globalnews.org.uk classroom activity

Activity: Every picture tells not the whole story

Activity introduction
Photographs can reveal a mass of information about the wider world and provide an excellent stimulus for enquiry-based learning. News related images are now widely available through the internet and such images bombard young people on a daily basis.

However, these images, particularly of people, places and situations in the South, rarely tell the whole story. Media representations can, for example, often contribute to negative stereotypes; they may be deliberately chosen to meet certain criteria about what makes someone or something 'representative' of that place.

Media images and photographs are constructed and selected. Photographers decide on the composition of the photo in terms of what to photograph, what camera angle to use etc; editors select images, perhaps cropping them or manipulating them so that they have the greatest impact on the audience.

Being able to critically question and challenge photographic portrayals is therefore an important skill. Interpreting an image is similar to reading a text, but images can be more powerful than the written word in affecting our feelings and attitudes.

Activity summary
Students select news related photographs from the many that are now widely available through the internet. They personally reflect on these images and critically question and challenge the photographic portrayal of people, places, situations and issues.

Carrying out a range of the short introductory activities on photographs and images from the Global News website before this activity might be helpful. See: http://www.globalnews.org.uk/teacher_introactivity.htm

The Global News website contains listings of websites containing photographs related to the news.

Aims of the activity

- To reflect on news related images and photographs and critically examine their portrayal of people, places, situations and issues
- To understand that news related images can contribute to negative stereotypes and be deliberately chosen to meet certain criteria about what makes someone or something 'representative' of that place
- To consider the factors that motivate the composition and selection of images and photographs used by the media
- To understand the important role news related images play in affecting our feelings and attitudes towards people, places, situations or issues

- To explore how images and photographs can generate reactions and actions and to consider what might be appropriate and positive reactions to these images

For details of how Global News activities meet the requirements of the national curriculum, in particular the citizenship curriculum see:
http://www.globalnews.org.uk/teacher_curric.htm

Resources
Access to computers/internet – at least one computer for every 2-4 students, colour printer for printing out selected photographs from the internet, activity worksheet, large sheets of paper, colour pens, post-it notes (optional)

Activity details

Raising an issue/questioning/discussion
Before students explore news related images on the internet a class discussion should take place exploring the current major international news stories. Write these stories/issues on the board etc. Ask students what images they have seen relating to these stories, either in newspapers/magazines, on the internet or on television. Also ask them what kinds of images they expect to find on the internet related to these stories.

Following this discussion one particular issue or prominent news story could be selected or groups of students could select their own issue/story and find images relating to this. Encourage students to consider what images are likely to reflect which stories and allow them to select an image that they feel particularly strongly about.

Researching/Group work
In groups, students should explore some of the suggested sites for images related to what is currently in the news. They should agree on one photo that they find particularly powerful and one that includes people in it. This photo should be downloaded and printed off. They should then place the photograph in the centre of a large sheet of paper, writing their thoughts/comments directly onto the paper, perhaps in the form of thought bubbles, or use post-it notes to stick comments around the photo. Each group will need a copy of the activity worksheet (see below). This contains a list of questions/issues to consider.

Teaching notes related to the 'Every picture tells not the whole story' worksheet
The following information aims to provide a rationale for the questions on the worksheet and provides some thoughts on issues to discuss.

Thinking about the photo: This section asks students to examine their reasons for choosing their selection. Often images of people, situations or issues to do with countries in the South are negative and reinforce stereotypes of disaster, poverty, helplessness etc. Does their selection reflect this? Indeed, have students, wittingly or unwittingly, made their selection because it reinforces these stereotypes?

What do you see? The aim here is to encourage students to think in detail about what is within the frame but also to be aware that much exists outside it. It asks students to imagine what might lie outside the frame of the shot and to consider the context in which the photograph was taken. Again, if the framed photo is a negative image, students should be asked to consider what positive things may be going on outside the frame. For more on framing and cropping of photos see the short introductory activities on photographs and images on the Global News website.

What do you feel? Photos play an important role in affecting our feelings and attitudes towards people, places, situations or issues. Here students are asked to acknowledge this by considering their own responses to their selected image.

What are the key questions and issues? This section encourages students to think of the issues surrounding the photo; the context in which the photo is taken. The questions and responses raised by students are likely to fall into two categories: those that can be answered by the photo, if details are examined closely, and those broader, 'bigger picture' issues, that are raised by the photo and will need further discussion and research.

Thinking further about the photo: Here students are being encouraged to put themselves in the place of the photographer; to consider the motives of the photographer; the likely audience and the degree of compliance on behalf of those being photographed. The aim is also to encourage students to think of what other images would present a more thorough and accurate picture of the people or situation in which the photo was taken; what 'positive' images might be taken in the context?

Disseminating
Following the selection of a photograph and consideration of the questions/issues raised on the worksheet, each group should have information to disseminate back to the whole class. The issues raised should provide plenty of opportunity to discuss the use of images by the media and the representations of people, places, situations and issues that result from them. The teaching notes above may help aid the discussion.

Positive action
Learning to take a more critical approach towards the representation through photographs of people, places, situations and issues, particularly in relation to the countries of the South, can help challenge pre-conceived views and combat prejudice and stereotyping. This can help students better understand how they can take action that will result in positive change. Ask students to consider the ideas on the students in action page on the Global News website:
http://www.globalnews.org.uk/student_action.htm

Expectations:
By the end of this activity students will:

- Have had an opportunity to reflect on news related photographs they themselves have selected and critically question how they portray people, places, situations and issues
- Have a clearer understanding of how news related images can contribute to negative stereotypes and be selected so as to meet certain criteria about what makes someone or something 'representative' of that place
- Understand the important role news related images play in affecting our feelings and attitudes towards people, places, situations or issues
- Be aware of the factors that motivate the composition and selection of images and photographs used by the media
- Have thought about how images and photographs generate reactions and actions and to consider what positive actions they may take in response to images presented by the media

...global**news**.org.uk worksheet...

Activity: Every picture tells not the whole story

This sheet should be completed in groups

Having selected a particular news related photograph from the internet, newspaper or magazine consider the following questions:

Thinking about the photo

- Why have you selected this image?
- Is it a positive hopeful image or a negative depressing one? Or is it both? Explain your views.

What do you see?

- Describe as precisely as possible what and who you can see in the image.
- What do you think you might see outside the frame of the picture?

What do you feel?

- Think about how the picture makes you feel, e.g. angry, sad, hopeful, worried, frightened, excited etc. Write down all the words that express how your group feels about the photo.

What are the key questions and issues?

- List any questions that come to mind as a result of looking at this photo and any issues you think the photo raises.

Thinking more about the photo

- Why do you think the photographer chose to take this picture; what is the purpose of the image?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Do you think the people in the photo wanted this picture taken? Why/why not?
- Do you think the photo fairly represents the people and situation photographed? Why/why not?
- If you had been a photographer in this situation would you have wanted to take this photo? Why/why not?
- What other photos would you have wanted to take to try and give an accurate and fair picture of the people, issues or situation?

What does any of this have to do with me?

- What links you to the situation or people in the photo? What do you think you can do to take action to address the situation and change it for the better?