

Baruch COLLEGE | WRITING CENTER

ANALYZING IMAGES WORKSHOP

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Handout 2: Model Analysis

Handout 3: Observation Guide

Images 1, 2, and 3: Hope poster, colonial postcard, *Christina's World*

Reference Sheet: Model Analysis

MATERIALS NEEDED

Whiteboard markers

LEARNING GOALS

At the close of the workshop, students will be able to:

- Identify and describe essential elements of visual communication, such as line, composition, and color.
- Observe a specific image through the lens of these terms.
- Synthesize and structure observations of an image into a claim.

OVERVIEW

This workshop introduces students to visual rhetoric via three primary activities:

- Students close read model writing that analyzes images in order to extract the features addressed in such writing.
- Using an observation guide structured by these features, students independently observe, document, and present to others an image provided by the workshop facilitator.
- Students draft and collaboratively reflect on a claim drawn from their findings.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction

Begin by asking students where, in an academic setting, they might analyze an image. Encourage them to consider how visual rhetoric plays a part not only in obvious disciplines like art history, but also in marketing, history, and performing arts.

Part One: Identifying Elements of Visual Communication (20 Min)

1. **Distribute Handout 1, “Mary Cassatt’s Paintings.”**
 - Introduce the images as four oil paintings by the American artist Mary Cassatt.
 - Ask students to look at the paintings, individually and as a set, and share what they notice with the full group.
2. **Distribute Handout 2, “Model Analysis.”**
 - Explain that the group will now read an excerpt from a professional essay that analyzes the same paintings they’ve just discussed.
 - Inform students of the purpose of this reading: to identify what aspects of the paintings (or elements of visual communication) the writer describes and analyzes.
 - Thereby direct them to mark these passages as you read aloud to them.
3. **Using the Reference Sheet, facilitate as students extract the attributes of the paintings analyzed by Mary Gordon.**
 - Elicit all the features noted:
 - line
 - composition
 - shape
 - scale
 - negative space
 - Once students have demonstrated understanding of visual tools, ask them to suggest others not mentioned (including, for instance, any observed by students at the start of the workshop); these might include:
 - texture
 - light
 - color, etc.

Part Two: Practicing Image Analysis (40 Min)

1. **Distribute Handout 3, “Observation Guide,” and Images 1, 2, and 3, “Hope poster, colonial postcard, *Christina’s World*.”** Ask students to choose one of the three provided images.
 - Encourage at least one student per image.
 - Provide time for students to respond to all the prompts in the Guide;

- Depending on the number of students in the room, you may decide it's most effective to do some portions of the Guide collaboratively or orally.

2. **Facilitate sharing out.**

- One image at a time, ask students to share their observations and responses with one another.
- Wherever possible, encourage them to note patterns in their observations, and to reflect on moments of disjunction.

Part Three: Synthesizing Toward a Claim (15 min)

1. **Return to the model analysis, and note that Gordon doesn't mention any evidence from the paintings until the sixth sentence. Ask students, "What's going on before the elements of visual communication are discussed?"**
 - Guide students to recognize the first few lines as claims that Gordon supports with the concrete evidence of her observations.
 - Segue to the importance of synthesizing analysis into a claim that explains what the viewer/writer finds most significant about her interpretations.
2. **Invite students to draft a claim about the image they observed in Part Two.**
3. **Wrap up.** Share these out, concluding by observing the strengths and areas for development in the claims students offer.

MARY CASSATT'S PAINTINGS



The Family



Girl in the Blue Armchair



The Bath



Ellen Mary Cassatt in a White Coat

Mary Cassatt, an American artist born to an upper-middle class family, spent much of her adult life in Paris. The oil paintings here were made between 1878 and 1896.

MODEL ANALYSIS

Not surprisingly, perhaps, [American artist Mary] Cassatt's reputation has suffered because of the prejudice against her subject matter. Mother and children: what could be of lower prestige, more vulnerable to the charge of sentimentality. Yet if one looks at the work of Mary Cassatt, one sees how triumphantly she avoids the pitfalls of sentimentality because of the astringent rigor of her eye and craft. The Cassatt iconography dashes in an instant the notion of the comfortable, easily natural fit of the maternal embrace. Again and again in her work, the child's posture embodies the ambivalence of his or her dependence. In *The Family*, the mother and child exist in positions of unease; the strong diagonals created by their postures of opposition give the pictures their tense strength, a strength that renders sentimental sweetness impossible. In *Ellen Mary Cassatt in a White Coat* and *Girl in the Blue Arm Chair*, the children seem imprisoned and dwarfed by the trappings of respectable life. The lines of Ellen's coat, which create such a powerful framing device, entrap the round and living child. The sulky little girl in the armchair seems about to be swallowed up by the massive cylinders of drawing room furniture and the strong curves of emptiness that are the floor. In *The Bath*, the little girl has all the unformed charming awkwardness of a young child: the straight limbs, the loose stomach. But these are not [just adorable or angelic babies]. In this picture, the center of interest is not the relationship between the mother and the child but the strong vertical and diagonal stripes of the mother's dress, whose opposition shape the picture with an insistence that is almost abstract.

from "Mary Cassatt" by Mary Gordon (1991)

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OBSERVATION GUIDE

Establishing Context

Who made this image? Does its purpose seem to be artistic, documentary, commercial?

What media, materials, or technologies might have been used to create the image?

When and where was the image made? When and where could the image first have been published or displayed?

Describing the Image

What do you notice about how the image's creator uses...

color?

line?

shape?

light and shadow?

composition?

text?

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Responding to the Image

How do the materials or techniques used to create the image affect what you see?

Is the image *representational*—that is, does it present a recognizable image—or is it *abstract*? Is it *narrative*; in other words, does it seem to tell a story?

What's at the center of the composition? At the edges? What do you imagine is just outside the frame?

What seems most emphasized in the image?

List some adjectives to describe the mood of the image.

Barack Obama “Hope” Poster by artist Shepard Fairey, 2008





Postcard from Tunis, North Africa, around 1910,
by European partners Rudolf Lehnert and Ernst Landrock
The caption, written first in French and then German,
reads "705 – The curious. Turkish-oriental Type. The curious."



Christina's World, egg tempera painting by American artist Andrew Wyeth, 1948

REFERENCE SHEET

MODEL ANALYSIS

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from "Mary Cassatt" by Mary Gordon (1991)

Legend

Green – line, contour

Blue – composition

Magenta – shape

Yellow – scale

Gray – space (negative space in this instance)