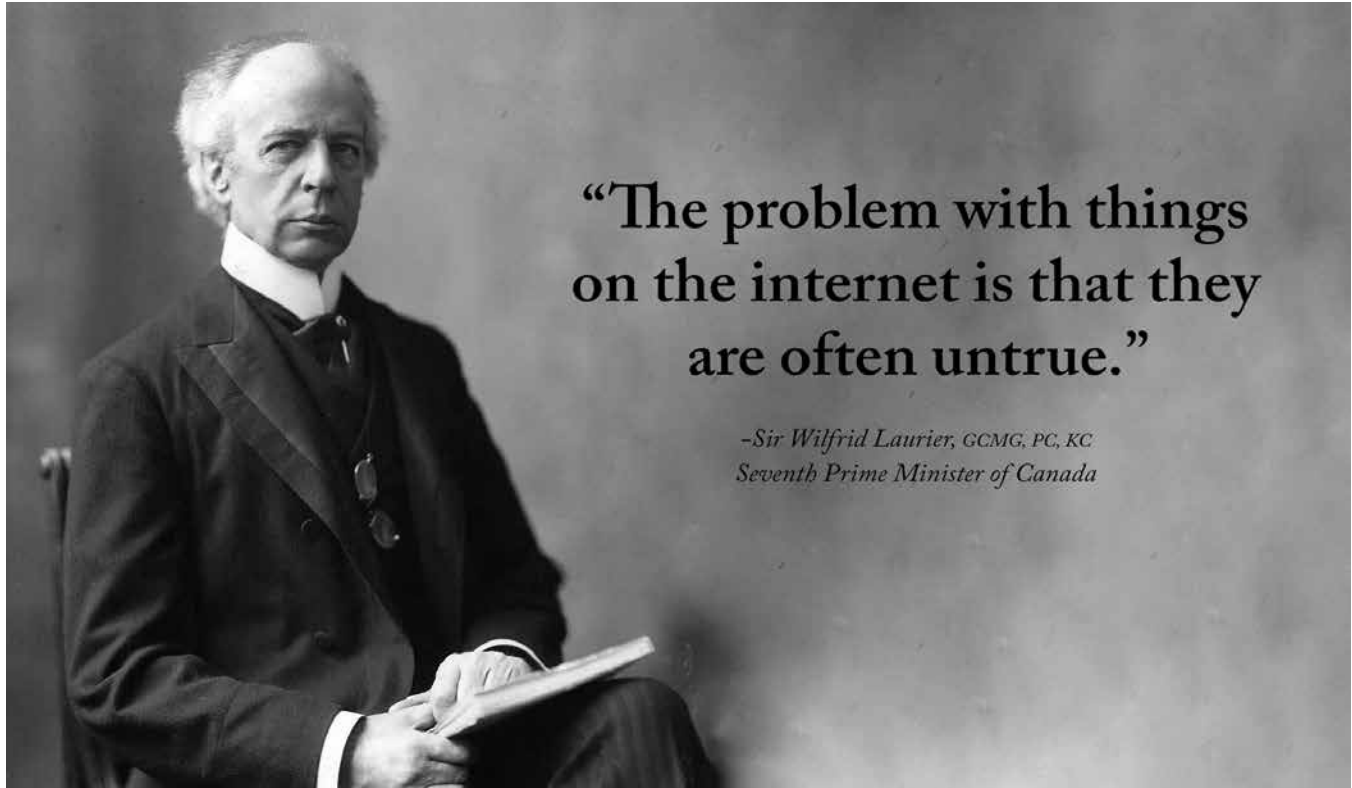


Lesson 7

Questioning Images



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 How do images produce meaning?
- 2 How can I think critically about images?

PURPOSE

Images can shape the way we understand people, issues, and events. Developing a habit of questioning images can make us more informed citizens.

In this lesson, students use a visual framework to analyze images from a variety of sources. By working through the series of questions, students will strengthen their ability to interpret and think critically about images. In the *Extended Learning* section, there are many ways students can use the 'Questioning Images Framework' to discuss how political parties, media organizations and individuals use images to influence thinking and attitudes around the election.

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;
- understand how text and captions influence meaning;
- infer how different audiences may interpret and use images.

Tips For Teachers

- Please use the activities and combine them in a way that is appropriate for your class.
- If you are analyzing an image from social media, you can also use this as an opportunity to model verification strategies for students, such as reverse image searches and evaluating sources using Google and Wikipedia (see Lesson 6).
- Supplies/Needs: Slide Deck 7, 'Why good political photo-ops don't happen by accident' CBC video (optional), sample images, copies of 7.1 and 7.2.
- Any videos, slide decks, handouts and activity sheets in Word can be found at: studentvote.ca/canada.

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)? 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 select a news image or use the examples in Slide Deck 7A.
 - 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?

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.

Suggested video: "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.
3. Distribute copies of Handout 7.1 and introduce the framework to analyze images. Please refer to Guide 7.3 for tips and guiding questions. Use a 'Think-Aloud' strategy to model how to use the framework to analyze images (samples are provided in Slide Deck 7 or at studentvote.ca/questioning).
4. 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. Allow students 5 minutes to work through each of the four framework segments (20 minutes total).
5. Ask each group to share their image with the class and explain their key insights and conclusions.

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 questioning them?
- Why is it important to question the images that we see?
- How can images influence our choices in elections?

Extended Learning

Option A: For intermediate grades or advanced students, you can use the Secondary version of the 'Questioning Images Framework' and examples (Please see Lesson 7 – Secondary Level at studentvote.ca/canada).

Option B: There are many ways students can use the 'Questioning Images Framework' to discuss how political campaigns, media organizations and individuals use images to influence thinking and attitudes around the election. 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 leader or an issue? (See Lesson 11 for more activities)

- Analyze **political memes**: What images become memes? How are these images edited? What are the qualities of an effective meme?
- Analyze **political cartoons**: How do cartoonists portray political figures or issues? How does the political cartoon combine images and words to create a message? 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?

Assessment For Learning

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

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 don’t take much time or effort to make sense of. It’s the power of images to appeal to our emotions that makes 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 type of mis- or disinformation form 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. A journalistic image meant to inform could be used to communicate something completely different used somewhere else.