

RECORDING A CHANGING NATION

Quick Visual Analysis: Observation and Interpretation

Duration: 20 minutes

Grade Level: 6th-12th grade

About this Resource: This introductory activity builds basic visual literacy skills that may be used with any image.

Materials: This activity will require access to print or electronic reproductions of select images. Additionally, there is an optional graphic organizer available [HERE](#) to support your students' analysis.

Preparation:

Select a single photograph from the survey of your choice or present students with a small selection from which to choose one. Look particularly for images that you think would resonate with your students and demonstrate the breadth of the survey. Below are links to Smithsonian Learning Lab collections that gather a cross-section of survey images for you.

1. [Los Angeles, CA](#)
2. [Long Beach, CA](#)
3. Venice, CA (digital reproductions unavailable)
4. [Atlanta, GA](#)
5. [Lawrence, KS](#)
6. [Louisville, KY](#)
7. [Whitesburg, KY](#)
8. [Galveston, TX](#)
9. [Baltimore, MD](#)
10. [Mars Hill, NC](#)
11. [Buffalo, NY](#)
12. [Seattle, WA](#)
13. Cheyenne, WY (digital reproductions unavailable)

Protocol:

Present the students with a single photograph. After each step, bring students back together so that they may share their discoveries and you can check their understanding.

1. *Observe:* Spend 30 seconds looking at every part of the photograph. Then make a list of 10 things that you see. List only things that you can point to in the artwork; this is a list of observations.
2. *Interpret:* Based on what you see, write a 2-3 sentence description of what's going on in the photograph. This might be a mini-narrative or an informative writing.
3. *Pair:* Share your interpretation with a classmate. What did you see that made each of you tell the story that you told?

4. Share: Share your discoveries with the class. What have you discovered about the difference between observations and interpretations?

Note: If you know that your students find visual analysis challenging, consider offering students a set of 2-3 photographs and posing one or more of the questions below to start. Then conduct further visual analysis on the photograph that garners the most student attention.

5. Of the photographs presented, which one do you most relate to? Why?
6. Which one seems least relatable or relevant to today? Why?
7. Which photo do you find to be the most beautiful? Which photo is most difficult to look at?

Formative Assessment: Step Four acts as a formative assessment before moving on to either an Extended Analysis or other Extension Activities. Most essential is students' ability to distinguish between things they see (observations), and reasoning based on evidence (interpretation).