

THE POWER OF IMAGE

Developing a visual literacy in the language classroom

Ben Goldstein, Tesol France, Paris 2008

Analysing Images

- **1 Images of people:**

Values:

- What kind of person / people are shown?
- What values do they represent?

Gaze / Attitude:

- Who or what are the people looking at? At you? At someone else? Out of the frame?
- What are you expected to feel about them? Admire/pity/desire/envy?

Distance / Perspective:

- Are the people in... close-up? ...medium-shot? ...long-shot?
- Are they distanced from you?
- Are you looking down at them or are they at eye-level?
- How does this affect the way that you feel about them?

Fashion / Style:

- What does their style of clothing suggest about them? (i.e. age, class, professional status, ethnicity?)

- **2 Images of settings:**

- Is the setting identifiable?
- Is it urban, rural, public, domestic?
- What associations does it have? (i.e. romantic, bucolic, mysterious, etc.)
- Is it used to illustrate a particular place or people? If so, is it an accurate representation?
- Would you like to go here?

- **3 Images of objects:**

- What associations does it have in your culture?
- What kind of person would own it or wish to?
- Does it have a symbolic value?
- What is its function?
- Are you expected to want it, understand it, admire it or despise it, be shocked/amused by it?

- **4 Images of action:**

- Is there a physical or mental action?
- How is the action portrayed – by gesture, gaze, expression? Or by a 'vector', a line tracing a path from one element to another?
- What kind of action is performed?
- What kind of person is performing the action?
- What kind of people/thing are acted upon or looked at in the frame?

- **5 Composition & Framing**

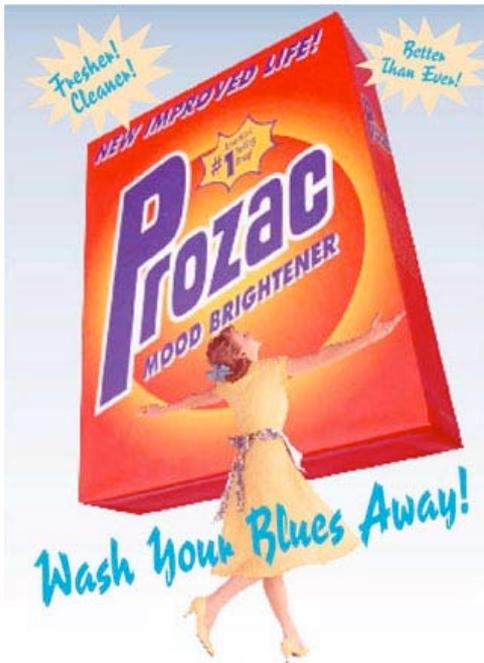
- What do you see in the foreground / background? How are some other elements foregrounded? Consider lighting, shade, focus, camera angle etc.
- Are elements in the image separated by 'frames' (i.e. lines/profiles/shadows)? Why are the images separated?
- Is there a movement in the image: from left to right? top to bottom?
- Is the image realistic or unrealistic? Consider colour/monochrome film, focus, sharpness, degree of detail/pose, (im)possible perspectives.

What do you think lies outside the frame?

- **6 Image & Text**

- How does the positioning of text & image become part of the overall message?
- Is the text separated from the images as headlines and captions, speech or thought bubbles, superimposed or framed separately providing complementary info?
- Is the text positioned... to the left, providing a context? ... to the right, providing an explanation? ... at the top, expressing an ideal? ... at the bottom, representing reality? ... at the centre, focusing our attention? ... at the margins, providing extra information?

Subverted Image



Adbusters spoof advertisement, 2001

Art Image

(Edward Hopper, Nighthawks)



TEN THINGS TO DO WITH AN IMAGE

1. Framing Images / Hypothesizing / What's missing?

Find an image which can easily be shown in a 3-part sequence, in close-up, medium and long-shot formats. Show each part to students and ask students to focus on different details each time, hypothesizing about different outcomes/contexts. How does the knowledge of extra detail help their hypotheses take shape? Another approach is to remove parts of the image and ask 'what is missing'?

2. Deciphering codes / logos

Find a series of thematically linked logos or symbols. Ask students to work out what they might symbolise or, in the case of logos, what the product might be. This works particularly well with generic logos, such as those which feature animals. Tattoos, graffiti, pictograms, emoticons, flags, coats of arms, etc. are other options which can be deciphered in a similar way.

3. The Social History of an Image

As a research project, ask students to focus on a single object (such as the apple) and analyse how the significance of the image may have changed over time. What values has it had at different historical times, and for whom? For example, choose an iconic garment; the leather jacket, the mini-skirt, the kilt.

4. Writing descriptions from magazine photos.

Give each student or pair of students a different themed magazine (e.g. decoration – Ikea catalogues are good, etc.) in which many images look alike. Student A writes a detailed description of one image. Others listen and try to identify the specific image Student A had in mind.

5. Who am I in this picture?

Choose an image in which there are a lot of people. Ask students to choose one person and imagine their characters and thoughts. Other students ask yes/no questions to identify the person concerned. Another option: Where am I? or Where have I hidden x? This works well with basic level / young learners.

6. Is it real?

Digital manipulation of images for political and/or aesthetic reasons is becoming increasingly commonplace. It is sometimes hard to say whether an image has been tampered with, but students are often expert at spotting this. Study different examples in class and then ask students why/how they were corrupted. <http://www.museumofhoaxes.com/tests/hoaxphototest.html> The class can then manipulate their own images digitally and bring them to class.

7. Narrating/Analysing film sequence with sound off

Choose a film sequence in which there is a lot of action (e.g. chase sequences in thrillers) and little or no dialogue. Ask students to focus on cinematographic details, e.g. what contributes to the suspense in the scene (lighting, camera angles & movement, soundtrack, etc.) or ask them to focus on the order of events and then test their memory, good for practising verbs of movement.

8. Mapping it

Show students different cartograms of the world at www.worldmapper.com and ask them to identify which criteria were used for each map (e.g. Aids fatalities, tourist destinations, etc.) What do they learn about the world?! Use www.panoramio.com for students to hang their own photos on a world map and identify where others were taken.

9. Tagging concepts

Ask students to conjure up a mental image of an abstract concept such as 'happiness', 'solitude', etc. Research a number of different images with the same tag such as <http://www.flickr.com/search/groups/?w=all&q=happiness>. Students identify recurring images, e.g. smiles, open spaces and then create their own images for different concepts. These can then be compared with children's illustrations of the same concepts.

10 What's the angle? / Abstract Shapes

Show a variety of different images taken from odd angles, students guess how and from where it was taken. Another option is to find macro photos of objects taken from strange angles or with a long exposure (see groups in flickr.com e.g. <http://www.flickr.com/search/groups/?q=angles> / www.theimage.com)

Websites / Sources of Images

General

www.flickr.com: Search by 'tags', keywords used by photographers to identify their work.

www.youtube.com: Professional and amateur videoclips galore!

<http://creativecommons.org/image/> : Copyright-free images to use

www.istockphoto.com: cheap archive photos

www.cartoonstock.com: One of many excellent sources of cartoons on the net.

www.theimage.com, including the close-up gallery

Advertising

www.advertisingarchives.com

www.adsoftheworld.com

Art

www.artchive.com

www.thevisualdictionary.net

www.adbusters.org – includes spoof ads among other controversial 'manipulated' images.

Maps

<http://www.world66.com/myworld66/visitedCountries> - generates maps of your visited countries

www.worldmapper.org: the world as you've never seen it before

www.panoramio.com: 1.3m photos and their place on the world map

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Pedagogy/Visual Literacy

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<http://education.waikato.ac.nz/research/files/etpc/files/2005v4n1art1.pdf>

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