

Visual Literacy (Images and Photographs)

Every day, we see and are exposed to hundreds, perhaps thousands, of images that pass through our radar screens. Everyone, it seems, is vying for our attention. Unfortunately, not many of us know how to "read images." One of the ways to teach critical thinking and "media literacy" is to start with the still image. In many arts classrooms, "visual literacy" is introduced: the methods and techniques artists use to create meaning in paintings: that knowledge can now be applied to photographs as well.

SC State Department of Education

Visual & Performing Arts Standards ([link to 2010 revision](#))

2010 Media Arts Standard

Standard 3 (Media Literacy): The student will demonstrate the ability to access, analyze, interpret and create media (communications) in all forms.

Teachers will recognize "analyze," "interpret" and "create" as three of the verbs belonging to the Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning higher order thinking skills.

Analyze (or analysis) is defined as: "breaking down objects or ideas into simpler parts and seeing how the parts relate and are organized" ([source](#))

Interpret is defined as: "to bring out the meaning of" whatever is seen ([source](#))

Creating is defined as: "putting the elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganising elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning or producing" ([Source](#)) Creating sits at the top a new Bloom's Digital Taxonomy. [Take a look](#) (see page 6 in the hyperlinked document) at all of the various ways your students can create media and/or technology projects to support standards.

The following list of questions could be used as a guide as your students begin to consider the photos in this exhibit:

Visual & Media Literacy Critical Thinking and Viewing Considerations:

- What do I need to know in order to best understand how this was created and what it might mean?
- Who created this (message) photograph? (Authorship)
- Why is this (message) photography here? (Purpose)
- In what ways might the image complement the text and vice versa?
- Who is most likely to see the (message) photograph? (Audience)
- What methods are used to make the (message) photo believable; trustworthy? (Techniques)
- Is there something outside the (picture) frame that I don't see? (Omission)
- Can I make any assumptions about this (message) image?
- Where might I get additional information not contained in the (message) image? (Research)
- What does the producer/creator/photographer want me to think/feel? (Knowledge, Understanding)
- How might others see this same (message) image differently from me?

Websites & handouts in support of teaching visual literacy:

[Introducing Photography Techniques](#) [Learning to Look](#)

[Strategies for Analyzing Visual Images](#) [Questioning Photos](#) [Reading Photos](#)

[Photo Analysis Worksheet](#) [Analyzing Photos Worksheet](#)

[Reading A Photograph or a Picture](#) [Reading Media Photographs](#)

Resource recommendation: [this visual literacy wiki](#) has many valuable resources and ideas.

The following sections, from SC high school state-adopted arts textbooks, may be helpful to teachers:

Gardners Art Through The Ages (12th ed) Thomson/Wadsworth (2005)
Chapter 33 The Early 20th Century
The Depression and Its Legacy
pg 1023-1024

Gardners Art Through The Ages A Concise History
Thomson/Wadsworth (2006)
Chapter 13
The Great Depression
pg. 398-399

Art History (3rd ed)
Pearson (2008)
Art and its Context
Federal Patronage for American Art
During The Depression
pg 1116

[Focus on Photography](#) (Student Book) 1st ed. Davis Publishers

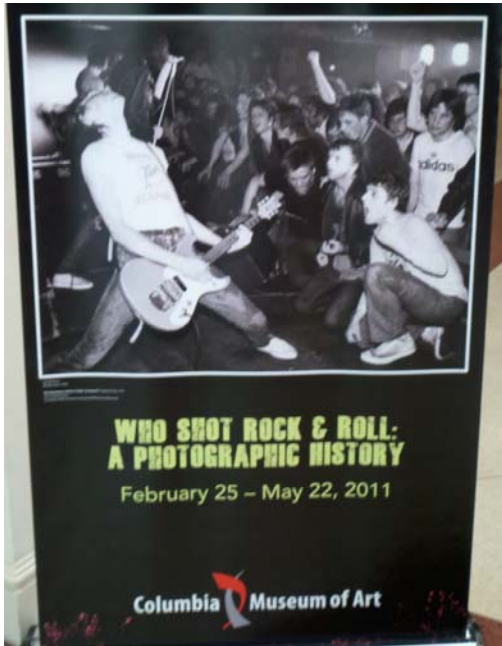
[Photography](#), 9th ed, Pearson (2009)

The following videos and video resources may also be helpful to educators and students:

ETV Streamline:
Introduction: Photography and Visual Images (00:54) Segment from the Series:
Lights, Camera, Education

Other videos: [Ways of Seeing](#) (four parts) YouTube.com
[Documenting The Face of America](#) (PBS Special)
American Photography: A Century of Images ([text](#) and [DVD](#))
[Language of Photography](#) (Films for the Humanities and Sciences)

See also the visual literacy videos listed [here](#)



[link](#) to Columbia Museum of Art



[Link](#) to publisher of the book

Who Shot Rock N Roll: Curriculum

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INTRODUCTION

When students look at images, they often don't know what to look at or what to look for, because for the most part, they have not had sufficient training in how to read a photograph. To read a photograph is to look deeply at it, to consider all of the elements. If students have been trained in traditional visual literacy (as it applies to paintings, for example) then the skills and knowledge they have obtained can certainly transfer to their viewing and understanding of photographs.

This website, [Learning to Look](#), provides an excellent guide and starting point for your students. It asks them to consider the visual elements within a photograph. Before students attend the exhibit, they should know, and be able to identify many of these elements including, but not limited to: light and shadow; value; focus; space; shape; line; scale; color; texture; angle; framing; dominance; contrast; repetition; balance; variety. (NOTE: a Google search for "elements of photography" and/or "composition in photography" will bring up a number of excellent resources for you and your students.)

Many photographers consider themselves also to be artists. Many have been trained and have made photography their careers. They actually make money by not only taking photos, but also having them published and exhibited in galleries. Most photographers take pride in their work. This exhibit contains the work of many photographers, all of whom have a style and an area of expertise. Is it important to know who the photographer is? In many ways, yes: the more you know about them, the more likely you are to understand their art.

For your students to consider: since the performers have invited the photographers into their world, the images captured may not always be complimentary. Have your students discuss the photographer-performer relationship. Who benefits from it? Who benefits from the images? Who is helped and who is not?

Preparing the students

Before attending the exhibit, students, and their parents, should be aware that the exhibit contains straightforward depictions of the history of rock and roll and its culture. Because of the nature of rock 'n roll, behaviors of some performers have been captured uncensored by the photographers and may contain mature themes and images. Teachers may preview the exhibition at no charge by downloading a school program brochure and using the educators preview pass located on the last page. Questions about the content of the exhibit should be directed to the Education department.

Specific Questions While Viewing the Rock N Roll Photographs

The [teacher resource packet](#) for the exhibit contains the following more specific questions for your students to consider as they view and experience the photographs at the Columbia Museum of Art:

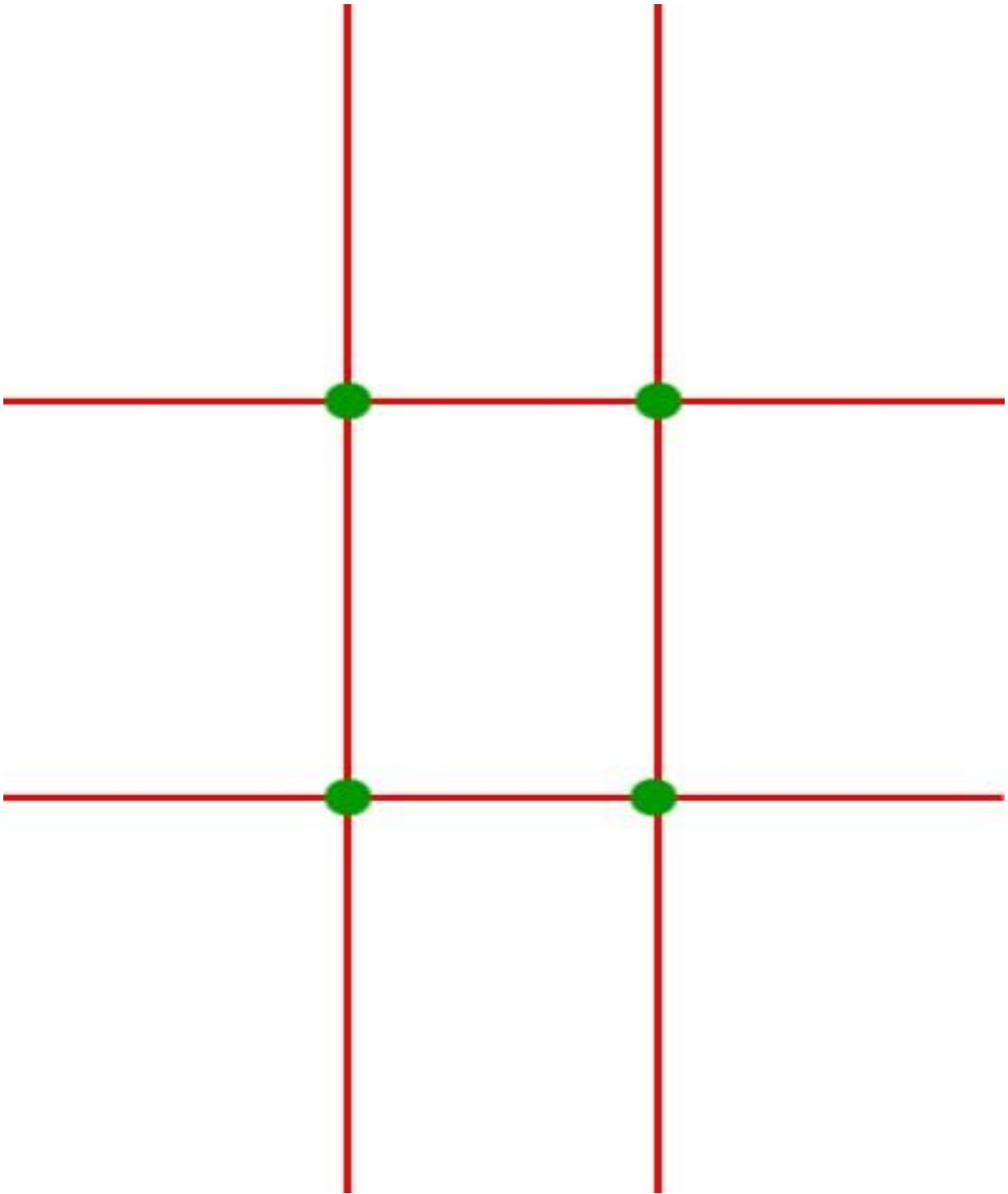
1. What's going on in this photograph?
2. Who are the main characters? What role does each character play in the scene?
3. Where might this scene take place? What do you see to support your idea?
4. Describe the level of energy. Does each person have the same amount? What is different about them?
5. Describe the viewer's point-of-view. Why do you think the photographer chose this vantage point?
6. Imagine you could step inside this photograph and listen to all of the sounds being made. Describe the different sounds.
7. What kind of relationship do the musicians have with the audience? What choices did the photographer make to represent this relationship?

Suggested Student Activities

1. Introduce the concept of “representation,” –that images are not real: they only show us part of what is happening. For example students might consider what is outside the frame, what is not seen, and why a photographer did or did not include certain elements.
2. Have students conduct a “content analysis.” How many images are of males; how many of females; how many images represent different ethnicities; is any one ethnic group left out; why do you think they might have been omitted?
3. Have students select their favorite image and write an essay, incorporating that image, or others, into it.
4. Have students conduct a compare-and-contrast activity using images of artists who appear more than once. What is the same; what is different? Why?
5. Have your students discuss and respond to: how important is an image to the performer or to the persona of a performer? What would happen if no photographers were allowed to take these images?
6. Compare and contrast two images from the same photographer? Can you discern a style by looking at the two images? If so, describe it.
7. What effect does a black-and-white image have that a color image might not have?
8. Videos: how might shooting video of a performer, or performance, differ than from still photography? What other considerations have to be made?
9. What artists did you expect to see but did not?
10. Using flip cams (if available) assign students to take pictures at a local concert. In what ways might your students’ movements be restricted as they attempt to get their best shots?
11. Have students select an image of a favorite performer and create an DVD cover, magazine cover or promotional advertising poster. What words or phrases might you use, along with the image, to appeal to your audience? (NOTE: they might even create an interactive online glog poster at Glogster.com)

Rule of Thirds (a good explanation can be found [here](#))

Create a clear overhead transparency of the image below. Distribute one per student. Ask students to view the rock n' roll photos through the graphic. Can they make any conclusions about why a photographer positioned the subject, using the rule of third?



Understanding the language of the moving image (video)

"Who Shot Rock 'n Roll" exhibit also includes a number of videos. Students have lots of experience viewing music videos, films and television, but many have not been introduced to the "language of the moving image."

Each medium has its own rules, codes and conventions. Video is no different. Where a videographer positions themselves is important and has meaning. Meaning is also conveyed through the lighting used, as well as the music and other sounds heard.

As students experience the videos in the exhibit, they should keep in mind:

Camera Work

- where is the camera/photographer positioned?
- Is the photographer using a close-up or telephoto lens? What difference might this make?
- is the photographer zooming, panning or tilting the camera for some effect?

Lighting

- describe the lighting; how might it affect the mood or emotion?

Editing

- how is this video edited? Does the editing affect the way you feel about it? If so, how so?

Special effects

- has the video been edited to include any special visual effects?

Sound

- close your eyes; other than the music, what else might you hear? Why were those sounds included; are they important?

The photographers and their subjects

Below is a list of images your students will see inside the exhibit. Before visiting the museum, you might assign each student to one (or more) photographers to investigate and research on the web. Many of the images in the exhibit can also be seen online. These websites feature a sample:

http://www.coolhunting.com/archives/2009/09/who_shot_rock_r.php

http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/rock_and_roll/

<http://www.brooksmuseum.org/whoshotrock>

Photographer	Subject(s) of the Photo
William "PoPsie" Randolph	Wilson Pickett, Jimi Hendrix Brooklyn Paramount
Phillip Townsend	Rolling Stones
David LaChapelle	Eminem Lil Kim
David Corio	Grace Jones
Kevin Cummins	Ian Curtis
Gered Mankowitz	Psychedelic Marianne Faithful The Yardbirds
Allan Tannenbaum	John and Yoko Lennon
Jill Furmanovsky	Joy Division Oasis With Johnny Marr
Storm Thorgerson	Frances The Mute Elegy 10cc Led Zeppelin Pink Floyd
Jasper Dailey	The Doors
Unknown	The Rolling Stones
Richard Creamer	Iggy Pop
Laura Levine	R.E.M.
Photographer	Subject(s) of the Photo
Astrid Kirchherr	The Beatles
Claude Gassian	Elvis Costello
Ian Dickson	The Ramones Bob Marley and the Band
Ethan Russell	The Rolling Stones
Ebet Roberts	The Cramps
Shawn Mortensen	Courtney Love
Charles Peterson	Mosh Pit
Mark Seliger	Mick Jagger
Danny Clinch	Pavement Reading Festival Tupac Shakur
Marvin Israel	Elvis Presley
Diane Arbus	James Brown
Kwame Brathwaite	Apollo Theatre
William V. (Red) Robertson	Elvis Presley

Linda McCartney	London
Daniel Kramer	Bob Dylan, Peter Yarrow, John Hammond
Maripol	Madonna Exene Cervenka
Chris Stein	Richard Hell, Debbie Harry Anya Phillips, Debbie Harry
Valerie Jodoin Keaton	M.I.A.
Ray Avery	Phil Spector, The Ronettes, Sonny Bono
Michael Putland	Mike Jagger
Alain Dister	New York Dolls
Dennis Morris	Johnny Rotten
Bob Whitaker	George Harrison
Dennis Hopper	James Brown
Art Kane	Aretha Franklin
Godlis	Talking Heads Patti Smith Blondie
Barrie Wentzell	Elton John Aretha Frankline
Andy Earl	Bow Wow Wow
Henry Diltz	Tina Turner
Jean Claude Goude	Grace Jones Blue Black in black on brown
Lynn Goldsmith	Mick Jagger Bruce Springsteen
Ryan McGinley	untitled
Stephanie Chernikowski	Debbie Harry
Lew Allen	Buddy Holly
Edmund Teske	Jim Morrison, Pamela Courson
Ken Regan	Keith Richards, Patti Hansen, daughter
David Gahr	Janis Joplin Bruce Springsteen
Don Hunstein	Bob Dylan
Baron Wolman	Pete Townsend Pink Floyd Little Richard
Photographer	Subject(s) of the Photo
Lisa Law	Big Brother & The Holding Company
Jean Pierre Leloir	Chuck Berry Bill Haley
Bob Gruen	KISS John Lennon Joe Strummer Stiv Bators and Friends Tina Turner
Alfred Wertheimer	Elvis Whisper Elvis Kiss Elvis prelude to the kiss Gentlemen Elvis Leaves Home
Peter Beste	Kvittrafn of Wardruna

Bob Seidemann	Blind Faith Facsimilies of Elements for Blind Faith
Gloria Stavers	David Bowie
Ray Stevenson	Jimi Hendrix Experience
Richard Avedon	Everly Brothers George Harrison Ringo Starr John Lennon Paul McCartney
Glen E. Friedman	Fugazi
Ian Tilton	Kurt Cobain Crowd, Morissey
Kevin Cummins	Morissey
Pennie Smith	The Clash
Jerry Schatzberg	Frank Zappa Bob Dylan
Kate Simon	Bunny Wailer
Lloyd Shearer	Elvis
EMI Studio	The Supremes
Pattie Boyd	Eric Clapton
Pennie Smith	Jimmy Page Joe Strummer- Thailand Joe Strummer- London Led Zeppelin The Clash
Peter Vernon	Sex Pistols
Jim Marshall	The Beatles Johnny Cash
Herb Greene	Jerry Garcia
Michael Zagaris	Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck
Guy Webster	The Mamas & The Papas
Ed Caraef	Jimi Hendrix
Nitin Vadkul	Radiohead
Central Press	Beatles fans
David Corio	Salt n Pepa
Elaine Mayes	Cindy Lauper Michael Jackson
Photographer	Subject(s) of the Photo
Ricky Powell	Wu-Tang Clan's Method Man, Huckleberry Mahoney
Anton Corbjin	U2
Stepane Sednaoui	Bjork
Mark Seliger	JayZ, Puff Daddy Red Hot Chilli Peppers
Albert Watson	LL Cool J
Elliott Landy	The Band
Roberta Bayley	The Ramones
Timothy White	Axel Rose
Amy Arbus	Madonna
Annie Leibovitz	Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley
Steve Gullick	Keith Flint

Max Vadukul	Amy Winehouse
Ross Halfin	Metallica
Kevin Westerberg	White Stripes
Lynn Goldsmith	Fans of New Kids on the Block
Josh Cheuse	Run DMC
Ian Dickson	Red Hot Chilli Peppers
Justin Boroucki	Tim Armstrong S.T.U.N.
Terry O'Neill	The Police
Edward Colver	Henry Rollins Minor Threat, Ian MacKaye
Michael Lavine	B.I.G.
Ernest Withers	Ike & Tina Turner
Julia Gorton	Lydia Lunch
Richard Kern	Marilyn Manson Sonic Youth
Barry Feinstein	Bob Dylan with kids Bob Dylan Soundcheck Bob Dylan, Press conference Fans
Judy Linn	Patti Smith
Ari Marcopoulos	Alice Temple
Nat Finkelstein	Velvet Underground
David Corio	Chrissie Hynde
Jean-Marie Perier	Chuck Berry
Marcia Resnick	Royalty of No Wave Cinema
Norman Seef	Sly Stone, Kathy Silva
Masayoshi Sukita	David Bowie
Adrian Boot	Top Rank Theatre
Andreas Gursky	Madonna
Albert Watson	Jagger/Leopard Michael Jackson
George DuBose	B52s
Hannes Schmid	Freddie Mercury David Lee Roth
Claude Hassian	Keith Richards
Laura Levine	Bjork

Videos in the Exhibit

Heartbreak Hotel	Elvis Presley
Slide Show with soundtrack	Henry Diltz
Outhataway	David LaChapelle
One Man Show With Introduction	Jean Paul Goude
Death Valley '69	Richard Kern
Big Time Sensuality Big Time Sensuality (night)	Stephane Sednaoui
Electrical Storm 2002	Anton Corbijn
Who Shot Rock 'n Roll Compilation	Brooklyn Museum

Related Websites

Rock `n Roll Music <http://42explore.com/rocnroll.htm>

Taking Aim: Unforgettable Rock `n Roll Photographs Selected by Graham Nash

The images: <http://www.empsfm.org/press/index.asp?categoryID=183&ccID=281>

Taking Aim Exhibition Bibliography:

<http://www.mopa.org/education/files/Curriculum%202010/Taking%20Aim/Book%20References%20for%20Taking%20Aim.pdf> (3 pages)

About the author

Frank W. Baker has conducted hundreds of workshops for educators across the United States. For more than 15 years, he has taught visual and media literacy to teachers and students. He is the author of two books and he maintains the Media Literacy Clearinghouse web site: <http://www.frankwbaker.com>