Critical Thinking: Advancing Visual Literacy

Sample Analysis

Welcome to our presentation on critical thinking skills for visual literacy. We will focus on the application of critical thinking skills to reflect on and analyze the meaning of an image.

Mastering this ability is especially important nowadays as more and more information is derived from images in digital and non-digital format. Quite often, a picture is removed from its context and therefore may say little. It is only when we apply our critical thinking skills to create the context and the meaning, a picture image becomes worth at least a thousand words. Here we can venture into the picture context, look beyond its frame or setup, compare and contrast it with our own viewing context.

The image selected as an example for this presentation is a collage that I pasted together years ago. I made it thoughtlessly on a Saturday afternoon, not having any critical thinking in mind that I was aware of.

Let’s imagine that we viewed ten collages and it was this one that we resonated with. This then becomes our author’s statement.

Please note that for your own practice you could select any visual image and proceed with it through the six levels of thinking.

Again, the 6 levels of thinking, Remembering, Understanding, Applying, Analyzing, Evaluating, and Creating, from the Bloom’s taxonomy will be used as our guide in this process.
In **Remembering** level, I elect to focus on the presence of the teddy bear and use it to remember facts and/or principles. Other options could have been selected such as the presence of the gem, the background design, the color, shape, or composition, etc.

In **Understanding**, I need to relate what I see to my own experiences. That is, identifying some past experience that allows me to relate, have a relationship, with this image. I remember myself as a child growing up in a rural area, Christmas, and a toy box.

Certainly, your experience would be vastly different, but equally form a focus, or theme, for thinking. Does remembering and reflecting on my experiences help me better understand the situation in the past?

Now let’s take one step further. How would better understanding of me past experiences help me in a new situation? This is the **Applying** level. Since I am in the helping field, I imagine the application of my thinking in a new, unrealized situation, for example, in a shelter.

In **Analyzing** I am stating what I am learning. Note that the learning was stimulated from the presence of a teddy bear in the collage. Whether that was the intention of the collage or not, I am following the levels of thinking into examining a child’s perspective in the world. As we advance the theme, a child’s perspective emerges.

In **Evaluating**, we seek an oppositional viewpoint. This is often a challenge because within self-centered thinking it is likely to believe everyone would or should see our facts as truth. Finding a role, in this case a supervisor, or a named person, prevents us from being trapped by our own thinking. While critical thinking is wonderful, it can create a prison where there is little freedom for ourselves or others. Evaluation protects us.

Finally, in **Creating**, we step back and search for a new whole, a whole that integrates the learning outcomes of other five levels of thinking. Note that while we started with the image of the teddy bear, we conclude with a larger view of meaning.