

English Home Language, Grade 10-12, Visual Literacy

Visual Literacy

- Visual literacy is the ability to make meaning of information presented in the form of an image. In other words, if you are **visually literate** you understand what the drawings in a cartoon, or the drawings or photographs in an advertisement, are communicating to you.

Critical language awareness

- To be critical when reading, viewing or listening means to analyse the material so that you can understand what is really being communicated.

When you study advertisements and cartoons, you should watch out for:

- **Emotive or manipulative language.** Advertisers use emotive (emotional) language and images to persuade us to buy products.
- **Stereotyping.** A stereotype is a misleading idea of someone or something as a type, with no regard to the truth about the actual person or thing. The ideas that 'all children are noisy', 'women belong in the kitchen' or 'strong men don't cry' are examples of stereotyping. We know that not all children are noisy, women do not all belong in the kitchen and many strong men do cry.
- **Prejudice or bias.** This is close to stereotyping. It is a way of thinking that makes us believe that we know something about a whole group of people, and that makes us feel good or bad about them, no matter what the facts are. Racial, religious and political prejudices are very common.
- **Lies.** People often lie to make you believe or do something, so we forget to ask: 'Is this the truth?' For example an advert may promise 'Our miracle diet pills will turn you from plump to slender in only

three weeks.' You are not also told that you will lose weight only if you exercise and eat a healthy diet at the same time, and what, exactly, 'plump' and 'slender' mean.

- **Association.** When two things are associated in your mind, you may feel that they 'go together'. For example, if you are told about beautiful people who use Whammo deodorant and who have lots of fun, you are being asked to believe that if you use Whammo deodorant you will become like the beautiful people and have lots of fun. Even great music in a TV commercial can persuade you that the product being advertised will make you feel as good as the music does.

Analysing advertisements

- The purpose of advertising is **to persuade** someone to buy a product (for example food or clothing); or to do something (for example, to stop smoking or to vote in an election).
- Advertisements also announce events (for example, Mandela Day or a sporting event) and inform the public about jobs or services that are available.

Advertisements come in many forms:

- **Printed** advertisements, which may be:
 - Advertisements containing words and images in newspapers and magazines;
 - Short advertisements in newspapers using words only, called classified advertisements;
 - Posters on walls, or streetlight poles, or notice boards;
 - Flyers (loose sheets of paper handed to people in the street or dropped into post boxes); and

- Catalogues (booklets advertising all the products made by a particular company or sold by a particular store).
- **Radio** commercials
- **Television** and **film** commercials
- Advertisements on **smart phones** and on the **internet**

Advertisements attract people's attention by:

- Using layout and colours which draw attention to specific words;
- Being amusing or clever;
- Featuring attractive or interesting people and places;
- Using catchy slogans and phrases, for example, 'Betty's buns are better'
- Promoting a bargain
- Playing interesting music (television and radio).

When you study advertisements, think about:

- What is being advertised? How do I know?
- Who is likely to be interested in/ who would like to buy this product?
- How do the designers of the advertisement try to make the product appealing?
- What is the meaning of the words they use? Why do they use these words?
- What does the picture (drawing/photograph) show? Why has this picture been chosen?
- If I had the money, would I buy this product? Why or why not?

Features of Advertisements

- **Slogan:** Words that are linked to a product and that are easy to remember (for example, “Finger-licking good”).
- **Logo:** A visual design, sometimes including letters, words or symbols, that is the official sign of a company or organisation (for example, the Nike tick).
- **Font:** The style and shape of printed letters, often especially chosen for emphasis in advertisements or cartoons.
- **Target market:** The type of people an advertisement wants to attract (for example, fashionable young people; wealthy business people).
- **Layout:** The way the advertisement is set out on the page so that certain words and pictures attract attention.
- **Language use:** The choice of words and ways of saying things (for example, the use of slang to sell jeans to young buyers; formal language used to sell banking services to business people; dramatic language used to sell adventure equipment; repetition used to make the reader remember the message).
- **Figures of speech:** The use of metaphor, simile, hyperbole (great exaggeration), onomatopoeia, puns, personification and alliteration (for example, hyperbole and alliteration used together: ‘Betty bakes the best buns in the world’).
- **Sound devices:** Words chosen for the effect of their sounds (for example, onomatopoeia and alliteration used together: ‘Shush, baby’s sleeping, it’s time for a soothing sip of rooibos tea’).

Cartoons

- A **cartoon** is a single drawing, often accompanied by words.
- A cartoon may be: Amusing, in order to make us laugh; or serious, in order to draw attention to something the cartoonist wants people to think about (for example, an event that is in the news).

Cartoon strip

- A **cartoon strip** is a series of drawings where each separate drawing tells part of the story. Each separate drawing is called a **frame**.
- The story in a cartoon strip usually builds up to, and ends with, a **punch line**.
- A punch line consists of the last few words of a story which make that story amusing or clever (or both).
- In a cartoon strip, both the words and the drawing in the final frame contribute to the punch line.
- Like single cartoons, cartoon strips may also be amusing or serious (or both).

Satire

- Cartoons and cartoon strips may use **satire**.
- Satire makes fun of people, especially public figures such as politicians, in order to criticise them.

Cartoons may include

- Cartoons may include people, animals or imaginary creatures, or all three.
- Cartoonists (people who draw cartoons) may change or exaggerate some of the features of these figures.
- For example, people may have huge heads or skinny legs, animals may wear clothes and talk.
- A cartoonist commenting on current affairs may draw a person's head bigger than it is in real life, or emphasise his or her nose, his or her glasses, or his or her hair, for example.
- This is called a **caricature**.

When you study cartoons or cartoon strips, think about the following:

- Is this meant to make me laugh or to think seriously about something, or to do both?
- What do I notice about the body language of each person or animal in the frames?
- What do I notice about the font and size used for the words?
- What do I notice about the punctuation?
- What connections can I make between the words and the drawings?