13-A Brooklyn Bridge, New York, 1929

Walker Evans (1903–1975)

13-A Walker Evans (1903–1975), Brooklyn Bridge, New York, 1929, printed c. 1970. Gelatin silver print, 6 ¾ x 4 13/16 in. (17.2 x 12.2 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Arnold H. Crane, 1972 (1972.742.3). © The Walker Evans Archive, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The Art

Like paintings and colored glass pictures, photographs are another form of art. In this black-and-white photograph, the very large piers and arches of the Brooklyn Bridge appear through a spider web of steel cables. There is an electric lamppost to the right of the bridge, which looks out of place. The bridge in the picture seems to be from some earlier time—maybe the time of knights in armor. The arches look like those of a very old fortress. At the same time, the bunches of steel cables remind people of how modern the bridge design and construction really are.

The Artist

Walker Evans was born in St. Louis, Missouri, and grew up in Chicago, Illinois, and Toledo, Ohio. He became interested in photography as a child, when he collected penny postcards. Evans dropped out of college and moved to Paris. When he returned to the United States, he took pictures of poor people during the country's Great Depression. Evans kept a small, cheap Kodak camera in his pocket to take pictures of friends and family. For other pictures, he often used a large, 8x10-inch camera. Evans's special gift was to see something familiar through a camera as if it had never been seen before.

The Historical Perspective

When the Brooklyn Bridge opened in 1883, it was the largest bridge of its kind in the world. The Brooklyn Bridge is a type of bridge called a suspension bridge, and people thought of it as a great achievement when it was built. After awhile, though, people felt less amazed by the bridge. The excitement wore off. When Evans started to take pictures of the bridge in 1929, it already had become just a way to get back and forth from Brooklyn to Manhattan, two different parts of New York City.

Conversations and Teaching Activities

Head Start Children ages 3 to 5

Encourage children to study the photograph closely—the arches, the cables, and where they lead. Introduce new vocabulary and use books relating to the photo.

Describing

Describe what you see in this picture.

✔ Do you see shapes in this picture? Which ones?

✔ Is this the shape you think of when you think of a bridge? This photograph is taken from a different viewpoint than the one we usually see of a bridge.

✔ Find the lamppost in this picture. What side is it on? (It's on the right.)

Analyzing and Interpreting

Ask the following questions to stimulate thinking and discussion:

- The title of this artwork is *Brooklyn Bridge*. Why do you think it is named that?
- Would you know this is a photograph of a bridge if it were not titled Brooklyn Bridge? Why?
- What does a bridge do?
- How would you know an image is a photograph?
- How do we take photographs?
- Have you used a camera? Tell us about it.
- How would you feel if you were crossing this bridge? Where would you be going?
- What does it look like on the other side of the bridge? On your side?
- Show me any diagonal lines you see.
- Do you see any patterns in this photograph?
- Are there other things you would like to tell me about this photograph? Children might say: I have taken photos with my mom's/dad's phone; my daddy takes pictures that move; I went over a bridge and the water was swirling underneath; I went over a bridge and was afraid I would fall off.

Connecting and Extending

Introducing Vocabulary

arches	engineer
architect	image
bridge	ocean liner
cables	photographer
camera	sailboat
commute	video camera

Connecting and Extending continued...

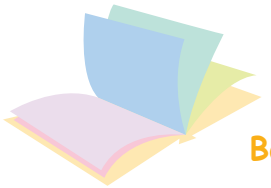
Related Family Literacy Experiences

Parents and children can

✔ sing the song "Going on a Picnic" while waiting in line or on a long drive.

✔ play with boats during bath time.

✔ walk to a park and have a picnic.



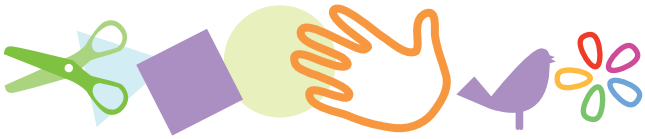
Books

Bridges are to Cross by Philemon Sturges (Puffin Books, 2000)
Different kinds of bridges, from train bridges to fortified castle bridges, are examined, and an example of each is provided.

Cross a Bridge by Ryan Ann Hunter (Holiday House, 2004)
Descriptions and illustrations of different kinds of bridges are presented.

Iggy Peck, Architect by Andrea Beatty (Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2007)
Ever since he was a baby, Iggy Peck has built towers, bridges, and buildings. His building skills come in handy when his second-grade class is stranded on an island during a picnic.

Three Billy Goats Gruff by Paul Galdone (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981)
Three clever billy goats outwit a big ugly troll that lives under the bridge they must cross on their way up the mountain.



Related Educational Experiences

✔ Go outside to take pictures. Let each child take a few pictures with a disposable camera.

✔ Build bridges with blocks, Legos, clay, play dough, and art sticks. Add people and/or animals to the bridge.

✔ Read *Three Billy Goats Gruff*. Make a bridge. Act out the story with children or puppets. Reinforce concepts of over/under, on/off, behind/in front, first/second, and other vocabulary from the book. Describe the troll. Make a troll picture.

✔ Draw a story or paint a picture about the Brooklyn Bridge.

*The ideas listed are just a few of the many activities that could be used to introduce or extend children's learning. Your knowledge of your children and families supports your ability to ensure positive learning experiences and outcomes for students. As an educator, you probably have ideas for books, songs, finger plays, and activities that you have thought of when introducing or extending children's learning related to the "**A Head Start on Picturing America**" artworks. We encourage you to confer with your colleagues, visit the local library or bookstore, and share your ideas with others.*