

Visual Analysis Exercises

Exercise 1: The Five Cs

1. Context – When was this made? What is the subject matter? What clues are given for a time frame? Consider clothing, tools, weapons, architecture, etc.
2. Characters – Who or what is portrayed here? Is it a person? Animal? Symbol? What clues are given about who/what they are?
3. Color – What colors (if any) are used here? Do you think they were used just for visual appeal? What is the mood or tone established by these colors?
4. Composition – Look at the use of space. Is one image bigger than another? Is that to suggest a relationship and what kind of relationship? Is the entire space used? Why or why not? What is in the foreground? The background? Do either suggest importance?
5. Construction – Someone consciously constructed this image for a purpose. Who do you think made this? Why? For what audience? Who would connect with this image? Who would not?

Exercise 2: Framing

1. Go to http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/john_thomson_china_01/cur_student/how_to_read_a_photo.pdf to see how framing affects the meaning and message of an image.
2. What is the focal point of the original image—that is, where is your eye drawn?
3. Where is the focal point within the original image—foreground, background, other? Is it centered or is your eye drawn to a corner or side of the image?
4. What is the meaning and message of the original image?
5. If you reframe the image, how and in what ways does the meaning and message of the image change? Why?

Exercise 3: Juxtaposition

1. What is the focal point of the image—that is, where is your eye drawn?
2. Where is the focal point within the image—foreground, background, other? Is it centered or is your eye drawn to a corner or side of the image?
3. What is the secondary focal point of the image—that is, what other elements in the image draw your attention?
4. Where is this secondary focus in relation to the first, and to the frame of the image?
5. Describe the contrast or tension created by these two aspects of the image.
6. The person who created the image had choices in how he or she composed it; the image could have framed in other ways. How could the image's creator have framed it to eliminate the contrast or tension you describe?
7. What message about an Asian culture could the viewer take from the image? Is this message correct? Why?