Material World photographer Peter Menzel with Buddhist monks in Bhutan
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Bhutan

- Small, mountainous country
- Traditional agricultural lifestyle
- Social, medical, and environmental difficulties
Although the Namgay family is wearing a rainbow of colors, two other dominant colors appear in the photograph.

- What are those colors, and why are they so widespread?
• Do you think they have to travel far from their home to do this work?
• What evidence do you see in the photograph to support your answer?

• What type of work do you think the Namgay family does?
• Describe the appearance of the house
• What materials do you think it is made of?
• What purpose do you think this section of the house serves?
• Who might live in this part of the house (besides the family members)?
• What do you think the family has placed above and below the window?
• What function (e.g., furniture, food, recreation) might it serve?
• What do you think these objects sitting in front of the family are?
• What purpose might they serve?
• Why do you think they appear in the foreground of the photograph?
Can you guess what this food item might be?
• Do you notice any modern technology in this photograph?

• What does this indicate about the family’s lifestyle and standard of living?
Discuss how the Namgay family’s life differs from that of most people in the United States.
This photograph shows the family in 2001, along with the new possessions they’d acquired since the original photograph was taken.
Cuba

- Island country in the Caribbean
- Major sugar producer in the 19th century; African slaves
- Fidel Castro
• Do you think the Costa family lives in a city or a small town?
• What evidence do you see to support your answer?
• Describe the appearance of the buildings
• Do they seem new or old?
• What forms of modern technology do you see in this photograph, including vehicles?
• Do they appear old or new, compared with the appliances and vehicles you have in your home?
• Do you think the Costa family knows its neighbors very well?
• Why or why not?
• How many generations of people appear in this picture?
• Who lives in this house?
• Why do you think this household might consist of more than simply parents and children?
• What kind of trees do you see?
• What does this imply about Cuba’s climate?
This photograph shows the family in 2001, along with the new possessions they’d acquired since the original photograph was taken.
Mali

- Vast mineral resources and cultural wealth
- A very poor country
- At one time, a very wealthy kingdom
- Former French colony
This photo shows the family sitting on top of its house with all of its possessions.

• How do this family’s possessions compare with those of the typical American family?
• What is this house made of?
• What does this tell you about the climate and landscape in this part of Mali?
Does this home have electricity?
As you have seen, most of this family’s possessions are related to cooking.

- What does this tell you about the family’s lifestyle?
- Who do you think does the cooking?
What do you think the woman in blue with the two small children at the lower left is doing?
• What do you think this part of the house is used for?
• How can you tell?
What might the family use this net for?
• What are these people doing?
• Why do you think they’re on the roof?
• What does this suggest about the climate and temperature in this area at this time of year?
What might this white tent be used for?
This photograph shows the family in 2001, along with the new possessions they’d acquired since the original photograph was taken.
Kuwait

- Small country along the Persian Gulf
- Vast petroleum resources
- Economy flourished in the 20th century
- Severely damaged by 1990 Iraq invasion
This is the Abdulla family’s house.

- What do you notice about its appearance?
- How does it compare with houses you might see in the United States?
• Do they look relatively old or new?
• Why do you think they have four cars?
• What does this tell you about this family’s standard of living as compared with that of the other families you’ve seen in this presentation?

• Describe the appearance of the family’s cars
Why do you think they have such a big sofa?
From what you can see in this picture, what are the landscape and climate like in Kuwait?
The striped towers have something in common with the tanks that can be seen on nearly every house.

What do you think these towers and tanks might hold?
South Africa

- Mineral wealth
- Apartheid
- Soweto
Describe the landscape surrounding Johannesburg.
• What do you think the climate is like here?
• What was the weather like on the day this photo was taken?
• What evidence do you see in the picture that supports your answer?
• Describe the fences
• Why do you think each house has one?
What do you notice about the windows of the Qampie family’s house?
• What is the “street life” like at this time of day?
• Do people seem afraid to be outside?
• What does this tell you about nighttime versus daytime in Soweto?
• Do you think the Qampie family is poor, middle class, or wealthy by black South African standards?
• How can you tell?
• Do you see any cars in this picture?
• Why do you think this might be the case?
• What are these two towers in the distance?
• What do they tell you about the city of Johannesburg and its power supply?
Mongolia

- Sparsely populated
- Formerly communist, now democratic
- One-third of people are nomadic or semi-nomadic; one-third live in the capital city
The Regzen family lives in a round tent-like house that can be taken apart and put back together, much like a set of Tinkertoys covered with a warm cloth.

- Why would they live in such a structure?
Describe the landscape in this part of Mongolia.
• What season is it in this picture?
• What do you think it’s like here in the winter?
• What evidence do you see to support your answer?
The Regzen family has a television but no bathroom or running water in their house. Why do you think this is the case?
This is the mother’s most prized possession. What purpose do you think it serves?
What type of meat might this family have eaten on this night?
This photograph shows the family in 2001, along with the new possessions they’d acquired since the original photograph was taken.
Japan

- Major changes in the past century
- Most people live in urban areas on the coasts
- Similarities and differences between Japanese and American families
• Describe the neighborhood, from what you can see
• Does it seem like a busy, crowded urban environment, a quiet suburb, or something in between?
• What type of clothing do you see hanging here?
• What does this suggest about the father’s job and lifestyle?
• What types of modern technology do you notice?
• What does this tell you about the family’s standard of living and lifestyle?
• Where do the girls sleep?
• What does this suggest about the size of the house?
The family probably uses this kitchen appliance every day.
What type of food do you think it cooks?
This photograph shows the family in 2001, along with the new possessions they’d acquired since the original photograph was taken.
• A highly developed country
• Natural energy resources
• What do you think one of the main industries in this town is?
• How can you tell?
Describe the landscape and environment where the Thoroddsen family lives.

What do you think it’s like here during the winter and summer?
This picture was taken in the mid-afternoon.

- What does this tell you about Iceland’s latitude?
- During what time of year do you think the picture was taken?
In what ways might the structure of the house make it easier for the family to live comfortably in Iceland’s cold climate?
What are some of this family’s most valued possessions?
What do you think the members of this family might do for recreation?
This photograph shows the family in 2004.
Thailand

- Never colonized
- Relatively stable government and growing economy
- Buddhist culture
• Describe the Kuankaew family’s surroundings

• Do they live in the city or the countryside?
• How do their home and its surroundings compare to typical homes where you live?
• Do they drive a car?
• What might this indicate about the family and the area in which they live?

• How do you think family members get around?
• Does this home have electricity?

• What evidence do you see to support your answer?
• What does this tell you about the level of modernization in rural Thailand?
• What do you notice about the family members’ clothing?
• What does their attire suggest about their income level and way of life?
What do you think the net is used for?
As you have seen, families in rural Thailand must cope with the abundant insect life in this tropical region.

• What purpose might these small bowls beneath the legs of this screened food storage cabinet serve?
• What animals do you see in this picture?
• What purposes do you think these animals serve for the family?
• What does the presence of livestock tell you about the family’s lifestyle?
• What is this boy doing?
• What does this tell you about changes that might be occurring in Thai culture?
Samoa

- Formerly called Western Samoa
- Traditional culture with some modernization
- Christianity
This is a traditional Samoan house, called a *fale*.

- In what ways do you think this house is well suited to the climate of Western Samoa?
• How much privacy do you think members of his family have in their house?
• What does this imply about the extent to which Samoans value privacy?
Describe the people’s clothing

How does this clothing reflect the environment in which the family lives?
What do you think this family does for recreation? Provide evidence from the photograph to support your answer.
What foods do you think this family commonly includes in its diet?
• What is the mother sitting on?
• What materials surround her?
Mexico

- World’s largest Spanish-speaking country
- Rapid industrialization
- Emerging middle class
- Increasing urbanization
• Describe the neighborhood where the family lives

• Does it appear to be in the center of Guadalajara or away from the center?

• What evidence do you see to support your answer?
Considering what you have learned about this family’s neighborhood, what benefits do you think this courtyard provides them?
• What forms of in-home entertainment does the family enjoy?

• What objects do you see in photographs to support your answer?

• What do you think their favorite type of entertainment is?
• What are these?
• What do they tell you about conditions in this neighborhood?
The title of this chapter in the *Material World* book is “Vaulting Into the Middle Class.”

- Why do you think the author chose this title?
- What evidence do you see in the photograph to suggest that this family is “vaulting into the middle class?”
United States

- Third largest country; largest national economy
- Three-quarters Christian
- Modern societal strains
What is the family’s house like?
What type of town or neighborhood do you think they live in?
In what ways is this neighborhood similar to or different from the American homes and neighborhoods you’re familiar with?
• What is the mother holding?
• What does this tell you about the family’s cultural life and values?
• How many motor vehicles do you see in this picture?
• What kind of vehicles are they?
• Why might the family have this number of vehicles?
What do members of the Skeen family do in their leisure time?

What evidence do you see in the photograph to support your answer?

How do these leisure activities compare with some of the things you do for fun?

How do they compare with the recreational activities of other families you’ve seen in this presentation?
Imagine that your family has been selected to take part in the “Big Picture,” just as the Skeen family and the other families you’ve seen agreed to do.

- What items would you want to highlight in the foreground of the photograph?
- How do you think the photograph would reflect your family’s lifestyle and values?