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IN FEBRUARY 2013 during a meeting of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Visual Literacy Task Force, which we comprise, an agenda item read, “Next VLTF project.” We wanted to help academic librarians learn to apply, teach, and promote visual literacy, and we brainstormed ways to do this. By the fall of 2014 we were writing Visual Literacy for Libraries.

This book came out of a truly collaborative process: we wrote it together. This is not an edited volume or an anthology—this is a coauthored work, jointly conceived and collectively written. Each of us brings a unique perspective to visual literacy, and we felt that this was the best way to reflect our range of experiences and create a cohesive whole. Instead of divvying up chapters or sections, we worked to develop a unified voice. We adopted such practices as using a common language for each phase of writing; we like the Madman (we call it Madwoman, of course)–Architect–Carpenter–Judge model introduced by Betty S. Flowers in a 1981 Language Arts piece on roles in the writing process. We wrote in assigned colors (Nicole, pink; Denise, blue; Kaila, purple; Ann, maroon) to signal when we were in true “hashing it out mode,” making our thought processes as apparent as we could to each other. As we coedited the prose, we collaboratively decided when to turn the text to black, meaning we all signed off (at least for the stage we were in). As we wrote, we generated an authorial voice that is uniquely “ours,” different than any one of us would have done alone, and certainly richer.
VISUAL LITERACY HAS a long history and means different things to different people. As we’ve worked with visual literacy over the past decade (some of us more, some less), we’ve heard lots of different takes on what visual literacy is all about. We’ve heard that it is only for art historians or graphic designers and that librarians shouldn’t be involved. We’ve seen presentations that equate visual literacy with art appreciation. We’ve encountered befuddled looks from librarians wondering what we’re talking about . . . and why?

Why Visual Literacy and Academic Libraries?

When we step back and think about how to situate visual literacy into a library context, the word critical keeps coming up: critical thinking, critical viewing, critical using, critical making, and the list goes on. To understand our approach, start with your own practice, add images, and see where it takes you.

Do you encourage students to think critically as they research?
How can you extend this experience to images?
Do you embrace critical information literacy?
Can you bring visual content to enrich that experience?
Do you teach students to critically evaluate sources?
How can you expand that practice to images?
You’ll see a lot of questions in this book, because our approach is inquiry-driven. This is not to say that we don’t cover the basics of image content. Curious about color? Covered. Not sure where to find great images? We’ll show you. Wondering what makes a good presentation? We talk about that too. But what we really want you to get out of this book is a new understanding of how images fit into our critical (there it is again) practice as librarians and how we can advance student learning with our own visual literacy.

This book grounds visual literacy in your everyday practice—connecting it to what you know and do as a librarian who engages in reflective practice. Heidi Jacobs put it well when she argued that, for information literacy pedagogy, “one of the best ways for us to encourage students to be engaged learners is for us to become engaged learners, delve deeply into our own problem posing, and embody the kind of engagement we want to see in our students” (Jacobs 2008). We extend this viewpoint to visual literacy pedagogy and provide many opportunities for you to embody the kind of visual literacy that you want to develop in your learners.

What Is Visual Literacy?

At this point, you probably want a definition for visual literacy. The following definition is set forth in the ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (see the appendix for the complete standards):

Visual literacy is a set of abilities that enables an individual to effectively find, interpret, evaluate, use, and create images and visual media. Visual literacy enables a learner to understand and analyze the contextual, cultural, ethical, aesthetic, intellectual, and technical components involved in the production and use of visual materials. A visually literate individual is both a critical consumer of visual media and a competent contributor to a body of shared knowledge and culture. (ACRL 2011)

The Visual Literacy array expresses this definition graphically.
Based on ACRL’s Visual Literacy Standards by D. Hattwig, K. Bussert, and A. Medaille. Copyright 2013, Johns Hopkins University Press. This image first appeared in portal: Libraries and the Academy, Volume 13, Issue 1, January 2013, p. 75.

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When you engage with the array, you’ll probably find that you’re comfortable and confident with some concepts, while others make you feel apprehensive or uneasy. That makes sense! Some concepts align with your work, and others take you far from your comfort zone. We’re used to reading and writing text, but an image—whether a painting, photograph, or chart—is an important medium of communication too. And we need skills to “read” and create them. Visual literacy is a natural bridge to information literacy. From finding and using to creating and evaluating, images are part of the research process.

Chapter Breakdown

The chapters in this book are arranged by what you do with images so that you can easily connect the content to your practice when you need to. Chapters 1–5 focus on components of visual literacy, while chapter 6 steps back and looks at visual literacy from a wider angle.
Chapter 1: Interpret and Analyze Images builds fluency with unpacking the meanings of images and visual media.

Chapter 2: Find the Right Images points to sources and practices for finding great images.

Chapter 3: Create and Use Images builds a repertoire of skills for crafting visual communication.

Chapter 4: Ethical Use of Images considers the ethical implications of creating, sharing, and using image content.

Chapter 5: Cite and Credit Images provides tips and templates for giving credit to image creators in scholarly and creative work.

Chapter 6: Images and the Research Process connects images to the larger process of information literacy and the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.

How to Use This Book

This book is meant to be used, and you don’t have to read it cover to cover. Here are some tips to make the most out of this book’s features and empower you to skip around with purpose.

Foundational Questions: Every chapter begins with a set of foundational questions that can be used as prompts for the full process of working with visual materials. Use these questions in the classroom, or parse them out in discussions with students, colleagues, and faculty.

Coffee Breaks: We’ve heard from many of you that you want to develop your own visual literacy, but you don’t know where to begin. Our Coffee Breaks are designed just for you! These short, self-contained, low-stakes activities can be completed at your desk. They are also fun to do with a partner, with a learning community, or in a professional development session. Jump to any Coffee Break for a chance to pause, reflect, and apply visual literacy to your practice.

More to Explore: Look for these lists of resources to learn more about the topics covered in each chapter and to stay up-to-date with new developments. These lists can be great starting points for developing your own visual literacy resources guides.

Visual Literacy in Action: Each chapter ends with a Visual Literacy in Action section filled with practical, outcomes-driven activities for you to use in your everyday work with students. Use the activities as is, or adapt them
to suit your context. Reflect on the activities by capturing your observations about student learning: What evidence of learning was there? Where did students get stuck? How might you revise the activities?

Most of all, have fun! Use our ready-to-go activities, strategies, and ideas to begin working with images. As you support students’ acquisition of visual literacy, you’ll also learn how to use visual materials to make your instruction more engaging. Or, maybe you’ll create a presentation that wows an audience. Whatever your visual literacy goal, this book will give you specific tools to knock it out of the park when you discuss, teach, and practice visual literacy.

REFERENCES


TWO STORIES OCCASIONALLY remind us that image interpretation and analysis skills are essential. In 2010, the United States Postal Service (USPS) issued a Statue of Liberty Forever Stamp featuring an image of a replica of the Statue of Liberty from the New York-New York Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas—not the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. A stamp dealer discovered the mistake, and the collectors’ magazine Linn’s Stamp News reported that the photograph, selected from Getty Images by the USPS, was accompanied by metadata clearly identifying it as the Las Vegas replica. How could this happen with such an iconic monument? Chances are that applying some of the approaches in this chapter could have headed off the mistake. Strategies such as looking carefully, reading the metadata and textual information associated with the image, and discussing with others could have prevented the mistake. Images are all around us, and we’re accustomed to casually glancing at pictures and assuming we know what they are and what they mean. The USPS incident is a good reminder to take the time to look, read, examine, describe, and check understanding.

This chapter sets forth a flexible process for interpreting and analyzing visual content that you can apply in your work with students as they begin to analyze the meanings of images and visual media. Use our adaptable, inquiry-based process in consultations, instruction sessions, and assignment design.
Through systematic looking, thinking, and questioning, students can come to a solid understanding of the way meaning is produced in images. Some activities in this chapter provide entry points for interpreting and analyzing images, and others move into the deeper consideration of images needed for advanced academic work. Activities range from analyzing photographs to reflecting on the implications of image manipulation. The images, activities, and examples in this chapter can be adapted to align with different disciplinary contexts and levels and to inform partnerships with faculty as you embed visual literacy concepts into the curriculum.

**Foundational Questions**

**How Do I Begin Interpreting and Analyzing?**
Start by looking closely at images and asking yourself a few key questions. We offer a flexible, five-step process for interpreting and analyzing visual content. The process begins with learning to look at an image and moves through incorporating textual information, thinking more deeply about meaning, and reflecting on how to further your understanding.

**What about Cultural and Social Context?**
All images carry meanings that can only be understood through a contextualization of how, when, where, and why they were produced. Images do not exist in a vacuum. Situate images within the framework of their social, political, and economic circumstances.

**How Do I Interpret Graphical Information?**
To dig deeper into data visualizations, begin by observing and describing the way the data are being presented. Then, ask questions about the data: Who produced the data? Are the data reliable? What methods were used? Consider the audience, purpose, and effectiveness of visual design as you interpret graphical information.

**What Does the Text That Accompanies Images Tell Me?**
When interpreting and analyzing images, the text you read alongside the images furthers your analysis by telling you more about those images. Use text to gain valuable context about where, how, why, and for whom the image was created. Text may also reveal that an image is part of a larger collection or let you know who holds the image rights.
What Do I Need to Know about Image Alterations and Manipulation?

Has the image you’re looking at been edited and altered? Changes to image files can have significant implications for their meaning, authenticity, and reliability. A general awareness of common image manipulations will help you know what to look out for.

Getting Started: Looking and Interpreting

Careful looking is the essential first step in image interpretation. We encounter so many images in our daily lives that a quick glance is usually all we have time for. When using images in academic work, however, a quick glance does not give us the information we need and can lead to misinterpretation and misuse. Developing the patience to look closely at an image can take practice, and Activity 1.1: Learning to Look gives you the opportunity to walk through this process.

The beginning of a typical library instruction session is an excellent time to present an engaging opening activity using images. Images related to

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*Figure 1.1. Interpreting and Analyzing Images*
course content coupled with a few “looking prompts” can get students in a question-driven mind-set and frame the research process. Try projecting an image related to course material at the beginning of class, then give students a few minutes to engage with the image and to write answers to questions such as: *What do I see? What is going on? Why do I think this image was created?* After students spend a few minutes freewriting answers, use a think-pair-share technique to debrief. Invite students to share their responses with a partner and then open the questions for the whole class to discuss. This approach sets the stage for an inquiry-based research session and works as a lead-in to more pointed visual analysis. **Activity 1.2:** *Interpreting and Analyzing Images* provides a comprehensive process, along with question prompts that can be adapted for instructional scenarios across the disciplines.

**Interpreting the Meanings of an Image**

Image meanings are shaped by factors beyond what is initially visible. The historical and social contexts in which the image was created, and cultural factors such as suggestion, metaphor, and symbols within the image, all contribute to the significance and communicative value of an image. Visual content does not stand alone, and only through careful looking and informed interpretation practices can images be accurately understood and used.
CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

To understand the richness of images as information sources, students need to situate images in their cultural, social, and historical contexts. You can sharpen students' image interpretation skills by regularly using examples of images that differ in terms of time period, medium, and subject matter and by guiding students through the process of looking carefully and making sense of what they see. By learning to interpret images in various contexts, students gain a deeper understanding of visual content and prepare to think about incorporating images into research papers and projects.

Understanding the context of an image includes thinking critically about how the image represents people—both as individuals and as representatives or signifiers of different groups. Image interpretation skills help students to arrive at an informed, nuanced, and historically contextualized understanding of diversity and difference across cultural groups and identifications and among individuals within those groups. Images are also excellent sources for research projects that focus on historical or diversity-related issues because they often contain gender, ethnic, and other cultural or social identifiers, cues, or stereotypes. Visual literacy interpretation practices equip students to approach looking with a critical eye when they encounter images of people different from themselves, and advance students’ research process through accurate and informed analysis of representations.

Use classroom activities to generate discussions about how individuals and groups are depicted in images. Discussions can focus on the relationships among people and objects within the image, the social and economic status of individuals or groups represented, and the use of suggestion and symbolism to portray cultural identifiers. An excellent source for images to generate such discussion is the blog Sociological Images by Lisa Wade, a sociology professor at Occidental College. With over five thousand posts consisting of an image alongside content analysis, Wade's blog aims to encourage people “to exercise and develop their sociological imagination by presenting brief . . . discussions of compelling and timely imagery that span the breadth of sociological inquiry” (Wade n.d.).

Advertisements are another rich source of content for deepening image analysis skills. Exploring the images, layout, and other design choices in ads sharpens visual literacy skills while helping students to think about historical context. You might lead students to ads related to specific time periods, products, or services and then launch into a targeted discussion. Subscription databases, such as ProQuest Historical Newspapers, and free resources, such as Duke University Library's Ad*Access project, are excellent sources for
historical advertisements. When used in the classroom with our Key Questions for Ad Analysis, historical ads build analysis skills while setting the stage for further research. Activity 1.3: Analyzing an Ad for Context situates ad analysis in a library context and uses visual literacy as a bridge to information literacy.

**SUGGESTION AND METAPHOR**

Images are representations that contain meanings beyond the literal, and an image's impact can come from the use of suggestion or metaphor. For example, an image of a lion evokes the literal or primary meaning of a large, orange-colored member of the cat family. However, the same image of a lion might evoke a feeling such as fear or awe, or suggest an idea such as power, importance, or strength. The suggestive or metaphorical meaning derived from images is influenced by the context in which the image is presented and by the type of image used. Thus, an image of a lion that is situated next to an image of a mouse may suggest one meaning while the same image that is situated next to text that reads “It’s a jungle out there!” will suggest another. Similarly, an image of a roaring lion will suggest a meaning that is different from that of a sitting lion, a yawning lion, or a napping lion.

Sometimes images are repeatedly associated with an idea or concept and may come to take on symbolic meaning. So if you’ve ever seen an image of a lion and thought “king,” or seen an image of a dove and thought “peace,” it may be because these animals have been traditionally associated with the idea of a king or peace, not because a lion is a sovereign over other animals or because a dove seeks to create harmony. The interpretation of visual signs, symbols, and their meanings may vary depending on one’s cultural background or life experience,
or the context in which the image is used. For instance, the peace sign might symbolize antiwar sentiments for some or an alternative to waving goodbye for others. Taking a critical approach to investigating the construction of meaning in images is an essential component of image interpretation and analysis.

**Visualizing Data**

Visual representations of data and information let us see relationships, patterns, and trends we may not easily see otherwise. Data visualizations are central to scientific inquiry and communication because they aid in understanding complex information quickly and efficiently. Statistician Francis Anscombe demonstrated the extent to which visualizations can provide critical insight into the qualities of data with his four data sets known as Anscombe’s quartet (Anscombe 1973). Although his data sets have nearly identical statistical properties, they appear very different when presented as graphs because the data contain variations. Visualizations, in other words, reveal important aspects of the data that might otherwise be overlooked. Visualizations can also elicit new insights—for example, when statistical information (quantitative data) is displayed on a map or when the number of words from a textual corpus (qualitative data) is processed as a word cloud.
Though visualizations make quantitative information easier to understand, interpreting and analyzing them requires some instruction and practice. In a review of graph comprehension research, psychologists Shah and Hoeffner (2002) contend that three important factors impact how well someone interprets graphic information: (1) the visual characteristics of the graph, (2) general knowledge about graphs and how they function, and (3) the person’s prior knowledge and beliefs about the content. Shah and Hoeffner argue that to improve graph comprehension educators should train students to apply metacognition and “think of graph reading as an interpretation and evaluation task as opposed to a mere fact retrieval task” (2002, 64). Activity 1.5: Evaluating Data Visualizations in the News takes students through this interpretation and evaluation process by engaging with a real-world news example in which graphs are used to explain a societal trend.

Because being a successful reader of data visualizations depends upon knowing what to look for and what questions to ask, we provide Twenty Key Questions for Interpreting and Evaluating Data Visualizations. The questions are divided into three stages: observation and description, interpretat-
tion, and evaluation. For example, two of our key questions ask students to articulate general knowledge about graphs so that they can practice identifying the format and situating it within a schema that categorizes data visualizations according to the communication goal. This exercise positions students to recognize the type of graph with a description of its basic purpose (e.g., *This is a bar chart, which is useful for comparing values across categories*). Students will begin to grasp that one type of visualization is not necessarily better than another; rather, each has its strengths and limitations. The following sections show common communication purposes alongside a typical example for visualizing data based on the purpose.

**COMPARE VALUES ACROSS CATEGORIES**

**Example:** Bar Chart
A bar chart uses rectangular bars, plotted vertically or horizontally, with the height or length showing each value.

**Strengths**
- Provides a quick comparison of values across categories
- Conveys the maximum, minimum, and relative ranking of the categories being compared

**Limitations**
- Can provide an incomplete or simplified view of the data
- May imply, but not actually reveal, trends and patterns

**Other Examples:** Horizontal Bar Chart, Stacked Bar Chart

**SHOW PARTS OF A WHOLE**

**Example:** Pie Chart
A pie chart is a circle divided into sections that represent proportions of the whole.

**Strengths**
- Shows a percentage or proportion, also known as a *part-to-the-whole* relationship
- Familiar format to a wide audience
Limitations
• Less effective when there is a large number of categories
• Difficult to discern small differences between categories
• Difficult to illustrate trends over time using a series of pie charts

Other Examples: Stacked Bar Chart

SHOW CHANGES OVER TIME

Example: Line Chart
A line chart or line graph uses a line to connect a series of data points.

Strengths
• Shows change over time, or historical trends, when plotted in a time series
• Can compare different data series or multiple lines in the same time frame

Limitations
• More difficult to interpret when comparing multiple lines or series
• Aspect ratio (height and width) can influence the appearance of the lines and interpretation of the chart

Other Examples: Area Chart, Stacked Area Chart

SHOW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VARIABLES

Example: Scatter Plot
A scatter plot (also spelled scatterplot) is a set of data points plotted on the \( x \) and \( y \) axes.

Strengths
• Used to explore relationships or trends between two variables
• Can illustrate many different aspects of the plotted data, such as:
  ◊ Correlation between variables (and whether the correlation is positive or negative)
  ◊ Variation of the data (clear trend or scattered)
  ◊ Nature of the relationship (linear or nonlinear)
  ◊ Identification of outliers
• In statistics, used for evaluating a line of best fit
**Limitations**
- Displays only two variables at a time (may not provide a full picture for data sets with many variables)

**Other Examples:** 3D Scatter Plot, Bubble Chart

**TELL A STORY ABOUT A COMPLEX ISSUE**

**Example:** Infographics
Infographics present information and data, often combining multiple forms of visualizations, to illustrate a topic in a concise, engaging, and aesthetically pleasing manner.

**Strengths**
- Can show a variety of data in relatively small and succinct visual forms
- Uses data to present a narrative or advocate for a position

**Limitations**
- Can be “busy” and difficult to read
- Presents data selectively and therefore can be biased
- Emphasizes the story over a comprehensive view of the data
- Design choices and templates can compromise accuracy

**SHOW CONNECTIONS**

**Example:** Network Diagram
A network diagram consists of a set of nodes and connecting lines.

**Strengths**
- Illustrates the connections or links between people or things
- Size, shape, and position of lines and nodes indicate the type and strength of relationships

**Limitations**
- Often requires interactivity to present large and complex data sets
- Can require specialized knowledge of network analysis for understanding

**Other Examples:** Arc Diagram, Flow Chart, Organizational Chart
SHOW GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

Example: Choropleth Map
A choropleth map uses colors and shading to represent quantities within defined geographic areas.

Strengths
- Can reveal patterns that may not be clear in other forms of visualization
- Effective at many scales, from local to global, with suitable geographic data

Limitations
- Because geographic boundaries are not typically uniform in size and shape, can distort the visual significance of areas represented on the map (e.g., the size of Texas versus Rhode Island)
- Color and shading can affect interpretation of the map

Other Examples: Contour or Isopleth Maps, Dot Maps, Heat Maps

Using Text to Understand Images

Taking the time to read captions, metadata, and other text that accompanies an image gives you essential information you cannot get from simply looking at the image. Just as reading a catalog record for a book reveals information beyond the author and title, examining the text alongside an image fills in details that provide context for the image and further the research process. For example, an online image might include information about a collection that the image is part of, a formal description, names of the rights holders, information about the time period in which the image (or its representation) was created, geographic locations, or even the process used to create the image. Quality metadata and textual information provide essential context such as why, where, how, and for whom the image was created.

The level of description tells you a lot about an image and its source, and what’s not there can also tell you something about the image or raise additional questions. Somebody—whether the image creator herself, using natural language, or a visual resource cataloger at a cultural heritage institution, using a fixed taxonomy—took the time to generate the descriptions you find. Tags and metadata can indicate aspects of the image that were important to the image creator, image provider, or commentator. As a researcher, noticing these textual clues (or lack thereof) is crucial for critically engaging with visual
Twenty Key Questions for Interpreting and Evaluating Data Visualizations

Carefully read the title, description, headings, units, and each part of the key before answering the following questions.

**OBSERVE AND DESCRIBE**

What information is being presented?

1. What components or variables are presented?
2. What do the lines, colors, symbols, and so forth represent?
3. What are the units of measure?
4. What trends and patterns do you see?
5. What type of graph or visualization is being used?
6. What are the sources of data?
7. How were the data collected?
8. Were the data modified, analyzed, or summarized?

**INTERPRET**

What are the meaning and purpose of the data or information presented?

9. What conclusions can you draw from your observations of the data?
10. What is the question, topic, or issue being addressed?
11. What does the data tell you about the issue, and are these findings meaningful?
12. What does the data not tell you, or what are the limitations of the data?

**EVALUATE**

Are the design and function effective and appropriate?

13. Does the visualization help you understand the data or the broader issue?
14. Do design elements (typography, color, line, etc.) work together to convey the overall message?
15. Is the type of graphic appropriate for the data being presented?
16. Are there better, alternative options to display the data?
17. Are the data and methods reliable and appropriate?
18. Is there a related data set that would add to your understanding of the question, topic, or issue?
19. Are there other visualizations that would add to your understanding of the question, topic, or issue?
20. How might you use this data visualization?
content. Questioning the text can also influence what you see in the image and how you see it. Use our Key Questions for Using Text to Interpret Images to facilitate discussions about image interpretation and to conduct image analysis. Practice looking closely at image metadata from different sources with Activity 1.4: Comparing Image Metadata.

Analyzing Images for Alterations and Editing

Simple image alterations, such as cropping and color correcting, can significantly change an image’s meaning. Images have immediate emotional impact and are used in the media and advertising to persuade readers and consumers. This combination of ease-of-editing and direct impact has been exploited in the media with distorted images that convey targeted messages. For example, in a January 31, 2012, news story in The Guardian, John Plunkett reported that the UK’s Advertising Standards Authority banned a L’Oréal wrinkle cream ad featuring Rachel Weisz, stating that the photograph in the ad “misleadingly exaggerated the performance of the product” because Weisz’s skin appeared to be flawless. In France, politicians are addressing a similar concern by proposing required warning labels on photos that have been digitally altered, much like labels on genetically modified food. Israel even has “Photoshop laws,” which regulate the use of image alterations in media and advertising. According to an article in The Atlantic by Talya Minsberg (May 9, 2012), the Israeli law
requires all ads that “use airbrushing, computer editing, or any other form of Photoshop editing to create a slimmer model must clearly state that fact.” If you’re not an expert at image manipulation, how can you determine whether an image has been digitally altered?

Even if you’re looking at a nonadvertising image, or an image that presents itself as factual or documentary, be aware that any image can be digitally manipulated. Some research may be required to determine whether it has been. You can be proactive by researching the creator, the production, and the context surrounding the image. Here are some questions you might ask:

- Who created or produced the image?
- Did the image creator or producer have a particular agenda?
- What were the circumstances surrounding the production of the image?
  - Why was it created?
  - How was it distributed?
- Do other depictions of the image subject confirm or conflict with this image?

This thoughtful approach will ensure that you are a critical reader of visual information. Activity 1.6: Inspecting Scientific Images concretizes these skills by exploring possible image manipulations, and their consequences, in the production of scientific knowledge.

### Key Questions for Using Text to Interpret Images

- How does the textual description relate to your initial observations of the image?
- Based on the text that accompanies it, what do you know about this visual representation?
- What questions remain unanswered about the image’s original historical and cultural context (the who, what, when, where, and why)?
- How might you begin to answer these new questions?
- What keywords, descriptions, or text might help you with further research?
- What sociological, political, economic, or cultural attitudes are reflected in this ad?
Next Steps

Develop interpretation and analysis by looking carefully, reading the textual information associated with images, and discussing what you see with others. To incorporate this strategy into your work in consultation and the classroom, try the following:

- Try our Five Steps for Interpreting and Analyzing Images to look at, read, examine, describe, and check understanding for various types of images.
- Use the Twenty Key Questions for Interpreting and Evaluating Data Visualizations to observe, describe, interpret, and evaluate graphic presentations of data.

REFERENCES


ACTIVITY 1.1

Learning to Look

LEARNING OUTCOMES

• Look carefully at an image and observe content and physical details.
• Describe pictorial, graphic, and aesthetic elements of an image.

DESCRIPTION

Guide students through the practice of dedicated looking, using an image that you provide. Project the image or distribute copies of the image to students. When students have completed looking carefully at the image, they compare observations. Distribute the Learning to Look Worksheet, or use the following instructions to lead the activity verbally:

• Look carefully at your image.
• Write down ten details you notice. Include at least one detail from each quadrant of the image. Look for details about people, places, things, color, design, movement, and composition.
• When you have completed your list of details, exchange your list with a classmate and compare your observations. Did you observe the same details?

TIP FOR SUCCESS

• If projecting the image, choose one with high resolution.

OPTIONAL EXTENSION

• Give students different images to work with in step 1, and use step 2 for students to exchange their images and observations with a classmate.
  
  Ask: Can you find every detail your classmate observed? What did you notice that your classmate did not?

VISUAL LITERACY STANDARDS CONNECTION

• ACRL Visual Literacy Standard 3, Performance Indicators 1 and 3
Learning to Look

Step 1: Look carefully at the image.
Record ten details you notice. Include at least one detail from each quadrant of the image. Look for details about people, places, things, color, design, movement, and composition.

Step 2: Exchange your list with a classmate and compare your observations.
Describe a detail that your classmate noticed and that you missed.
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