

Exploring Culture: The Influence of the Images & Texts Surrounding Us

Our culture is filled with persuasive texts that we encounter constantly in different formats and contexts. We can consider them to be *cultural artifacts* because they are produced by, circulated in, utilized within, and affected our modern culture in big and small ways. In this activity we will consider the visual rhetoric and the images/text of specific cultural artifacts that motivate and affect particular audiences in certain ways. To do so, we will consider what the cultural artifact says, how it works, and what it means. We will examine the influence of each artifact through freewriting, collaborative description, and analysis of it.

First, select a cultural artifact to examine with a partner.

Individually: In your daybook, take 10 minutes to start to examine and freewrite about your cultural artifact. You will start by describing and summarizing elements of your artifact while also starting to consider the effects of it on you as a possible audience member.

Some elements to consider for the visual analysis:

- What images do you see?
- What is your initial response to the images?
- What kinds of colors do you see? Where?
- What's your initial reaction to the colors?
- What types of fonts are used?
- What is your initial response to those fonts?
- How are the visual elements arranged or organized?

Some elements to consider for the rhetorical analysis:

- What does the text say?
- What is your initial response to it?
- How are the textual elements arranged or organized?
- What's your reaction to the argument, tone, language...?
- Do you find any aspects of the text difficult? Puzzling? Interesting?
- Is it making any kind of claim? If so, do you agree with what it is saying? Why or why not?

With a partner: Start by discussing observations from your freewrite with your partner. Glue your text to a large stickie note. Use your notes and collaborative discoveries to describe and annotate the text using a black marker. Be specific. Look at the big picture and the details to **describe as thoroughly as possible**. (See example.)

After you have thoroughly described and annotated the text, record the questions, observations, significant ideas, and themes that you noticed while describing the text on your poster in red marker.

Next, identify and consider the rhetorical elements of the text with your partner. Considering the function of each element in terms of their rhetorical purpose and target audience. If there are certain or specific areas of the text that stimulate you, feel free to dig deep into those. Our Visual Analysis and Rhetorical Analysis handouts and ideas from your reading in *The Little Seagull Handbook* may also help you think through your analysis. **On a separate sheet of paper**, make notes to explain the rhetorical elements of your text along with the effects of these visual and rhetorical elements on an audience's perception of the text itself.

Elements to consider for your analysis:

- How do the visual elements work together?
- What are some connections or disconnections with the visual elements?
- How do the visual elements work with the textual (writing) elements?
- What are some connection or disconnections with the visual elements and the textual elements? Be specific. What kind of effect does this create in the product overall?
- Is there a use of ethos, pathos, logos in the visuals? Where? Is it effective? Why or why not?
- Who is the target audience? How do you know? What elements of the text support your answer?
- What could you assume or find out about the author of the text?
- What could you assume or find out about the larger context of the text?
- What kind of language is used?
- What kind of style is being utilized?
- What voice(s) is/are used? How do you know? What elements of the text support your answer?
- Is there a use of ethos, pathos, logos in the text? Where? Is it effective? Why or why not?

After you have thought through these question, identify the genre you are analyzing, its rhetorical purpose, and the intended audience. Write them at the top of your poster in blue marker.

Finally, go back to your original poster and record your answer to this question on it in green marker.

- What are at least three interpretative statements or reasoned judgments can you make about the cultural artifact overall?

Hang up your finished product somewhere in the room. Take the time to walk around and examine others' products. Be ready to discuss your product and relate it to others' products in the room.