

# Interpreting and Reinterpreting Images

This modelling the tools is incorporated into critical challenges at grades 7, 8, 10 and 12, however, it can be adapted for use at all grade levels.

## Overview

The detailed activities that follow help students examine drawings that depict historical scenes. The examples in these lessons are based on drawings that depict early contact between First Nations peoples and Europeans in North and South America, but the activities could be adapted for use with other historical images. Students use the W5 questions (i.e., who, what, where, when, why) to decipher explicit messages in one of the drawings. They then learn about and look for implied messages in drawings. Next, students offer a revised interpretation of the historical scene that considers alternative perspectives. As a possible culminating task, students present a balanced perspective.

## Session One

Discuss motives for exploration.

- You may want to begin the class by playing the music and opening lines from *Star Trek*. Invite students to offer reasons why countries spend great sums of money exploring space. List these reasons on the board. Ask students to speculate on reasons that motivated European exploration of North and South America in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Compare these reasons with the reasons for contemporary space travel. Invite students to suggest other differences between contemporary exploration and early European exploration of the new world; e.g., the new world was inhabited, equipment was less sophisticated, explorers would lose contact for extended periods.

Introduce European motives for exploration.

- Duplicate and distribute copies of [Early Contact in North and South America](#) (Background Information) or present this information to the class. Explain that a major catalyst for European explorers' arrival in the Americas was blockage of the established trade routes to the east, brought on by the Fall of Constantinople to the Turks. Motivated by the 3C's—curiosity, commerce and Christianity—explorers, then traders and settlers, became interested in North and South America. Searching for the spices and silks of the Orient, the explorers found valuable commodities to trade and new populations to recruit to the Christian faith.

Imagine the early contact experience.

- Invite students to imagine what first contact would be like and how Europeans and First Nations peoples interacted in these early encounters. Ask students to individually record a brief imagined scene of first contact; e.g., outline the sequence of events, explain who

would do what, describe the participants' feelings. See [Imagining Early Contact Experiences](#) (Lesson Material). Save student work until later in the challenge when students will be asked to revisit these initial thoughts.

Analyze a drawing.

- Project a copy of a drawing that depicts a historical scene such as early contact between First Nations peoples and Europeans. See **Image Collections** (bottom of page) for examples of drawings depicting contact in North America or South America. If the title of the drawing is known, do not reveal it to the students. Limited information regarding the artist can be provided, if known.

Make inferences.

- Ask students to interpret the drawing using W5 questions.
- Use a table such as the one below to record student responses during the discussion. See [Analyzing a Drawing](#) (Lesson Material).
- Explain that each of the W5 questions invites an inference—a possible conclusion drawn from evidence. Model the vocabulary of inference and evidence as student responses are shared. To meet diverse learning needs, you may modify the vocabulary by using *conclusion* for inference and *clues* for evidence.

| W5 Questions   | Inferences<br>(what we think) | Evidence<br>(reasons to support our inferences)  |
|--|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>A. Who are the people in the drawing?</b>               | <i>missionary</i>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>has a cross</i></li> <li>• <i>is wearing a black robe</i></li> </ul> |
| <b>B. What are they doing?</b>                             |                               |  |
| <b>C. Where does the action in the drawing take place?</b> |                               |  |
| <b>D. When did it take place?</b>                          |                               |  |
| <b>E. Why is the action happening?</b>                     |                               |  |

Discuss criteria for inferences.

- Explain that some inferences are more plausible or convincing than others. Plausibility is increased when the inference is consistent with the evidence available from the drawing as well as from other information sources. Ask students to revisit their inferences to check for consistency with available evidence. Make revisions to the chart as necessary.

- Suggest that a second criterion for a sound inference is that the evidence is specific/detailed and based on observations. Encourage students to provide additional, more specific descriptions for the evidence. To stimulate students' thinking, pose specific questions in relation to each of the 5W categories. For each agreed-upon answer, add appropriate detail to the initial evidence list.

Present the explicit interpretation challenge.

- Distribute copies of five or six new drawings or images by the same artist or examples that depict similar historical events (see **Image Collections**). In Session Two, the students will form small groups according to the drawing they examine.
- Provide each student or pair of students with one of the picture studies and a copy of [Deciphering Explicit Messages in Visual Images: W5 Questions](#) (Lesson Material).
- Present the first part of the first critical challenge:

*Interpret the explicit messages of the assigned drawing.*

Explain that students are to interpret their assigned drawing by recording on the chart highly plausible inferences with specific supporting evidence for each W5 question.

## **Session Two**

Reflect on inferences and evidence.

- Involve students in self-reflection or peer feedback regarding their responses for [Deciphering Explicit Messages in Visual Images: W5 Questions](#) (Lesson Material). For purposes of formative assessment, you may wish to use [Self-reflection or Peer-feedback Checklist for Deciphering Explicit Messages](#) (Lesson Material) to guide the students through their reflections.

Extension: Compile individual interpretations.

- Organize students into five or six groups according to the drawing studied. Provide each group with a blank copy of [Deciphering Explicit Messages in Visual Images: W5 Questions](#) (Lesson Material). Ask each group to discuss their responses and use the chart to compile the most plausible and well-supported inferences drawn from their individual charts.

Share interpretations with the class.

- Invite each student, or a representative from each pair or group, to present its (composite) findings to the class or post the (composite) data charts around the classroom. Display or project each drawing during the presentations. Encourage the rest of the class to decide if they agree with the interpretations and evidence provided. Invite students to offer and support additional or alternative suggestions.

## Session Three

Introduce implicit message.

- Explain to students that the W5 questions focus on interpreting the readily observed and intended messages of the drawings. These are explicit messages. Explain that there is also an implicit or disguised message in pictures. The implicit message suggests the artist's values and attitudes toward the figures and events in the drawing. Project a copy of the drawing used in Session One, or one with similar content, in anticipation of later activities.

Introduce point of view.

- Discuss the concept of point of view. Explain that every time we look at something, it must always be from a particular point of view. The position—either physical or intellectual—from which we view things will shape what we see. Illustrate this by standing in different spots in the classroom and indicate how viewing the classroom from one viewpoint leads you to see different things and, perhaps, to see things differently. For example, when viewed from the front of the classroom, it may look as though everyone is paying attention; when viewed from the back of the classroom, you may see the passing of notes and change your conclusion. Ask students to think of a specific event in a sports activity; e.g., scoring a goal, hitting a home run, getting a penalty. Next ask students to describe how the point of view of that event would vary, depending on whether students are fans of that team, fans of the opposing team or neither. Point out how you can often tell someone's point of view from the words used to describe the event; e.g., calling a goal great as opposed to disastrous or well-deserved versus lucky. You may ask students to offer the point of view of someone who is not a fan of either team—this point of view is likely to be more balanced, recognizing the talents and weaknesses of both teams.

**Note:** In the Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies *point of view* is used when referring to an individual's viewpoint, and *perspective* is used when referring to a collective or group viewpoint.

Examine the viewpoint of the drawing.

- Draw students' attention to the picture being projected. Explain that the artist has drawn the picture from a particular viewpoint and that the class is going to make inferences regarding the artist's point of view and perspective (a group's point of view) based on evidence.
- Ask students to consider how groups of people included in the drawing are portrayed. What inferences can be made regarding the artist's point of view? Does the artist's point of view represent a broader perspective; e.g., European or First Nations perspective? What evidence supports the inferences?
- If the artist has titled the drawing, ask students to consider how the title might be used to infer viewpoint.

- Invite students to offer evidence from the drawing about the dominant viewpoint. Does the viewpoint reflect a broader perspective held by a group or collective? Record their evidence on [Deciphering the Implicit Message](#) (Lesson Material).

Example using [C.W. Jefferys Drawing 1](#)

### Viewpoint

| Inference   | Evidence  |
|---|---|
| <p>The dominant viewpoint in the drawing is a European perspective.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sole priest is the dominant figure in the picture.</li> <li>• The action revolves around the priest; the First Nations people are listening.</li> <li>• The dark robe draws our attention to the priest.</li> <li>• The title “A Jesuit preaching to the Indians” locates the dominant action with the priest. The use of the term Indian is from European explorers who mistakenly thought they were in India.</li> </ul> |

Introduce symbolic messages.

- Introduce one further dimension of the implied message in a drawing—what Walt Werner refers to as the iconic or symbolic message (see References). Explain that artists often draw a picture not simply to portray a particular historical event but also to symbolize a larger issue, value or purpose; e.g., good and evil, courage, struggle. Invite students to imagine the underlying messages in the drawing displayed. Create a chart, as suggested below, and record their inferences and supporting evidence for each symbolic message.

## Symbolic Message

| Inference  | Evidence   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The artist's message appears to be one of bringing Christianity to the receptive peoples that Europeans named Indians.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The cross (symbolizing Christianity) towers above the heads of everyone.</li><li>The First Nations people seem accepting.</li></ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The artist's message appears to be one of the lone voice of morality among the uncivilized people.</li></ul>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>There are many First Nations people and only one priest.</li><li>First Nations clothing leaves much of the body uncovered.</li></ul> |

Present the implicit interpretation challenge.

- Refer students back to the drawings that they examined in Session Two. Present the second part of the first critical challenge:

### **Interpret the implicit message of the assigned drawing.**

Distribute a copy of [Deciphering the Implicit Message](#) (Lesson Material) to each student or pair of students. Explain that students are to interpret their assigned drawing by recording an inference, with supporting evidence for each of the following:

- dominant focus*; i.e. the artist's viewpoint (which may represent a broader perspective)
- implied attitudes* toward the groups of people depicted in the drawing
- symbolic message*; i.e., the artist's overall theme or message.

## **Session Four**

Reflect on inferences and evidence (implicit messages)

- Involve students in self-reflection or peer feedback regarding their responses for [Deciphering the Implicit Message](#) (Lesson Material). For purposes of formative assessment, you may wish to use [Self-reflection or Peer-feedback Checklist for Deciphering the Implicit Message](#) (Lesson Material) to guide the students through their reflections.

Extension: Compile individual interpretations.

- Organize students into five or six groups according to the drawing studied, and provide each group with a blank copy of [Deciphering the Implicit Message](#) (Lesson Material). Ask each group to discuss their responses and use the chart to compile the most plausible and well-supported inferences from their individual charts.

Share interpretations with class.

- Invite each student, or a representative from each pair or group, to present the (composite) findings to the class or post the (composite) data charts around the classroom. Display or project each drawing during the presentations. You may want to use a different format from the one selected for sharing the explicit message. For example, provide students with sticky notes. As they walk about the class to look at the drawings and charts, ask them to decide if they agree with the interpretations and evidence provided. Invite students to offer and support additional or alternative suggestions that they record on the sticky notes and post with the charts.

## **Session Five**

Introduce an alternative perspective.

- Share or tell a story such as *Encounter* or *Coyote Columbus* that offers an alternative perspective regarding a historical event or traditional story (see References).
- Use the previous example of a sports event to discuss how we can use our own experiences to help us imagine other people's feelings.
  - People who are sports fans can imagine how the other side feels when a winning goal is scored against their team, since they have had very similar feelings.
  - People who are not sports fans may have a harder time understanding how anyone could get so upset by seeing their team lose, but they can still draw from other experiences they have had that caused similar emotions; e.g., an anticipated vacation or special gift being suddenly withdrawn.
- Invite students to suggest events they have personally experienced that may be similar in some respects to early contact experiences; e.g., the first day in a new school, trying to understand someone who speaks in a foreign language, meeting someone who tries to convince you about something that seems very odd.
- Project or display a copy of the demonstration drawing used in Sessions One and Two. Invite students to consider how the First Nations peoples might have viewed their early encounters with Europeans. As students offer their initial suggestions, encourage them to imagine the scene as First Nations peoples living at the time might have seen it. Explain that this attempt to place oneself in the shoes of people who lived in the past is referred to as historical empathy. Trying to empathize—to see things from the point of view of someone else without imposing your own values and beliefs—is difficult even when the person is alive. Historical empathy is especially difficult because we know much less about the people and because life in the past was probably different in ways we can only imagine.

- Ask students to suggest possible alternative perspectives such as First Nations' perspectives regarding early contact. If needed, pose questions such as the following to stimulate their thinking.
  - Would First Nations peoples have understood what symbols such as a cross or flag mean to the Europeans?
  - What relationship might First Nations peoples see between the Europeans, or their symbols such as the cross, and the diseases that were newly introduced?
  - What theories might First Nations peoples have about how or why the European missionaries came to their land?
  - Would all First Nations peoples feel the same way about the Europeans?
  - Who might be more or less interested in the missionary messages?

Reinterpret the drawings.

- Review the inferences developed earlier about the collection of drawings. Invite students to suggest how the events depicted in the drawings might be reinterpreted based on their understanding of an alternative perspective. Remind students to provide support for their suggestions. Ask students to imagine if/how the dominant focus of the drawing might change if viewed and drawn from an alternative (e.g., First Nations) perspective.
- Use this opportunity to help students see that an effective reinterpretation of an event should be consistent with historical facts, specific and empathic to the people represented in the drawings.

Revisit students' initial impressions.

- Ask students to review the written response in [Imagining Early Contact Experiences](#) (Lesson Material) that they completed at the start of Session One. This response described student conjectures about the early encounters between Europeans and First Nations peoples. Have students describe three or four ways in which their impressions have changed. If their impressions have not changed, students should record three or four pieces of new information they have acquired that support their initial impressions.
- Provide descriptive feedback to students on their entries (See [Assessment in Alberta: Discussion Paper](#)).

Introduce the reinterpret challenge.

- Present the second critical challenge:

**Reinterpret the assigned picture from a balanced viewpoint.**

- Ask students to imagine that the historical drawings are going to be placed on display at the local museum. The curator has invited students to create the information placards for the display. The information must represent the perspectives of both the European and the First Nations peoples.

- Students can work in pairs or in small groups to create an information placard for the demonstration drawing. Provide each pair or group with the formative tool [Self-reflection or Peer-feedback Checklist for Developing a Balanced Perspective](#) (Lesson Material) to use as they create the placard. Invite a group to share their work with the class and to model how to do productive peer review. Then involve all groups in the peer-review process.
- Students will then be provided with a copy of a different picture. Using the skills learned during this critical challenge, students will create an information placard for the museum display that represents a balanced perspective. Students should refer to the directions and rubric in [Presenting a Balanced Perspective](#) (Lesson Material).

#### Extension

- Ask students to create a drawing, visual or multimedia representation of a reinterpretation.

### Assessment

| <b>Criteria for Evaluation</b><br>Students provide evidence of their learning as they: | <b>Related Learner Outcomes</b><br>NOTE: The Modelling the Tools lessons can be used for a range of grade levels. Although this chart contains the learner outcomes for grades 7 and 8, there is considerable alignment of these outcomes in other grades such as Grade 9. Check the current program of studies for other grade-level outcomes. |   |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• synthesize information</li> </ul>             | 7.S.1.1   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• determine the validity of information based on context, bias, source, objectivity, evidence and/or reliability to broaden understanding of a topic or issue</li> </ul> |
|  | 8.S.1.1   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• analyze the validity of information based on context, bias, source, objectivity, evidence and reliability to broaden understanding of a topic or issue</li> </ul>      |
|  | 7.S.7.2   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• draw conclusions based upon research and evidence</li> </ul>   |
|  | 8.S.7.3   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• draw conclusions based upon research and evidence</li> </ul>   |
|  | 7.S.2.3   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explain the historical contexts of key events of a given time period</li> </ul>  |

|   |         |  |
|---|---------|--|
|   | 8.S.2.3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>analyze the historical contexts of key events of a given time period</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop balanced perspective</li> </ul>  | 7.S.1.2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>evaluate, critically, ideas, information and positions from multiple perspectives</li> </ul>  |
|   | 8.S.1.2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>critically evaluate ideas, information and positions from multiple perspectives</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>communicate information</li> </ul>       | 7.S.8.1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>communicate information in a clear, persuasive and engaging manner, through written and oral means</li> </ul>   |
|   | 8.S.8.1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>communicate in a persuasive and engaging manner through speeches, multimedia presentations and written and oral reports, taking particular audiences and purposes into consideration</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>re-evaluate personal opinions</li> </ul> | 7.S.1.4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>re-evaluate personal opinions to broaden understanding of a topic or an issue</li> </ul>  |
|   | 8.S.1.4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>re-evaluate personal opinions to broaden understanding of a topic or an issue</li> </ul>  |

### Assessment for Learning—Formative

Formative assessment provides opportunities for students to receive feedback to help improve their work. It is not included in report card grades and is used solely to assist students with improving their performance.

Evaluate the explicit interpretations.

Provide feedback on students' interpretation of the drawing's explicit message, as recorded in [Deciphering Explicit Messages in Visual Images: W5 Questions](#) (Lesson Material), using the [Self-reflection or Peer-feedback Checklist for Deciphering Explicit Messages](#) (Lesson Material).

Evaluate the implicit interpretations.

Provide feedback on students' interpretation of the drawing's implicit message, as recorded in [Deciphering the Implicit Message](#) (Lesson Material), using the [Self-reflection or Peer-feedback Checklist for Deciphering the Implicit Message](#) (Lesson Material).

Evaluate the balanced perspective.

- Provide feedback on students' ability to present a balanced perspective using the [Self-reflection or Peer-feedback Checklist for Developing a Balanced Perspective](#) (Lesson Material).

Evaluate the student impressions.

- Provide descriptive feedback to students on their response as they re-examined their initial impressions. Consider the depth of student responses and their ability to support their reasoning with specific examples and information.

### **Assessment of Learning—Summative**

Summative assessment takes place after instruction and after students have had a chance to practise and receive feedback on their work. Summative assessment provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate what they know and can do. Marks from summative assessment tasks can be included in report card grades.

Evaluate the balanced perspective.

- Evaluate students' ability to present a balanced perspective, using the rubric found in [Presenting a Balanced Perspective](#) (Lesson Material). According to this rubric, the task is evaluated on three criteria:
  - synthesizes information
  - develops a balanced perspective
  - communicates information.

### **Application**

- Later in the unit of study or in other units, have students use understandings of the explicit and implicit message and the accompanying data charts to interpret pictures in the textbook or in other sources.

### **References**

*Books listed as references have not been reviewed or approved by Alberta Education.*

"The Explorers" site of the Virtual Museum of New France (Canadian Museum of Civilization) contains maps, drawings and background on Cartier, Champlain, Brûlé, Radisson and a dozen other explorers of New France. [http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/index\\_e.aspx?DetailID=4174](http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/index_e.aspx?DetailID=4174)

Werner, Walt. Reading visual text. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 30 (3). (2002)  
This article explains many orientations to reading visual images. It was the basis for the discussion of explicit and implicit interpretations.

Jane Yolen, *Encounter* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2001)

Thomas King, *Coyote Columbus* (Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books, 1992)

Jon Scieszka, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* (New York, NY: Puffin, 1996)

## **Credits**

Adapted from *Critical Challenges Across the Curriculum* series. Permission granted by The Critical Thinking Consortium for use by Alberta teachers.

Assessment support provided by the Alberta Assessment Consortium.

## **Documents**

The following documents are referenced in the above modelling the tools.  
They can be adapted for your needs and re-saved.

### Graphic Organizers

- [Deciphering Explicit Messages in Visual Images: W5 Questions](#) 
- [Deciphering the Implicit Message](#) 

### Assessment

- [Self-reflection or Peer-feedback Checklist for Deciphering Explicit Messages](#) 
- [Self-reflection or Peer-feedback Checklist for Deciphering the Implicit Message](#) 
- [Self-reflection or Peer-feedback Checklist for Developing a Balanced Perspective](#) 
- [Presenting a Balanced Perspective](#) 

### Lesson Material

- [Imagining Early Contact Experiences](#) 
- [Analyzing a Drawing](#) 
- [A Classroom Example of Interpreting and Reinterpreting Images](#)

### Background Information

- [Early Contact in North and South America](#) 
- [Background to the Drawings: Spaniards and Aztecs](#) 
- [Background to the Drawings: New France \(Jefferys\)](#) 

## Images

- [New France: Jefferys Images Collection](#)
- [Spaniards and Aztecs Images Collection](#)