

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):

- *Blue and white beads.*
- *Symmetrical abstract pattern.*
- *Long, thin, looks soft (not rigid).*
- *Fringe on either side.*
- *Middle symbol resembles a tree, and it is surrounded by two rectangles on either side.*

Gather clues about context (from outside the image):

- *A modern image of a reproduction of a Hiawatha wampum belt.*
- *Found in the northeastern US; first created pre-1700.*
- *The belt is a symbol of the Peacemaker story of how five Iroquois tribes came together.*
- *"Wampum" refers to a type of shell bead.*

Reflect on meaning:

- *The five connected images probably represent the five tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy.*
- *It shows each tribe as distinct, but still connected.*
- *It is probably used as a sign of peace and respect when the tribes get together.*

Ask more questions:

- *Who held the Hiawatha belt?*
- *Did it accompany any kind of ceremony?*
- *How many belts were there? Did they all look the same?*
- *Was there actually peace between these tribes after the events of the Peacemaker story?*