

Conducting Critical Visual Analysis

Seeing is believing, except when what you see is not actually true. Many people tend to accept without question the images they see in advertising, websites, films, television, and other media. Such an uncritical stance toward visual content can leave one open to distortion, misinformation, and uninformed decision-making based on fake and false information. Take a moment to watch the [Dove evolution YouTube video](#) below to see how the media can present a distorted representation of reality.



Watch on YouTube <https://edtechbooks.org/-zRW>

Learning how to conduct a critical visual analysis is critical for living in a media-filled society. By engaging in critical visual analysis of the media, you can make more informed decisions regarding your [civic, political, and private life](#).



Watch on YouTube <https://edtechbooks.org/-NDpV>

As a first step in evaluating visual sources, the history education organization, Facing History and Ourselves, suggests the critical viewing approach of [See, Think, Wonder](#). The goal is to evaluate images by asking questions about them before drawing conclusions as to meaning and accuracy.

The following critical visual analysis activities expand the See, Think, Wonder approach by offering opportunities to evaluate different types of visuals for their trustworthiness as information sources.

Activity 1: Critical Visual Analysis of an Online Article

The visual content of an online article or website can tell us a lot about its trustworthiness. This activity asks you to perform a critical visual analysis of two news articles to evaluate the credibility of each source.

- Find an online article that you think qualifies as “fake news.” Don’t worry about justifying why you think it is fake yet, just go with your immediate reaction to it.
- Find an online article that you believe is credible, preferably one that covers the same topic as your fake news story.
- Take screenshots of both articles, making sure to include as many visual elements (ads, page menu, bylines, images) from the page as possible.
- Perform a side-by-side comparison of both screenshots by laying them out on a [blank Canva presentation](#) or Google Drawing. Justify the reasons why you consider one source is credible and the other not by. Focus specifically on the visual content of each article (page design, font choice, headline images, author byline, page advertisements), using arrows and text boxes to highlight specific elements of the design (refer to this [checklist](#) for help).
- **Use a screenrecording tool to present your analysis.**

- If you have a Mac computer, [use this shortcut](#).
- If you have access to Quicktime, here's [how to screenrecord using Quicktime](#).
- Otherwise, use a web-based screenrecording tool such as [Screencastify](#), [Screencast-o-Matic](#), or [Loom](#).

Activity 2: Critical Visual Analysis of a Primary Source

To analyze visual or written sources, the [Library of Congress recommends](#) students and teachers follow a three stage process: 1) Observe (describe what you see in the image), 2) Reflect (discuss what you think it means) and 3) Question (record what you want to now know more about).

- Choose a visual primary source from one of the following sites:
 - [Library of Congress Primary Source Sets](#)
 - [DocsTeach](#), National Archives
 - [Smithsonian Learning Lab](#)
 - [National History Day Digital Classroom](#)
- Use one of the [Library's source analysis sheets](#) to record your Observe, Reflect and Question thinking.
- **Create a TikTok or Snapchat video** to educate others about your findings.
- **Design a new framework for analyzing visual primary sources** that encourages higher order thinking and share it with the Library of Congress via social media or email.

Activity 3: Critical Visual Analysis of an Advertisement

- Select a advertisement from a magazine, social media site, or news site (or from this Business Insider list of [24 magazine ads so clever they stopped readers from turning the page](#)).
- Use the [Library of Congress' list of visual analysis prompts](#) as well as the [Teacher and Student Guide to Analyzing Advertisements](#) to conduct a critical visual analysis.
- Based on your findings, write a love letter or breakup letter to the company that created the advertisement you analyzed.

Activity 4: Critical Visual Analysis of a Doctored Historical Image

- Select a famous doctored historical image (see [Photo Tampering Throughout History](#)).
- Use the [Library of Congress' list of visual analysis prompts](#) as well as the [Teacher and Student Guide to Analyzing Images](#) to conduct a critical visual analysis.
- Create a TikTok or Snapchat video to educate others about your findings.

Additional Resources:

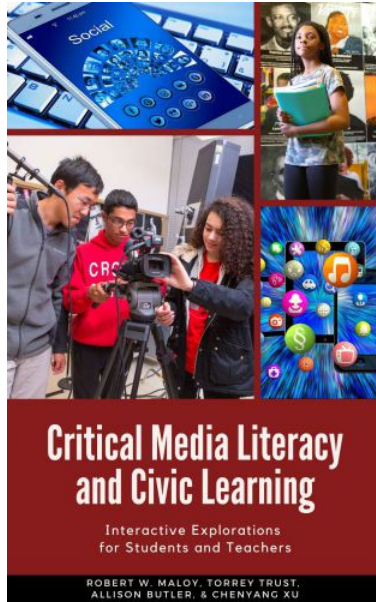
- 10 creative ways to teach visual literacy ([Canva](#))
- [Reading the Pictures](#): Evaluating the credibility of photos
- Evaluating Online Sources: Glossary of terms and guides ([tolerance.org](#))

Connecting to the eBook

[Building Democracy for All: Evaluating Print and Online Media](#)

Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
 - *Explain methods for evaluating information and opinion in print and online media.* (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) **[8.T7.5]**
- [ISTE Standards](#)
 - Knowledge Constructor
 - 3b: Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data, or other resources.
 - 3d: Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.
 - Creative Communicator
 - 6a: Students choose the appropriate platforms and tools for meeting the desired objectives of their creation or communication.
 - 6b: Students create original works or responsibly repurpose or remix digital resources into new creations.
 - 6d: Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for the intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)
 - Interpersonal and Societal Impact (CAS.c)
 - Digital Tools (DTC.a)
 - Collaboration and Communication (DTC.b)
 - Research (DTC.c)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8



Maloy, R. W., Trust, T., , & Xu, C. (2021). *Critical Media Literacy and Civic Learning*. EdTech Books. <https://edtechbooks.org/mediaandciviclearning>