



Analysing visual text

Features (colour, font, layout, symbols and concepts)

What are the most striking visual elements?

Consider what strikes you most about an image at first glance. It could be the mix of colours; disparate objects; characters, their expressions and body language; settings; use of light and shadow; placement of contrasting ideas; comparative sizes of the subjects; use of camera angles; use of symbols; comic elements, etc.

How does the text impact on the audience?

Consider your immediate impressions of the image, and then study how it works in more depth.

Look at the **colours, fonts and layout**:

- Predominantly bright colours, 'busy' layout and use of various fonts may appeal to teenagers and promise excitement.
- More subtle colours, basic fonts and conservative layout may appeal to traditional values of older adults.
- Royal blue, reds and golds, stylised fonts and elegant layout may be used to appeal to those who aspire to prestige or luxury.

Colour

What colours are used? How are they used? Do they portray different characters? Are colours used as symbols? How is colour used to build atmosphere?

In Shaun Tan's *The Red Tree*, Roberto Innocenti's *Rose Blanche*, and Anthony Browne's *King Kong*, the colour red represents life force, energy and passion.

Sepia colours are often used to reflect past times and memories.

Colour often has particular cultural significance. For example, red is associated with prosperity in Chinese culture.

Visual features

Consider the visual features and how they impact on the meaning of the text and the reader's response to the text.

Like written texts, visual texts have been carefully constructed by their composers to shape meaning, and to affect and influence the viewer.

When analysing a visual text it is useful to consider the following questions:

- What type of visual text is it?
- What is represented in the image? What is the text about?
- What is the purpose of this text? How do you know?
- Who is the intended audience for this text? How do you know?
- How is it composed?
- What are the most striking visual elements?
- What is the interaction or relationship between the viewer and subject?
- How does the text impact on the audience?
- How does the visual text achieve its purpose? How effective is this text as a piece of communication?

Concept qualities

The viewer gains meaning from the image/characters by associating them with something more generalised and symbolic:

- Objects and colours have symbolic qualities and may appeal to different age groups.
- A visual text may be represented in different contexts, or appropriated for different purposes or effects, especially in advertising.

Andy Warhol is famous for appropriating images of iconic subjects for his own artwork, eg Marilyn Monroe's face; Campbell's soup cans.



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