



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2014 Volume I: Picture Writing

Looking Past Connections to Find the Bigger Story

Guide for Curriculum Unit 14.01.02
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Students often struggle to look past their personal connections to images, choosing instead to focus on how their own experiences relate in some way to the subject of a painting or photograph. While such connections can be useful, they limit students' abilities to critically and objectively view paintings, photographs and other visual images. Students need those skills of observation in order to succeed and even thrive as independent, critical thinkers.

In an effort to help students develop as objective observers of images – and, by extension, of the world around them – this unit uses the work of Dorothea Lange and Norman Rockwell as well as World War II propaganda and contemporary advertising to teach students to slow the pace of their observations and to look beyond their personal associations to find the purpose and meaning behind images.

This unit was written with ninth graders in mind, although it can be modified as needed for students from grades seven through twelve. The unit and assessment are flexible enough to help teachers differentiate for various student learning preferences, English language learners, and special education students. While more complex assignments and assessments may be designed for advanced students, those offered here are accessible to all students and may be exceptionally engaging for struggling learners because they are image-centered.

(Recommended for English Language Arts, grades 7-12)

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