

# Introduction

One of my daughters was adopted from Guatemala when she was almost five years of age. Learning enough English to function well in school has been one of the challenges she has faced. Yesterday, I went to her second-grade classroom for her parent-teacher conference. Her teacher excitedly showed me pages where my daughter was beginning to write words she had sounded out and spelled phonetically. Then I looked at her science notebook. “Flor is recording what she is learning through drawings instead of writing. She is a wonderful artist, and drawings work much better for her than writing,” her teacher told me. Flor’s drawings were beautifully done, and the scientific processes the class had been working on were documented in detail. The contrast between how much she was able to communicate through her art and how little through her writing was striking. What a relief for Flor to communicate in a medium that allows her to show her intelligence and understandings. Art is an invaluable tool for communicating what she is observing, learning, and experiencing. Her artwork gives us a window into how she thinks and gives her a way to talk to us that words do not allow.

Although the type of artwork Flor is involved in during science is drawing, other forms of art can serve the same purpose for all children. Kayenta and I decided to write this book to provide teachers and other adults with information on how to involve children in creating photo essays and to discuss the role photography can play in allowing children to communicate their ideas, experiences, and emotions. We also wanted to provide children with rich ways to capture aesthetics in their environments, document historical events as well as their own stories and histories, and record what they are learning. And we wanted to provide a way for children to be teachers and advocates for causes they believe in as they explore the concept of being responsible citizens. Photo essays provide opportunities for all children to accomplish these goals in an engaging, authentic manner.

## 2 • Telling Stories With Photo Essays

This book, *Telling Stories With Photo Essays: A Guide for PreK–5 Teachers*, is divided into three sections. The first section, consisting of Chapters 1 and 2, provides the reader with an overview of involving children in creating photo essays and discusses theoretical and practical applications for children and adults to communicate through art. The second section, Chapters 3 through 11, discusses a variety of photo essays and gives examples of each kind. The third section, consisting of Chapter 12 and the appendix, contains photo essay assessment rubrics and lists standards that are met through the photo essays in section two.

After you have read the information in section one about involving children in photography and its benefits, feel free to open the book to any of the types of photo essays discussed in section two and try one with children. The ideas and insights you gain through guiding children through one type of essay will inspire and encourage you to try others. Follow the children’s leads as they explore their interests and develop photo essays that are unique to them. Following the descriptions of each type of photo essay are ideas for other photo essays that relate to the theme being explored. With each idea, we have listed a suggested grade level. However, you will know the children in your classroom and can decide how to adapt the idea for them. Included throughout the book and listed in the bibliography in the back of the book are many book titles that are excellent examples of photo essays for children.

Children’s voices throughout the book help the reader see the photo essay projects from the eyes of the authors and provide insight into what children are thinking and discovering as they create their essays. There are also voices of parents, elementary teachers, teachers of gifted and talented and ELL children, and community college and university educators. Each represents a unique perspective from his or her experiences with photo essays. Including insights, information, and ideas from a wide variety of teachers and children gives the book a broad perspective. The information is also very valuable in thinking about how to best work with children and photo essays and the many opportunities that are available for children to use photography to successfully tell their stories.

Dr. Gary Fertig, a social studies professor at the University of Northern Colorado, has a well-established body of work on guiding children in reading historical photographs, and he has written a chapter for this book that will lead you in helping children learn about how much a photograph can portray. This is a wonderful beginning in helping children become knowledgeable about the power of photographs and provides ideas for children on what they can include in their photographs, as well as the “voice” of photographs. We recommend that readers go to Dr. Fertig’s chapter at the end of the book and read through it as they begin the photo essay process with

children, because there are many excellent ideas and information about how photographs can communicate through time. Dr. Rashida Banerjee is an early childhood special education professor from India, now at the University of Northern Colorado, and shares in this book extremely interesting information on working with children and photo essays in India. Mrs. Judy Gump, an early childhood teacher at Aims Community College in Greeley, Colorado, tells of her experiences as a disaster relief volunteer who works with children and families at disaster sites during times of trauma. Ms. Estee Baldwin has been a gifted and talented teacher for ten years and is the coordinator of the gifted and talented program in Broomfield, Colorado. She provides the readers with examples of gifted children and how photo essays are valuable ways in which they can communicate.

While I was in the process of writing this introduction, the child who took the photographs of the damage done by the tornado was selecting photographs for his photo essay. The adult working with him asked him what he will say with a photograph that shows a demolished building. "I already said what I needed to with the photo," he responded. "Yes, and you said it very well," replied the teacher.