



LESSON PLAN

# After the Quake: Preserving the Artifacts of Kathmandu



RELATED PHOTO ESSAY

**Protecting Cultural  
Heritage After the  
Nepal Quake**

BY TAYLOR WEIDMAN



## After the Quake: Preserving the Artifacts of Kathmandu



**Class:** 60 minutes

### Key Idea

Earthquakes and other natural disasters can destroy valuable cultural artifacts, but local and global efforts can protect and restore relics for future generations.

### Background

This photo essay shows the destruction wrought by the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that struck the Kathmandu Valley on April 28, 2015, and depicts efforts to protect ancient artifacts of the area. Kathmandu is the capital city of Nepal, a country located in the Himalayas of South Asia bordered by China on the North and India to the South. More than 8,500 died in the earthquake and tens of thousands were left homeless. Behind the humanitarian crisis is the loss of some of the area's most treasured cultural resources.

Once at the intersection of trade routes between India and China, the Kathmandu Valley has a rich cultural history spanning nearly 2,000 years and is home to seven UNESCO World Heritage sites, more than any other area in the world. Three of these World Heritage sites are documented in this photo essay—Kathmandu Durbar Square, Patan Durbar Square, and Bhakatapur Durbar Square. A Durbar Square is a name given to a plaza or an area opposite to the old royal palaces in Nepal. The Newar people, indigenous to the area since prehistoric times, are largely responsible for its ancient art and architecture. Many of the royal palaces and both Hindu and Buddhist temples were destroyed by the earthquake.

Taylor Weidman, in this photo essay, captured the religious artwork from the ancient temples destroyed in the earthquake. His intention was to document the threatened architectural heritage of the Kathmandu Valley and the efforts of the local experts and archeologists..

### Connections to National Standards

Common Core English Language Arts. SL.9-10.5 and SL.11-12.5. Make use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understandings of findings, reasoning, evidence and to add interest.

### SUBJECT AREAS

#### HIGH SCHOOL

- Anthropology
- Art
- Geography
- Modern World Studies

#### COLLEGE

- Architecture
- Art History
- Cultural Anthropology
- Geography
- History

### THEMES

- Cultural artifacts
- Preservation of a culture
- Ancient cultures

### MATERIALS

- World map
- Access to the photo essay online (or printed copies of it)

### PREPARATION

- (Optional) Make copies of the photo essay



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College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies Standards. D2.Geo.2.9-12. Use maps, satellite images, photographs, and other representations to explain relationships between locations of places and regions and their political, cultural, and economic dynamics.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies Standards. D2.His.12.9-12. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to pursue further inquiry and investigate additional sources.

### Lesson

#### SETTING THE STAGE

Ask students if they can list some major earthquakes that have struck the world in the past 10 years. Some include:

- In 2004, a 9.1 magnitude earthquake struck Sumatra, Indonesia, which caused a devastating tsunami along the coastlines of the Indian Ocean.
- In 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Port-au-Prince, Haiti, causing 316,000 deaths and 1 million people to become homeless.
- In 2011, on the east coast of Tohoku, Japan, a 9.03 magnitude earthquake struck the east coast of Tohoku, Japan—one of the top five largest earthquakes in the world—that claimed more than 15,000 lives and collapsed hundreds of thousands of buildings.

Introduce the photo essay by telling students they will view photographs taken after the April 28, 2015, earthquake that struck Kathmandu, Nepal. Show students a map of the area, highlighting Kathmandu and its relationship to Mt. Everest, the tallest mountain in the world. Ask students: Did you hear about the earthquake that struck Kathmandu? If so, how? (Some answers may include the following: TV, online media, social media, or from a friend or family member.)

Explain to students that many of Nepal's cultural artifacts were destroyed during the earthquake. A cultural artifact can be defined as an object that reveals information about the society that used and created it. Anything which provides more evidence about the religious, social, and economic aspects of a society could be considered a cultural artifact. Some examples include books, tools, clothing, statues, etc.



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Ask students: What would be a modern cultural artifact? (One example would be the smartphone.) How do you relate to this object throughout your daily lives? What story would this artifact tell the future about our society today?

### ENGAGING WITH THE STORY

Introduce the photo essay by explaining that students will be viewing photographs from three areas in the Kathmandu Valley, all of which are World Heritage Sites acknowledged for their special cultural values. The 2015 earthquake devastated ancient royal palaces (and their local Durbar Squares) built as early as the 10th century, as well as Hindu and Buddhist art and architecture from earlier centuries. These temples and palace squares attracted thousands of tourists each day and the residents of Kathmandu interact with them throughout their daily lives.

Direct students to view the photo essay in pairs. Ask students to take notes about what they see. What has been destroyed? What specifically is being protected for preservation? How might the artifacts, the broken statues and temples depicted in the photo essay, affect the daily lives of those living in Kathmandu?

### Delving Deeper

After viewing the photo essay, lead a discussion with such questions as:

- Who are the people depicted in the photo essay? What are they doing?
- Many of the photos in this essay depict religious art and architecture. Identify and make a list of the specific artifacts depicted in the photo essay. (Some answers include the following: a Hindu statue, a stone lion, carvings, stone statues, a statue of the God Narayan, religious art, crushed bells, etc.)



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- One anthropologist describes an artifact as an object that frames “the way we act in the world, as well as the way we think about the world.” An artifact can also be described as “touchstones that bring memories and meanings to life. They make history real.”\* Identify an artifact in the photo essay and describe how it supports these definitions. Do you think an artifact can “make history real”? If so, how?
- A Nepali woman, age 71, said that the temples were “companions” to her since birth. She said, “I played on them when I was a little girl. Young people meet there. Old people go to sit in the sun and talk there. I go every day to prayer there. Everyone comes together to celebrate our festivals there.”\*\* What might life be like now for the people living in Kathmandu without the temples? What conclusions can you draw based on the photos and this statement?
- Photographer Taylor Weidman described that local experts and archaeologists are working to protect the important pieces of religious artwork from the temple. One of the local preservationists is photographed. Do you think it is important to protect these pieces? If so, why?
- Why do you think the photographer chose to take close-ups of the artifacts in the photo essay? What purpose does this serve the viewer?
- If you could rename the photo essay, what name would you give it?

\* Steven Lubar and Kathleen Kendrick, “[Looking at Artifacts, Thinking About History.](#)” Smithsonian Education.

\*\* Jason Burke, “[Nepal begins to assess its cultural losses after earthquake.](#)” *The Guardian*, May 1, 2015.

### Reflecting and Projecting

Give students one of the following reflective writing prompts to demonstrate their understanding of the photo essay. (Note for teachers: Just as quotes from a book or text are used to prove an analytical thought, students use the photo essay to justify their reasoning.)



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1. Professor Madhab Gautam of the local Tribhuvan University in Nepal said, “So many things – religious, cultural, historical, social, and economic – are interconnected here. This is a city for which the cultural sites are part of its skeleton. If you take them away, the city collapses.”\* Think about your own city or town. Which buildings are important? What would happen if these buildings collapsed from an earthquake? Do you think it would matter to preserve these buildings? Why or why not? (CCSS.ELA.SL.9-10.5 and SL.11-12.5)
2. Imagine you are a TV news reporter documenting Kathmandu in a segment titled “Before and After.” Watch this 3 minute video from *The New York Times* “[Nepal Before the Quake](#),” to view life in Kathmandu before the 2015 earthquake. Using this video and the photo essay, write a short paragraph to describe Kathmandu and how the earthquake has changed the region based on what you have observed. Answer the following questions and incorporate them into your description: How does the narrator in the video describe Kathmandu? What are three components the narrator explains are intertwined with urban life? How could the loss of these cultural artifacts transform the Kathmandu Valley? As a TV news reporter, how would you assess the value and importance of the cultural artifacts of the Kathmandu Valley? How would you describe this to your viewers? (C3.D2.His.12.9-12)
3. [The National Museum of American History](#), part of the Smithsonian Institution, preserves a wide collection of American historical artifacts.\*\* The objects depict American history and culture. Some examples include: adding machines, old postcards, compasses, and portable bathtubs from the early 19th century. Imagine you were to include an object from 2015 for this exhibit for the future in 50 years. What object would you choose? Why? How is the object used? In what way does this object explain how we act in our culture today? (C3.D2.Geo.2.9-12)

\* Jason Burke, “[Nepal begins to assess its cultural losses after earthquake](#).”

*The Guardian*, May 1, 2015.

\*\* Steven Lubar and Kathleen Kendrick, “[Looking at Artifacts, Thinking About History](#).”

Smithsonian Education.



## After the Quake: Preserving the Artifacts of Kathmandu

### Resources

[Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust.](#)

Rajneesh Bhandari and Jonah M. Kessel, "[Rescuing Nepal's Relics.](#)" *New York Times* Video, May 20, 2015.

Jonah M. Kessel, "[Katmandu: Before the Quake.](#)" *New York Times* Video, April 27, 2015.

Kirk Siegler, "[In Nepal, Efforts Underway to Salvage Ancient Sites Damaged by Earth Quake.](#)" NPR, May 3, 2015.

Kristin Romey, "[Nepal's 8 Key Historic Sites: What's Rubble, What's Still Standing.](#)" *National Geographic*, April 27, 2015.