

Google street view

Language level:	Intermediate (B1) +
Learner type:	Teens; Adults
Time:	30 minutes (+ Follow up discussion)
Activity:	Mental image dictation
Topic:	Google; Privacy
Language:	Looking at; Looks like; Looks as if, etc.



Since 2007, Google has been sending specially-adapted cars into our streets, each one equipped with nine cameras on a pole. The aim has been to obtain pictures for [Street View](#), which can be accessed via Google maps and Google Earth. As is the case with life, the random images that are generated are usually mundane and unremarkable. But as would also be expected, there are hidden moments of love and beauty, life and death, tragedy and destruction, and absolute bizarreness. For a project titled *The Nine Eyes of Google Street View*, artist Jon Rafman has spent the last few years collecting and curating such images. This lesson plan aims to make use of some of the issues that he raises.



Links:

- Slideshow on the Guardian website: <http://goo.gl/J8meL>
- Essay and images by the artist: <http://goo.gl/0m5T>
- More images: <http://9-eyes.com/>
- The artist's website: <http://jonrafman.com/>

Preparation, materials and equipment

1. For this activity, you will need to choose and download a few of the Google Street View images from *The Nine Eyes of Google Street View* (see links above).

Decide how you are going to display the slideshow in class. Possibilities include:

- Mobile device (For one-to-one situations)
- Laptop, desktop, tablet computer (For small groups)
- Computer, projector + screen (For larger classes)

2. Spend some time preparing a short description of each image. Grade the language to your learners' abilities whenever possible. Possible language points are discussed in the **Comment** on page 7. Some example descriptions are given below (pages 3 to 5).

*This is a street scene. It is almost certainly New York. **How can I tell?** There are no landmarks but there are two yellow cabs. There is a man standing on the street corner. He isn't paying any attention to us. He looks ecstatic. He's got his arms in the air **as if** his football team has just scored the winning goal.*



*This is strange. In this picture, there is a little boy hiding outside a house. He is crouching down behind a rubbish bin. He is looking at us and looks frightened. It **looks like** he is hiding from us. Is he frightened of us?*



*This isn't a nice picture at all. In this photograph, there's been an accident and it doesn't **look good**. The victim is lying in the middle of the road and there is a crowd of people around him. He is receiving attention from medics but I can't see his face and I **can't tell if** he's dead or alive.*



In this picture, there is an old man walking on the pavement. He's wearing jeans, a beige jacket and a black hat. He is carrying a walking stick. He isn't looking at us. Perhaps he doesn't see us. The strange thing is that a few meters behind him, there's another old man who seems to be wearing exactly the same clothes and is also carrying a walking stick. It looks **as if** they are clones.



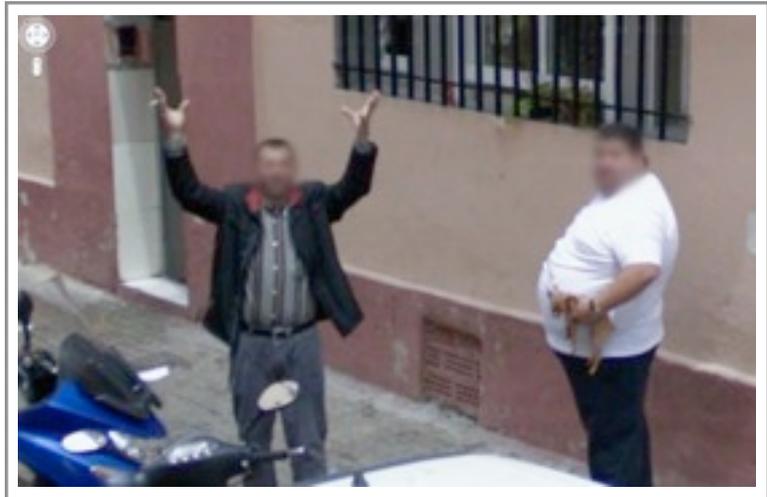
This **looks like** a scene from a David Lynch film. The adjective to describe it might be 'eerie'. We are looking down a road in a desert. There are four people in the picture and they are all staring at us. It's **as if** they are checking us out. The scary thing is that they are all dressed up. One of them is dressed up as a wolf, one of them is dressed up as a cowboy. And two of them are dressed up as what could be the ghost character from the film 'Scream'.



In this photograph, there a pick up truck outside a house. There is a woman opening the door of the truck. It **looks like** she is getting in. There is also a man standing beside her. But there is something sinister going on here. In the back of the truck, there is a third person - someone lying down on his back (I think it's a man). It **looks as if** he might be dead and the idea comes into my mind that he might have been murdered.



*In this picture there are two men. They are looking directly at us **as if** we are intruders. Perhaps we have interrupted their conversation. The guy on the right is a big guy and he's holding a tiny dog. The guy on the left is waving his arms at us **as if to say**, "What are you doing here?"*



Lesson plan

1. On the board, write the following:

The Nine Eyes of _____

2. Tell students that this is the title of an art project which involves a number of photographs. Ask if anyone can suggest what the missing words are.
3. Read (or dictate) the following passage to your students:

According to the artist, the images are artless and meaningless. They lack human intention and give no particular significance to any person or event. As a result, the world that the images represent is more truthful and transparent than the world that is represented by conventional photography. They represent true documentary photography.

4. Ask students to speculate about the nature of the project. Don't worry if no one has anything to say at this stage. The aim is to get them engaged.
5. Tell students that you are going to describe a number of the images to them. Tell them that their task is to work out what the images have in common. If they can do this, they will be able to identify the nature of the art project and identify the three missing words from the title in **Step 1** above.

6. One by one, describe the images to your students. As you do this:
 - Make sure that your students do not see the images.
 - Read directly from the texts if you like.
 - Make students believe that you are looking at images rather than reading from a text.
 - Ask questions and encourage student interaction when possible.
 - Draw attention to new or useful language and write this on the board.
7. Describe all of the pictures a second time. This can serve as a recap of the language. Aim to elicit words, phrases, grammar structures, etc. that you have already used (*crouching down, eerie, a walking stick, dressed up as, as if his football team has just scored the winning goal, it looks as if they are clones, as if to say, "What are you doing here?"*, etc.)
8. If students are unable to work out the connection (this will probably be the case), tell them that you are going to give them a number of clues. Read out the sentences in the box below:

- The quality of the photographs is not excellent but they have all been taken since 2007.
- The name of the artist behind is Jon Rafman. However, he didn't take any of the photographs himself. For the last few years, he has been collecting and curating images like these.
- The artist found all of the images online.
- For reasons of privacy, all faces and license plates are blurred.
- All of the images have a little icon in the top left hand corner that looks like a compass.
- The photographs were taken with an automated camera. They were all shot from the middle of the street from a height of 2.5 meters.

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• Note: Try to prevent students from shouting out answers at this stage. The
• aim is to give each student the opportunity to work out the answer for himself.
• You could ask students to write down their answers. Alternatively, put students
• into pairs and ask them to discuss their ideas in private.
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9. Take feedback and find out who has guessed the answer and managed to complete the title of the art project (*The Nine Eyes of Google Street View*.) Ask students if they know what the Nine Eyes refer to. Show them the picture of the Google camera car on page 2 and point out the nine camera lenses that it uses to capture images (Link here: <http://goo.gl/edK7m>)
10. Show students the slideshow. Use each image to recall as much language as possible from your prepared descriptions.

Comment

Note that in most of the images, the camera is unobtrusive. In some, however, the viewer seems to be taking part in some way or another. Descriptions can draw attention to this. Make use of phrases such as those in the box on the right.

... unaware of our presence
... doesn't see us
... looking straight at us
... staring at us
... hiding from us
... not paying attention to us
... looks like they are checking us out
... seems interested in us
... looks frightened of us
... looks like / as if
... running away from us

Alternatively, make use of phrases/structures such as *look + adjective*, *look like*, *as if*, *can't tell*, etc.

*It is almost certainly New York. **How can I tell?***
*He's got his arms in the air **as if** his football team has just scored the winning goal.*
*It **looks like** he is hiding from us. Is he frightened of us?*
*There's been an accident and it doesn't **look good**.*
*I **can't tell if** he's dead or alive.*
*It looks **as if** they are clones.*
*This **looks like** a scene from a David Lynch film.*
*It's **as if** they are checking us out.*
*There is a woman opening the door of the truck. It **looks like** she is getting in.*
*It **looks as if** he might be dead and the idea comes into my mind that he might have been murdered.*

Variations

- After **Step 7** (page 6) dictate a number of sentences that you have isolated from your description (see **Comment** on page 6 for examples). Later, when you show students the slide show, use the images to elicit the dictated sentences from memory.
- Find the place where you teach on Street View, find an image of a local point of interest that everyone knows. Screen capture the image and incorporate it into the slide show. During the description, tell students that: “*This is not the most interesting image in the series but it is the most relevant one to us.*”

Follow up

Use this activity to introduce the topic of privacy. On a number of occasions, Google Street View has found itself in hot water over this issue (see: <http://goo.gl/zgkds>). Find out what your students think with the following questions:

- **Do you think that the Google Street View project is ethical or not?**
- **How would you feel if you saw yourself in one of these photographs, taken without your consent?**

Note: This could depend on what you are doing in the picture. Privacy advocates have drawn attention to, for example, photographs of nude people captured in their own homes, or individuals leaving gay bars who may not want their sexual orientation to be known.

- **Is it enough to blur people’s faces and car registrations? Are there any other privacy precautions that Google could take?**

Note: In a number of situations, the software that is used to blur people’s faces fails to work. However, Google does have a ‘Report a problem’ function at the bottom of every Google Street View image that can be used in such situations.

- **Google maintains that all photos were taken from public property. Do you think that this makes it OK?**

Although the property is public, the elevated position of the camera may allow it to look over hedges and walls to view areas that would otherwise not be visible. In any case, some countries have laws which prohibit taking photographs of people in public places for public use, without their consent. (See: <http://goo.gl/g41wh>)

- **Do you think people should be more concerned than they are? If so, what should we do about it?**

Do you think Street View is useful? Do you think that the pros outweigh the cons?