

“Reading” the image (using visual clues to develop informative explanations of images)

- Think about the meaning of the saying: “A picture is worth a thousand words.”
- Share your thinking in a class discussion.

Possible responses

- a single image can represent complex situations
- carefully examining an image reveals a lot of information about its subject

Observe an image

- Use a detail-rich, caption-free image that creates some mystery about the event depicted to demonstrate the activity, before students investigate other images independently.

Provide pairs of students with the sample image



Allow one or two minutes for each pair to discuss what they see before proceeding with the activity.

Student activity

- Look closely at the image.
- What do you notice?
- What “thousand words” does this image convey?
- Describe what you see to a partner.
- Share your observations with the class.

Opportunities for differentiation

- Make the activity easier by highlighting details from the image that are particularly helpful in developing an explanation.
- Help students focus on the details in the image by suggesting they use squares of paper to conceal all but one quarter of the image at a time.

Distinguish direct observations and inferences

- Explain to students that their task is to draw inferences (logical, informed conclusions) about what is happening, based on visual clues in the image. Provide an example of an observation and an inference such as: if you see someone crying, you infer they may be hurt. Point out that the observation provides the evidence for the inference.
- Review the list of initial observations made by students. To reinforce the concept, provide an unfounded inference, e.g., the men are about to be arrested, and invite students to explain why this cannot be supported by the image.

Student activity

Categorize your initial list of observations into “observations” and “inferences.”

OBSERVATIONS	INFERENCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• two males (of different age) holding a bag with white powder• the men are wearing white, loose uniform that workers wear• one man is wearing glasses and a mask	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The men might belong to a group of people participating in an event.• The men do not appear to be wearing military uniforms; this may suggest that they are not part of the regular military forces.• They are having fun.

Look for the 5Ws

- Distribute a copy of “Reading the image” (Activity Sheet). Review the 5Ws (Who? What? Where? When? Why?). Suggest the 5Ws are an effective strategy for reading images and drawing inferences.

Dig for details

Encourage students to look beyond the obvious clues in the image, to extract as much information as possible. Suggest that the more specific and relevant their observations are, the easier it will be to draw plausible inferences. Draw students’ attention to the prompts on the activity sheet and encourage students to use the prompts to deepen their observations and inferences. If students have already studied the topic featured in the image, encourage them to also draw on their background knowledge when making inferences. If students have little background knowledge of the topic, encourage them to be very tentative in their inferences. Suggest that they qualify their conclusions by using terms such as “may be,” “possibly,” and “perhaps.”

Student activity

- Take another look at the image. Notice the less obvious clues in the image, including those in the foreground, middle ground, and background. Use the prompts to help you.
- What additional information can you extract?
- What can you infer from these observations?
- Compare your completed activity sheet with the one completed by another pair of students. What is similar? What is different?

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