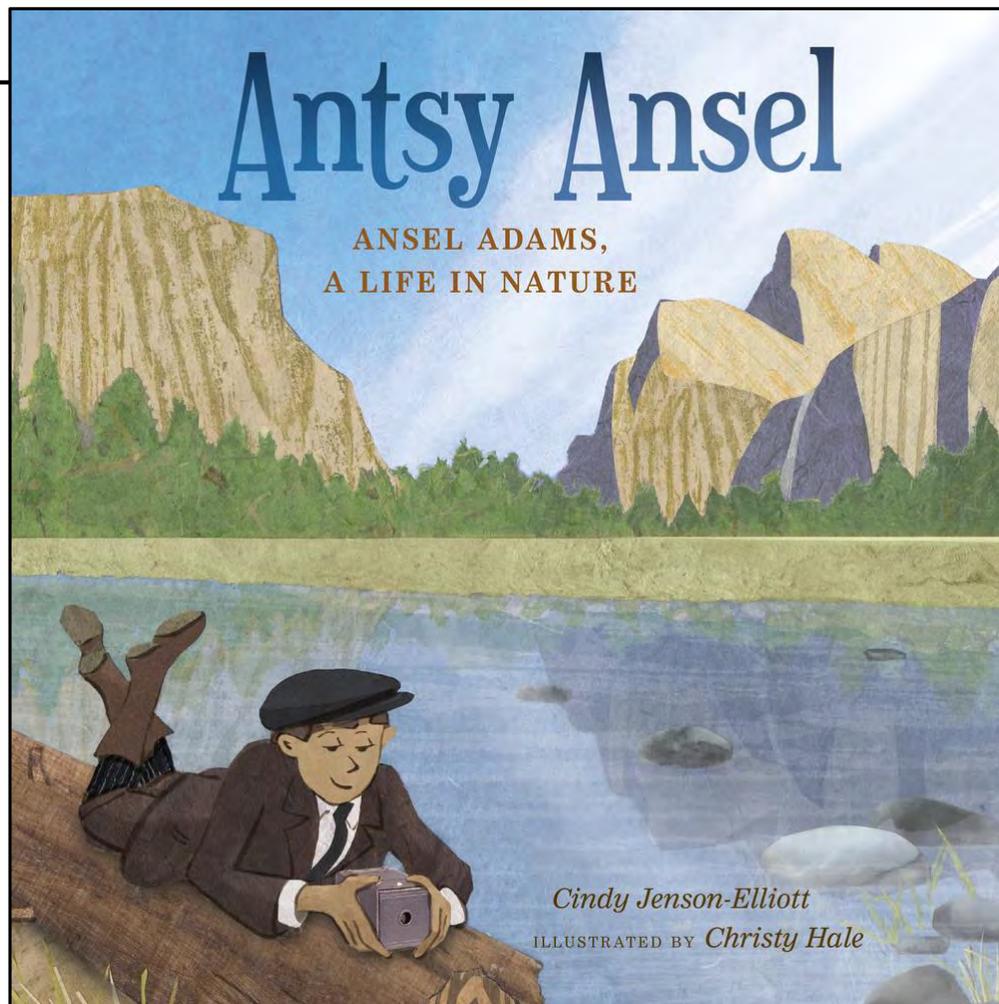


Educators' Guide to *Antsy Ansel*:  
*Ansel Adams, a Life in Nature*



## Educators' Guide to *Antsy Ansel: Ansel Adams, a Life in Nature*

Dear Educator,

Most of us have had an “antsy Ansel” in our classrooms: the girl who just cannot stop talking, the boy whose body is in constant motion. Whether or not they are diagnosed with ADHD, these are students who need to move in order to learn. Keeping an orderly classroom environment while meeting the needs of these active learners is challenging. My hope is that Ansel Adams’s story will inspire you to lead these children outside and to consider nature as a tool for learning for all children.

I first heard the story of Ansel Adams’s childhood in a lecture by Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Louv told his audience how Charles Adams, Ansel’s father, had taken Ansel out of school in the early 1900s and gave him tutors as teachers and free access to nature as a classroom. This action, Ansel Adams later wrote, would set the direction of his life and enable him to become a lifelong learner who was constantly seeking to improve his art.

I have written this Educator’s Guide to give you ways to use *Antsy Ansel* as a tool to bring nature into your classroom. I have included lessons that can be tweaked to apply to different age groups. For most, I have used the 5-E format for these lesson plans—Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate—to help you connect Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and Common Core State Standards (CCSS) with literacy through inquiry and hands-on activities. As a teacher and environmental educator, I know that literature can be a wonderful bridge to link inside and outside learning. Stories can help us connect what we need to teach children with what children need to learn. Visit my website at [cindyjensonelliott.com](http://cindyjensonelliott.com) for more book ideas that can help you link classroom learning with the natural world.

May you and your students, like Ansel, develop a relationship with nature—a world of wonder in light! Light! Light!

With appreciation,  
Cindy Jenson-Elliott

Soon, Ansel's photographs became famous.  
When the United States government and  
*Life* magazine asked him to take pictures,  
Ansel traveled far and wide, showing  
a nation its true nature in  
national parks,  
crystal caverns,  
craggy peaks,  
canyons carved by time,  
silver rivers swirling  
through wide-open land . . .



Lessons:

1. Reading and Discussion: *Antsy Ansel*
2. Ansel Adam's Photographs—Visual Literacy and Photography
3. Letting in the Light: Making a Pinhole Projector
4. Writing and Photography in Nature
5. Exploring National Parks—Making a Brochure

Standards Addressed: Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) / Elementary–Middle School

Elementary:

- 1-PS4-2. Make observations to construct an evidence-based account that objects in darkness can be seen only when illuminated.
- 1-PS4-3. Plan and conduct investigations to determine the effect of placing objects made with different materials in the path of a beam of light.

Middle School

PS4.B: Electromagnetic Radiation

- MS-PS4-2 When light shines on an object, it is reflected, absorbed, or transmitted through the object, depending on the object's material and the frequency (color) of the light.
- MS-PS4-2 The path that light travels can be traced as straight lines, except at surfaces between different transparent materials (e.g., air and water, air and glass) where the light path bends.

**CCSS Speaking and Listening:**

- SL K-2 1, 3 with increasing complexity per grade level:  
Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.  
Ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.

**CCSS Reading:**

- RL 1.7: Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting or events.
- RL 1.1 Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
- RL 2.1 Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

**CCSS Writing (with increasing complexity per grade level)**

- W K-2, 7 Participate in shared research and writing projects.
- W K-2, 8 With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

- W K-2, 2 Informative Text Type: Write informative/explanatory texts in which students name a topic and supply facts about the topic.
- W K-2, 3 Narrative Text Type: Write a narrative in which students use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely linked events, tell about the events in the order in which they occurred, and provide a reaction to what happened.
- CCSS.W.5.3.D Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.

CCSS.RH.6-8.7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

CCSS.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2.A Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories as appropriate to achieving purpose; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2.B Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.

CCSS. CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**Lesson One: Exploring *Antsy Ansel: Ansel Adams, A Life in Nature*** by Cindy Jenson-Elliott; Illustrated by Christy Hale

**Objective:** Close Reading: Exploring *Antsy Ansel* through pre-reading, reading, discussion, and writing.

**Pre-Reading:**

CCSS ELA RL 1.7

Show the cover of *Antsy Ansel*. Ask students what they know about Ansel Adams. Ask them what the cover tells us about him. Record ideas.

Ask students what the cover makes them wonder about Ansel Adams. Record their questions.

Take a picture walk through the book. Ask students to look at the pictures and make predictions about what this biography might focus on. Write down ideas.

Vocabulary Wall—preview any words students may not know. Possibilities are: *antsy, gusting gales, temblor, yearned, discipline, impressionists, aromas*.

**While Reading:**

CCSS ELA RL 1.1

As you read *Antsy Ansel*, review questions students asked prior to reading. Ask if they have been answered.

**After Reading:**

CCSS RL 1.1 Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

CCSS RL 2.1 Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

**Checking Comprehension—Discussion, Digging Deeper**

How did the author *show* that Ansel was antsy?

What did his father do to help him manage his antsy feelings?

How do you think this might have influenced his later career?

**Writing**

CCSS W K-2, 3 Narrative Text Type

Personal Connections and Personal Narrative Writing

Discussion: What does it feel like when you feel antsy? Describe a time when you felt antsy. Where were you? What were you doing? How did you feel? What happened? What helped you get your energy out?

## Lesson Two: Visual Literacy: Exploring Ansel Adams's Photographs (All Grades)

### Standards Addressed:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1

### Engage:

Look at two of Ansel Adams's photographs at [anseladams.com](http://anseladams.com).

Pick a photo of a landscape and a photo of nature up close.

Use Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) to unlock student ideas about each photograph, one at a time.

With a photograph projected at the front of the class, ask students the following questions:

- What's going on in this picture?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can we find?

### Things students might notice:

- Focus on nature; often no humans
- Black-and-white photos with contrast
- Large landscapes or small details
- How photos make them feel

### Explore:

Have students select another Ansel Adams photo online to look at.

Working with a partner, have them use VTS strategies and questions to look more deeply into the photograph.

Write about the photograph, including questions that arise about Ansel Adams after seeing more photographs.

Sentence starters:

"I notice . . ." "I see . . ." "I wonder . . ."

### Explain:

Watch a video of Ansel Adams to learn more about his life and techniques. Below are some videos in which Ansel's son, Michael Adams, and Ansel himself talk about Ansel Adams's photography in Yosemite.

<http://www.anseladams.com/interview-on-ansel-adams-with-his-son-michael-adams/>

<http://www.anseladams.com/ansel-adamss-story-visualization/>

Read “Ansel Adams: Life and Legacy” at the end of *Antsy Ansel: Ansel Adams, A Life in Nature*, particularly “Photographic Visionary.” Ask students to name two techniques Ansel Adams used in his photography. (Examples: envisioning a photograph before he took it; straight photography—photographs of ordinary life without embellishment.)

**Elaborate:** Using disposable cameras or other available photographic equipment, take students outside to try their hand at photographing nature. The school yard, school garden, or nearby nature are good places to begin.

Straight Photography: Close-up photography of insects, dirt, spider webs, leaves, bark, etc.

Visualization: Try visualizing what the photo might look like before taking it. What is your point of view? Try different perspectives—close up, far away, side view, front, bird's-eye, worm's-eye. Framing the picture—what exactly should be in the photo?

**Evaluate:** Critiques

Hold a class critique of photographs. Hang photos on the wall or project digital photos on a screen and ask students to do a “museum walk” and write helpful suggestions on sticky notes next to the photos. Use the following sentence starters for healthy and helpful critiques.

“I notice . . .”

“I wish . . .”

“I wonder if you could . . .”

Have students collect their responses and write a paragraph about how they could improve their photos the next time around.

**Exhibit:**

If possible, do two more rounds of photos outdoors and have students use feedback from critiques to improve their work. After the third round, students can choose a photo to display in a class gallery exhibition. Have them write a paragraph about why they chose to take that

particular picture in nature, the challenges they faced improving their work, and what they learned from the process. These paragraphs can be displayed alongside photos. Invite families to attend!



**Lesson Three:**  
**Letting in the Light**  
**Making a Pinhole Projector**

Standards Addressed:

NGSS: 1-PS4-2, 1-PS4-3; MS PS4-B;  
CCSS: SL K-2 1, 3; W K-2, 8

**Engage:** Read *Antsy Ansel*.

Additional Information: When Ansel Adams was fourteen and on his first trip to Yosemite, his parents gave him his first camera. It was a Kodak Box Brownie camera—a pinhole camera that uses a small hole to let in light that strikes film and leaves an image. As he ran around exploring the valley, he took pictures everywhere he went as a visual journal of his vacation. In his autobiography, he describes tumbling over the top of a log and accidentally clicking the shutter on the camera. When he developed the film, Ansel discovered that every image was upside down, but the image he took while flying through the air was right side up. Why?

**Explore:**

You can make your own pinhole projector or camera and see how a camera makes an image on film. Experiment with the following basic design. Then experiment to see how changing the size of the pinhole and/or camera can sharpen the image. Or change the design of the camera and use film to record images by following online instructions for making a pinhole camera.

**Materials:**

Any small, round container with a tight-fitting lid, such as a coffee can or oatmeal box  
Black paint or construction paper  
Wax paper  
A rubber band  
A light source such as a lamp  
A blanket  
awl

**Directions:**

Poke a small hole the size of a pencil point in the center of the bottom of the container.  
Paint the inside of the container and lid black (or cover the insides with black construction paper).  
Cover the open end of the container with waxed paper and secure with a rubber band.  
Cover yourself and the “camera” with the blanket so that only the pinhole end is sticking out of the blanket. This will allow light to enter the camera only through the pinhole. Hold the camera away from your body so you have a good view of the waxed paper. What do you see? You should see an upside-down view of what is outside your blanket “darkroom.”

**Explain:**

Discuss with a partner: Why do you think you see the image? Why is the image upside down? How is light coming into the camera?

**Elaborate: (Grades 4–8)**

Make your pinhole projector into a pinhole camera. Many excellent instruction videos are available online, including through the Kodak company, maker of the original Box Brownie camera.

[http://www.kodak.com/ek/US/en/Pinhole\\_Camera.htm](http://www.kodak.com/ek/US/en/Pinhole_Camera.htm)

**Evaluate:**

Find pinhole camera images online and share these with the class. Have students write a brief explanation and diagram explaining how the pinhole camera works.

**Extension:**

Make a giant pinhole projector out of a big box. Put a hole on one side and a screen at the other. Students can climb inside to see the image projected on the screen.



**Lesson Four:**  
**Writing in Nature—Nature Journaling (All Grades)**

CCSS: Nature writing can incorporate elements of narrative and informative writing.

*“On the Golden Gate beach near his house, nature was big and loud and wild. Gusting gales pushed and pulled; salt spray stung his cheeks; surf pounded the sand—BOOM!”*

*“But nature could be quiet, too. On Lobos Creek, it whispered and winked, flickered and flew, shimmered and shone for Ansel’s eyes alone.”*

**Engage:**

Read *Antsy Ansel*. Look for examples that show what Ansel Adams might have experienced in nature.

**Explore:**

Go outside and find a place to be quiet in nature. Spend 10 to 30 minutes (depending on children’s activity level) outside in your school yard, school garden, or nearby nature. Have kids separate, sit alone, and see what they notice. What do they hear? See? Smell? Feel? Write and draw.

Go back to the same spot three times. What has changed? Do the students notice different things each time?

**Elaborate:** After each visit outdoors, students can share their writing. Point out effective details in writing and effective observations in nature featuring all of the senses. Each time students go out to write, remind them to check in with all their senses. Add those sensory descriptions to their writing.

**Evaluate:** Students can pick out one piece of writing and/or art to polish or turn into an illustrated poem such as a haiku or a descriptive piece about their place in nature.

## Lesson Five: National Parks Brochures (Grades 4–6)

### Standards Addressed:

- W K-2, 2
- CCSS RH.6-8.7
- CCSS.R.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2.B
- CCSS. CCRA.SL.1

### **Introduction:**

2016 marked the centennial of the National Park Service. Ansel Adams took photographs of many national parks on behalf of the National Park Service to encourage the public to visit national parks.

### **Engage:**

Watch a video about the National Park centennial, like the trailer for MacGillvray-Freeman's *National Park Adventure* or the National Park Service's own videos at

<https://www.nps.gov/media/video/view.htm?id=0099FACD-155D-451F-67CCE9B704B95D12>.

### **Explore:**

Working in pairs, students will research a national park using books, Internet sources, and—if possible—primary source materials such as visits to parks or secondary source materials such as interviews with people who have visited that national park.

**Elaborate:** Each pair will make a three-fold travel brochure featuring art and writing about what you might find if you went to that park. Include information on:

- Location
- Special sights to see
- History of the park
- Animals and plants in the park
- Resources for tourists

**Evaluate:** Share final brochures in a family exhibition or in the school library.

