

Digital Citizenship: Arts Integrated Lessons

Lesson Title: A Thousand Words: What Do We Really See in Photos?

Grade Level: High School



Essential Question:

How do photos on social media affect our thoughts and feelings?

Materials

- 5 Photographs

Discussion Guideline

1. Begin the discussion by repeating to students the common phrase “A picture is worth a thousand words.” Ask students what that phrase means to them.
2. Next, transition the discussion to social media. Ask students: Where do you see photos online? How are photos used on social media?
3. Discuss how much time people spend deeply examining the photos that appear on their social media platforms. Take time to explore and discuss their Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat posts.
4. Research shows that most people do not take time to examine the photos and have a very quick emotional reaction. Sometimes that is how the photo is designed, but quite often this results in misinterpretation, hurt feelings, and a wide range of other negative emotions.
5. Explain (and perhaps write on the board) four (4) categories to use when examining photographs in order to fully explore the artistry and intention of the work:
 - **Composition:** What do we see in the picture? What don't we see in the picture? Consider things such as details of faces, blurred street signs, parts of objects out of the frame, etc.
 - **Timeframe:** What is the moment being captured? Consider things such as events, points in relationships, time of day, time of year, etc.
 - **Setting:** What is the location? How is the location made clear? What are the details to help you go beyond responding “inside” or “outside”?
 - **Focal point:** Where is our attention drawn? How does the photographer draw our eye to that point?
6. Ask students if they ever take the time to think about these four (4) steps. Why or why not? How have advances in technology and the constant accessibility of a camera (on our smartphones) changed the four artistic and intentional categories of thoughtful photography?

7. Explain that most photographs have two interpretations: **explicit** and **implicit**.
 - **Explicit:** the photograph clearly communicates who, what, when, and where.
 - **Implicit:** the viewers make assumptions or inferences (educated guesses) about who, what, when, and where.
8. Discuss whether people look at social media photo posts for their explicit or implicit interpretations. Students should explain their responses.
9. Tell students that they are going to look at some school appropriate yet typical photographs that might appear on a young person's social media page. Show photograph #1.
 - Ask students to look deeply at the picture for composition, timeframe, setting, and focal point. They should defend their responses with direct references to the photograph.
 - What is the explicit interpretation of the photograph? How do you know?
 - What is the implicit interpretation of the photograph? How do you know?
10. Ask students to discuss how this photograph would make them feel or make them think if they...
 - Knew the people
 - Did not know the people but knew the person who posted it
 - Were related to or close friends with someone in the photo
 - Intensely disliked one of the persons in the photo
 - Found it posted on their social media platform
11. Ask if their reactions were based on their explicit or implicit viewing.
12. Go through the same process with the next two pictures.

Conclusion

Ask students to think about how they react to photographs on social media, and then ask them to think about their intentions when they post a photograph on social media. Ask: do you ever stop to think about how people will interpret their photos? Why or why not?

Extension Activity

Locate and log on to a celebrity's social media site. Analyze a photo using the four criteria and then interpret the photo for its explicit and implicit meaning. What was the intention of the photograph? How does it make you feel? What does it make you think? How do photos like this influence you or others?

The next lesson will build on the information and discussion about social media photographs.







