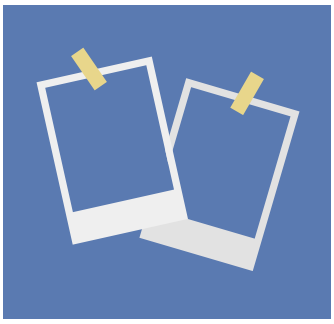
Analysing Images

Summary



Photographs or images can be used to raise questions, stimulate discussion, develop empathy, challenge stereotypes and practise media literacy skills.

Images can be used in the following ways:

- Immediate responses: display a range of photos, images or cartoons on a particular issue and seek immediate responses from the class.
- Select images: learners choose an image from a selection provided, or do their own research to identify images which best represent the issue being explored. Criteria for the selection of images could vary: for example, most representative, most stereotypical, favourite etc. Learners provide a rationale for their choices.
- Create captions: learners add a title, caption, description, text box or speech bubbles to an image. They then discuss their captions.
- Role-play: learners use an image as a stimulus to develop a role-play, inventing relationships, scenarios or events based on the image. Drama, art and creative writing activities could follow.
- Cropped images: learners are given a cropped image. Discussion centres on what is missing, what surrounds the cropped image, what is happening outside of the frame etc. Learners can respond by adding their own drawings or words to the cropped image. They can then compare it with the complete image and reflect on their initial interpretations.

Materials required

Selection of images (photographs, advertisements, diagrams, cartoons, sketches) relevant to the issue you are exploring. Identify current images which will stimulate discussion. Post-its, writing materials.

Steps

1. Divide the class into groups of 2-4 learners seated around a table.
2. Provide each group with images as well as Post-its and writing materials.
3. Description: learners examine the image objectively and describe or take note of what they see. The emphasis here is on description only, not interpretation.
4. Consider the unknowns: what can you not see in the image? What is the context surrounding this image? What do you not know? What do you think is going on? What do you wonder? Encourage learners to develop a list of questions about the place, people or events in the image.
5. Reactions: encourage learners to describe their emotional responses to the image: for instance surprise, guilt, joy, pity or excitement. Discuss the power of images to elicit reactions, including global citizenship actions such as campaigning or writing petitions.
6. Feedback: discuss as a whole class issues such as the power of images to tell a story; stereotyping; the knowns and unknowns; representation of voices, and the danger of assumptions. Record responses to the image on a whole-class mind map, as a descriptive essay, as a reflection or as a blog or report.

More information

- When selecting images to use in the classroom or to display around the school, we advise you to consult our WWGS Guide to Ethical Communication. This guide is informed by the WWGS Guiding Principles for GCE and draws on the Dóchas Guide to Ethical Communications (2023). These guides highlight the need for authentic representation, consent, respect for people's dignity and the need to 'do no harm' when selecting and using images.
- How the World Works: Financial Justice Ireland (1E, p.25).
  This lesson uses photographs to 'encourage active and critical engagement with media images, and to challenge stereotypes related to rich and poor countries'.
- Oxfam: Teaching Controversial Issues (2018)
  Activity 5 (p.14) and Activity 6 (p.15) use images to critically explore local to global issues. Questions to stimulate critical thinking and discussion are included.
- Global Citizenship Education: Curious Teachers, Critical Classrooms, edited by Brighid Golden. See page 171 for a section on 'Using Images and Videos in the Classroom'.

"I truly believe the only way we can create global peace is through not only educating our minds, but our hearts and our souls."

Malala Yousafzai *(born 1997) is a Pakistani female education activist, human rights advocate and producer of film and television. She is the youngest Nobel Prize laureate in history, receiving the prize in 2014 at age 17.*