallery and leave comments — or even contribute their own photographs!

*Practice Visual Literacy Skills*

We have published many lessons in the past that invite students to analyze photographs. Adapt the guiding questions and worksheets from Who Is Family? Analyzing Family Photos or from Critical Lenses to find ways to consider the technical and artistic aspects of these photographs.

In both series, there are photos of people who live in the same place but represent different ways of living there. Choose two photos to compare — either from the same series or, perhaps, one from each series. What do the differences tell you? What questions about class, poverty, gender or other issues does the comparison raise? How might you represent differences like this in your own community through two photographs?

*Connect With Other Children*

Is there a place or way of life depicted in these photos that especially intrigues you? Use online and library resources to explore that place, using the details depicted in the photo to generate research questions. As you go, make a list of questions you'd like to ask a real person from that area, then attempt to connect with someone your age who lives there via a site like e-pals. (In a recent edutopia post "World Without Walls: Learning Well With Others," Will Richardson offers other suggestions for connection classrooms and students.)

*Go Further With Food*

David Rabkin, director of current science and technology at the Boston Museum of Science, explains why the photo series about food has been popular at his museum:

*"Food is a hot topic — people are interested in it and its many dimensions, from its health impact, to the experience of great food, to the bigger picture of our global food system and issues of social justice…Food is personal. It's a great topic for our museum because it's so compelling to so many of our visitors and so rich in terms of the educational directions in which we can go with them."*

Using these photos as inspiration, brainstorm as many "dimensions" of the overall topic "food" as you can, then choose one you'd like to learn more about.

For almost any aspect you can think of, Times Topics pages will be a good place to start. For instance, if you're investigating the question of whether junk food is really cheaper to eat than healthy food, you might start with the recent graphic accompanying Mark Bittman's column on that question that visually compares prices for different meals.

Create an infographic depicting what you find.

*Tell About Everyday Life in Multimedia: Three Generations, One Roof*

In an interactive feature that accompanies the article "Three Generations Under One Roof," Sarah Kramer explores the lives of an extended family of Chinese-Americans living together in a house in New York City. Here is a quote from the article that vividly lists the details of this family's everyday life:

*Life happens here on Forsyth Street: drum lessons for the teenagers on Thursday nights; religious school for Warren and Jen's boys on Sunday mornings; grilling on the roof deck in summer; and hip-hop, swimming, tutoring, soccer games, piano and guitar lessons and the occasional rooftop water fight sprinkled in. Food is bought in bulk: 25-pound bags of rice, 15 pounds of beef. It takes three gallons of milk, more than five pounds of salad greens and up to a dozen loads of laundry to keep the household running each week. Filling the home are seven children, ages 4 through 17; three iPads; 10 computers; 14 bicycles; two Cantonese-speaking baby sitters and a home aide; three languages (English, Spanish, Cantonese); one cat (another was recently euthanized); and a revolving door of friends.*

Using just this paragraph as a model — and perhaps using "Life happens here on [name of street]" as a "sentence starter" — write your own short description of how "life happens" at your house. Then, use a video camera as Ms. Kramer does to capture a span of time (perhaps 15 minutes of your breakfast or dinner routine) in your home. What does the footage show that surprises you? Why?

*Memorialize Through Photography: Soldier's Bedrooms*

In 2010, the Magazine published "The Shrine Down the Hall," a series of photos of the bedrooms of American soldiers lost in war. We created a lesson plan around that series that might be used with the "Where Children Sleep" series. Students might also consider memorializing a loss of their own by photographing or writing about how daily life is affected by the change they have experienced.

*Write About 'Where I'm From'*

Many teachers will already know the George Ella Lyon list-form poem "Where I'm From." As Mr. Lyon writes, "People have used it at their family reunions, teachers have used it with kids all over the United States, in Ecuador and China; they have taken it to girls in juvenile detention, to men in prison for life, and to refugees in a camp in the Sudan." On his Web site, he features the poem along with ideas for writing from it. A "Where I'm From" poem could easily be a companion or extension to the photography, writing or video projects suggested above.