

“Photo Safaris”

Photo safaris are digitally-facilitated activities in which learners explore pedagogical themes and their surroundings through photography. Unlike a traditional scavenger hunt where participants search for specific items on a list, photo safaris challenge participants to capture images related to abstract themes. Learners upload their photographs - usually taken with mobile digital devices - with a hashtag to a predetermined digital platform so that pictures can be aggregated and viewed by the group. Photo safaris can last for different lengths of time, but as little as 40 or 50 minutes of photographing can yield excellent results.

CONSTRUCTIONISM & DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Photo safaris draw on constructionist learning theories that suggest students learn better when they interact with abstract or complex course concepts in ways that make them concrete and personally relevant. The experience becomes even richer when students have to verbalize their creative choices for an authentic audience. Digital environments enhance the activity by offering students (1) improved editing capability for an additional layer of creative expression and interpretation and (2) improved sharing and participatory capacity, which leads to greater reach, feedback, and opportunities for interpretive diversity.

PEDAGOGICAL OPPORTUNITIES

The key components to a photo safari are (1) an appropriately abstract pedagogical theme; (2) simple digital devices (camera phones and tablet computers work as well or better than professional camera equipment); (3) a designated picture sharing digital platform and hashtag (Twitter, Flickr, Instagram, and Facebook all work well); and (4) opportunities for students to view and discuss each other's photographs.

Ways to enhance the experience include:

Knowing the environment. It is not essential (or even desired) for a photo safari group to stick together in one large group or follow a designated trail. However, depending on your location, it might be best for several “leaders” to know the terrain so that the group may optimize the use of their time. Busy urban environments with rapidly changing settings and pockets of urban decay often make interesting venues.

Considering the “how” as well as the “what.” Encourage students to consider the themes in terms of how they take photos (e.g. macro, micro, action, filtered, etc.) as well as content. For example, if the theme is “capturing community,” the message may be in color saturation or a vignette border as much as content.

Making creative choices explicit. When students upload photos to digital platforms, have them offer a brief description of how or why their photo fits the safari theme. They may provide more detail in other settings, but this quick note offers them a reminder so that they can expand on the thought later.

Making time to view and ask questions about each other’s photographs. Looking at each other’s photographs is not only fun, but also offers students opportunities to inspire and learn from each other - in terms of techniques and interpretation of the themes.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Moore College. [Learning through Photography at Moore.](#)
Documentary Studies, Duke University. [Literacy Through Photography.](#)
Papert & Harel. [Situating Constructionism.](#)