

Reading Historical Images

When we read texts made of words, we use reading strategies (such as *previewing*, *summarizing*, *inferring*, *questioning*) to help us better understand a text's meaning. When we encounter historical images, such as photographs, paintings, or drawings, we can "read" them using similar strategies. Spending some time writing or thinking about the following four areas (in any order) can help you get the most out of any visual text.

Describe what you see (in the image):

- How would you categorize it? (a photo, an artifact, a painting, a drawing, a map, etc.)
- What do you notice about what is in the picture?
 - o What people, objects, and/or activities are featured in the image? How are they interacting with each other? What kinds of emotions are expressed?
 - o Do you notice any symbols?
- What do you notice about how the picture is designed?
 - o Where is the focus?
 - o Are we zoomed in or at a distance? Looking straight on, from above, or from below?
 - o Is the style realistic or abstract (for artwork)? Posed or candid (for photos)?

Gather clues about context (from outside the image):

- What can you learn from the title, caption, date, and/or description?
- What clues about the image can you get from what you are studying in class or from what your teacher has already shared with you?

Reflect on meaning:

- What can you figure out about what this image shows or means?
- Why do you think this image was created? By whom?
- What can you learn from the image? How does it connect to your class's current unit of study?

Ask more questions:

- What do you still want to know about the image? (Think about *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how*.)

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Reflect on meaning:

Ask more questions: