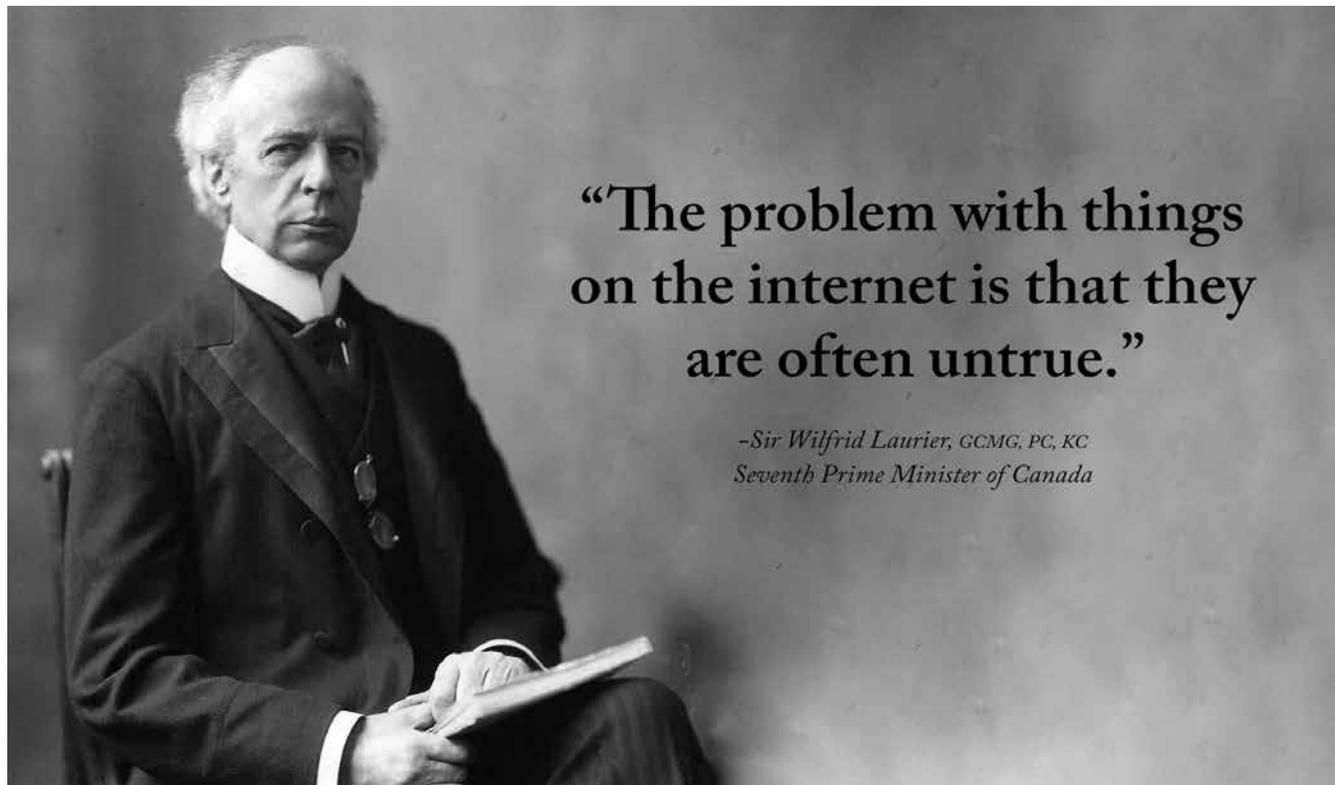


Lesson 7

Questioning Images



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 How do images produce meaning?
- 2 How do I know if it is ethical to share an image on social media?
- 3 How can images influence public opinion during an election?

PURPOSE

Today's news literacy requires image literacy. Developing a habit of questioning images can make us more informed citizens and can help us identify misinformation or disinformation.

In this lesson, students use a visual framework to analyze images from a variety of online and offline sources, allowing students to use their visual literacy and digital literacy skills in tandem. By working through the series of questions, students will develop everyday fact-checking habits and their ability to interpret and think critically about images.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- analyze images and explain how they produce meaning;
- identify and assess the source of an image;
- evaluate images based on their accuracy;
- infer how different audiences may interpret and use images;
- make informed decisions about sharing images and information;
- understand how images can be used to influence opinion during an election campaign.

Starter

1. As a class, ask students to analyze a few photos to introduce critical thinking about images. You can choose your own images or use the ones in Slide Deck 7.
 - What is being depicted?
 - What is the meaning behind the image? How does it make you feel?
 - What choices are visible? (e.g., crop, focal point, lighting, angle, etc). How do those choices affect how you interpret the image?
2. Next, analyze an image with a headline or caption. Start by sharing the image without the headline and invite students to share their analysis. Afterwards, reveal the headline or caption. You can use an image from a newspaper or the examples in Slide Deck 7.
 - What is being depicted?
 - How does the addition of the words change your understanding of the image?
 - What are some of the different ways people might interpret the message?
3. Ask students how they approach images online. What strategies do they already use to analyze images and to determine whether an image is worth sharing? Students can write their answers down, or answers can be collected on chart paper.

Activities

1. Review the importance of images in society and during election campaigns.
 - A picture can inspire an emotion or action or shape the way we understand people, issues, and events.
 - Political parties spend many hours planning photo ops to make sure the right image of their leader is presented to voters.

Additional resource: “Why good political photo-ops don’t happen by accident,” *CBC News* (September 28, 2015).

2. Explain to students that when we see images online, the context can be hard to identify. Pictures get re-used, re-posted, re-mixed, turned into memes and can appear in different places with different text, so what they represent can change dramatically. Use Slide Deck 7 to review the concepts of misinformation and disinformation, and some of the tactics people use to spread disinformation with special attention to images.
3. Distribute copies of the ‘Questioning Images’ handout (Activity 7.1) and introduce the framework to analyze

images. There are two levels to the framework, and the activity may be simplified by eliminating social media elements.

- *Image fundamentals*
Students describe the content of an image, identify its source, analyze possible meanings, and assess purpose. This level includes basic research and fact-checking. The fundamentals can be applied to any image in any context.
 - *Social media analysis*
This level follows the same path as the fundamentals, but asks a series of extension questions specific to images found on social media, including whether or not it would be ethical to share the image online.
4. Use a ‘Think-Aloud’ strategy to model how to use the framework to analyze images. Examples are available in Slide Deck 7 or at studentvote.ca/questioning. **A teacher guide and exemplars are included for support.**

TEACHER NOTE

If you are analyzing an image from social media, you can also use this as an opportunity to model information literacy strategies for students, such as using reverse image searches and evaluating sources using Google and Wikipedia (see Lesson 6).

5. Divide the class into small groups, giving each one an image to work through using the ‘Questioning Images’ framework. Ask students to record their notes on Activity 7.2. You can give each group a different image to analyze or use the same image to support a whole class discussion. Before you begin, consult Guide 7.3 for additional information. Allow students 5 minutes to work through each of the four framework segments (20 min total).
6. Ask each group to share their image with the class and explain their key insights and conclusions. Would students share this image (on social media, or with friends and family in general)? Are there any ethical considerations with sharing the image?

Consolidation

Have a closing discussion about images as a source of information or ask students to write a reflection in their learning journal.

- What can we learn about images by analyzing them?
- Why is it important to question the images that we see?
- How can images influence public opinion or our choices in elections? To what extent?

Assessment

Provide each student with an example image (or let students find their own). Ask students to work their image through the framework and fill out the activity on their own.

Extended Learning

There are many ways students can use the 'Questioning Images' framework to discuss how political campaigns, media organizations and individuals use images to influence public opinion around political candidates and issues. Here are some guiding questions you can use to supplement the framework when analyzing images related to the election:

- Analyze **campaign advertisements**: How does the advertisement use images to appeal to our emotions? How do the images make an argument about a political figure or issue?
- Analyze **political memes**: What images become

memes? How are these images edited and remixed on social media? What are the qualities of an effective meme?

- Analyze **political cartoons**: How do cartoonists depict political figures or issues? How does the political cartoon combine images and words to comment on politics? How does the cartoon communicate political opinions?
- Analyze **journalistic images** from news organizations (print or online): Does the image depict its subject in a neutral manner, or do you think it is biased? How do different newspapers (with different leanings) depict the same events or the party leaders?
- Compare the official **political party social media accounts**. How do the political parties use images to portray their leader or present their vision? Do they use different images on different platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter)? If so, why? What audiences are the different social media accounts trying to target?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Images are powerful. A picture can inspire an emotion or shape the way we understand people, issues, and events. Many expressions describe the impact of visual information — “a picture is worth a thousand words” or “seeing is believing.”

Unlike text, images are immediate and it does not take much time or effort to make sense of them. Because of the tremendous power of images to appeal to our emotions, it essential to ask questions about them.

Photos can be immensely influential in election campaigns, and images may help voters form their opinions on political candidates or issues. For this reason, campaign teams spend many hours planning photo-ops for their party leader or deciding how to use images to frame political issues and influence public opinion. In the age of social media, crafting the right image is even more important because politicians are able

to reach voters directly, without relying as much on traditional media outlets.

This emotional power of images becomes particularly important when it comes to their role in spreading **misinformation** and **disinformation**.

A common form of misinformation or disinformation is **false context** — when a real image is paired with a false claim to incorrectly influence an audience’s understanding of what they are looking at.

But even when images are not being used maliciously, valuable information can be found by analyzing them. There is no such thing as a purely neutral image because each choice behind its creation and presentation has an impact on how an audience will interpret it.

Even a journalistic photograph intended to inform people about a news event will involve a series of choices that affect how audiences understand it. The choice of subject, angle, light and distance will all create a particular mood or message.

Editorial decisions will limit meaning further — an editor will select one image from a range of possible photos to publish, adding a headline and a caption to help audiences make sense of what they are seeing in a particular way.

Similarly, your flattering and unflattering selfies are both you, but you make a choice about which to post, and your captions help viewers understand how to interpret the photo.

We can use image analysis skills to investigate any type of image, in any context. A news photo published by a media outlet has a clear context. Context can be harder to identify with images online. Pictures will get re-used, re-posted, re-mixed, turned into memes, and appear in different places with different text, so what they represent can change dramatically, and quickly. A journalistic image meant to inform could be used to communicate something completely different used somewhere else.