Tools for Thought

targeted ✔
adaptable

Primary
Intermediate ✔
Middle ✔
Senior

Explain the image II
using visual clues to develop informative explanations of images

Learning outcomes

- understand the basic contents of an image
- make plausible inferences about an image
- gather general information about a historical or contemporary situation or place—either to expand existing knowledge or to provide a starting point for inquiry into a new topic

Introduce the strategy

Discuss the power of images

- Invite students to speculate on the meaning of the suggested saying. Discuss the value of images as sources of information.

Student activity

Think about the meaning of the saying: "A picture is worth a thousand words."

Share your thinking in a class discussion.

Possible responses

- a single image can represent complex situations
- carefully examining an image reveals a lot of information about its subject

Observe an image

- Use a detail-rich, caption-free image that creates some mystery about the event depicted to demonstrate the activity, before students investigate other images independently. Provide pairs of students with the sample image available at http://tc2.ca/index.php?page=online-photo-gallery or display the image on a screen. Allow one or two minutes for each pair to discuss what they see before proceeding with the activity.

Student activity

Look closely at the image. What do you notice? What "thousand words" does this image convey? Describe what you see to a partner. Share your observations with the class.

Opportunities for differentiation

- Make the activity easier by highlighting details from the image that are particularly helpful in developing an explanation.
- Help students focus on the details in the image by suggesting they use squares of paper to conceal all but one quarter of the image at a time.

Distinguish direct observations and inferences

- Explain to students that their task is to draw inferences (logical, informed conclusions) about what is happening, based on visual clues in the image. Provide an example of an

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Explain the image

observation and an inference such as: if you see someone crying, you infer they may be hurt. Point out that the observation provides the evidence for the inference.

• Review the list of initial observations made by students. To reinforce the concept, provide an unfounded inference, e.g., the men are about to be arrested, and invite students to explain why this cannot be supported by the image.

Student activity

Categorize your initial list of observations into "observations" and "inferences."

Observations	Inferences
• two men have a large gun • the men are wearing light-coloured, loose clothing that is common among Muslims • one man is wearing a prayer cap	• The men might belong to a military group. • The men do not appear to be wearing uniforms; this may suggest that they are not part of the regular military forces. • They are Muslim.

Assessment for learning

• Confirm students' understanding of observations and inferences by asking for examples of each. If students require more support in understanding these concepts, refer to *Inference* (Lesson #32), available to subscribers to the **Tools for Thought** collection online and in print in *The Competencies Toolkit*.

Opportunities for differentiation

• Provide a list of observations and inferences and invite students to manually sort and label them.

Explore

Look for the 5Ws

• Distribute a copy of *Explaining the image* (Activity Sheet). Review the 5Ws (Who? What? Where? When? Why?). Suggest the 5Ws are an effective strategy for reading images and drawing inferences. To demonstrate the strategy, show students the videos found at http://www.tc2.ca/explainTheImage.html.
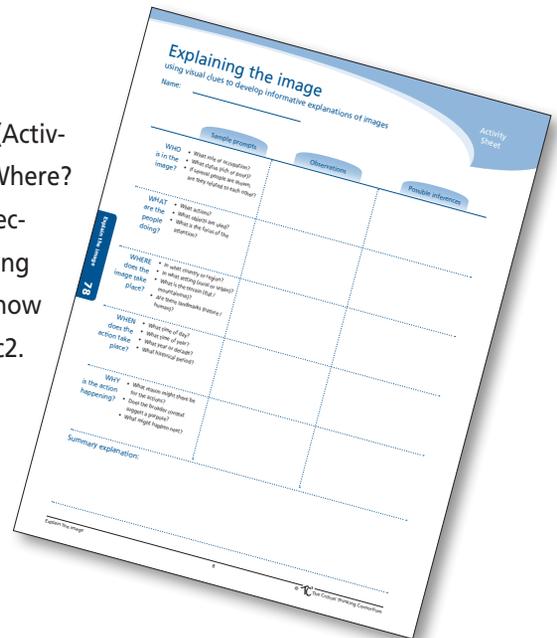
Student activity

Watch the video. With your partner, brainstorm and record obvious observations from the image for each of the 5W questions on your activity sheet. Discuss and record possible inferences. Remember that an inference must be supported by one or more observations from the image.

Dig for details

- Encourage students to look beyond the obvious clues in the image, to extract as much information as possible. Suggest that the more specific and relevant their observations are, the easier it will be to draw plausible inferences. Draw students' attention to the prompts on the activity sheet and encourage students to use the prompts to deepen their observations and inferences. If students have already studied the topic featured in the image, encourage them to also draw on their background knowledge when making inferences. If students have little background knowledge of the topic, encourage them to be very tentative in their inferences. Suggest that they qualify their conclusions by using terms such as "may be," "possibly," and "perhaps."
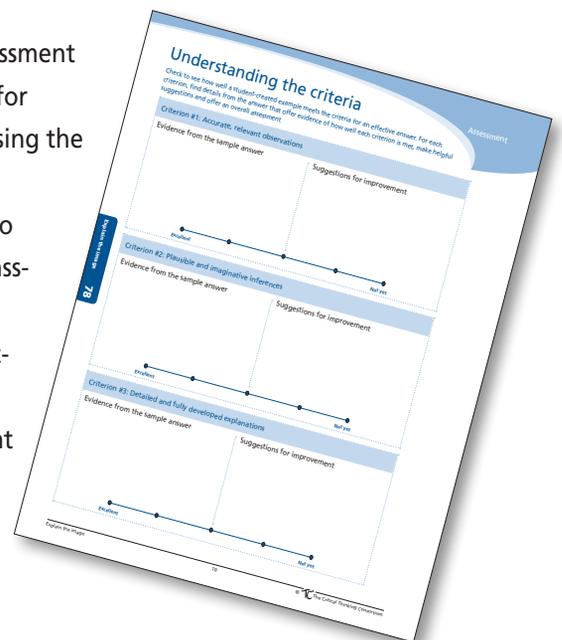

Student activity

Take another look at the image. Notice the less obvious clues in the image, including those in the foreground, middle ground, and background. Use the prompts to help you. What additional information can you extract? What can you infer from these observations? Compare your completed activity sheet with the one completed by another pair of students. What is similar? What is different?

Assessment for learning

- Introduce *Understanding the criteria* (Assessment Rubric) to help students apply the criteria for informative observations and inferences using the sample answers just completed as a class.
- Introduce the first criterion: Ask students to record evidence indicating whether the class-generated observations were accurate and relevant. Record these examples in the left-hand column.
- Invite students to suggest things that might be done to improve the class's performance, providing accurate and relevant details. Record these in the right-hand column.
- Encourage students to provide an overall rating of the success of the class in meeting the first criterion. Record this in the section below the two columns.
- Repeat this procedure for the second criterion.

Discuss criteria

- Explain to students that specific observations and plausible inferences will help them write a "thousand-word" explanation of the image. Invite students to discuss with a partner what makes an explanation informative. If necessary, review the examples of poor explanations provided and invite students to critique them. Based on student discussion, develop criteria for identifying an informative explanation.

Student activity

What makes an explanation informative? Look at the example explanations. How informative are they? Develop possible criteria for an informative explanation.

Examples of explanations

- The men are having a picnic.
- They are attacking a city.
- It is hot.
- The men are protecting the road.

Suggested criteria for an informative explanation:

- *accurate* and *relevant* observations
  - accurately describe the relevant details in the image
- *plausible* and *insightful* inferences
  - go beyond the very obvious conclusions
  - are supported by several pieces of evidence found in the image or are based on other facts known about the topic
- *detailed* and *fully developed* explanation
  - provides appropriately detailed but tentative answers to each of the 5W questions

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Assessment for learning

- Refer back to *Understanding the criteria* and introduce the third criterion. Apply the criteria for informative explanations using the examples provided above.

Develop explanations

- Instruct students to use their completed charts to develop a detailed summary that addresses each of the 5W questions. Remind students to use the criteria for an informative explanation and to avoid making definitive statements. If necessary, model how to write an informative explanation.

Student activity

Create a detailed informative explanation. Reread the inferences for each of the 5Ws. Identify the ones that are most likely to be true, given the clues. Combine these inferences into an extended sentence. Remember to use terms such as "may be," "possibly," and "perhaps." Share your explanations with another pair of students.

Example of an informative explanation

The image appears to portray two Islamic members of a militia who are safeguarding the region from hostile groups, using a large weapon positioned to monitor a large rural area, in a Middle Eastern country during the late spring or early summer of the late 1990s or early 2000s.

Opportunities for differentiation

- Provide a few plausible explanations and invite students to identify supporting details from the image.

Assessment for learning

- Encourage students to self- and peer-assess their explanations, using *Understanding the criteria*, and make revisions based on the feedback.
- Co-assess student exemplars, using the criteria to distinguish informative explanations from less informative ones.

Confirm plausibility and summarize

- Encourage students to confirm the plausibility of their explanations by referring to:
  - additional clues in the image
  - the published caption for the image
  - clues in other images showing the same topic
  - outside sources: e.g., an atlas, a textbook, or the Internet.

- Suggest that other clues will help them to corroborate their evidence (confirm the accuracy of their explanation) so they can be certain that they have arrived at sound conclusions about what is happening in the image.

Student activity

Consider the plausibility of your explanation (the likelihood that it is true) by looking for other clues in the image, reading the published caption, and looking at other images or outside sources. Revise your explanation as necessary.

Caption

- The caption for the image says *Northern Alliance guards on the road to Kabul*.

Background information about the Northern Alliance:

The United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan (UIF) was a military, political organization.

It was created in 1996 by the Islamic State of Afghanistan.

It united various ethnic groups, who were fighting against each other, to fight against the Taliban.

It fought against the Taliban from 1996–2001 and controlled roughly 30 percent of Afghanistan's population in its northern provinces.

In 2001, with support from the United States army, the UIF successfully retook control of Afghanistan from the Taliban.

- If more than one image has been examined, summarize what was learned about the historical or contemporary event. Provide additional information about the topic or image(s) to challenge any dubious conclusions that may have been proposed.

Student activity

If you used more than one activity chart on the topic, summarize what you learned.

What do the explanations tell about the event or situation shown in the images? What conclusions can you draw about the conditions and circumstances?

Opportunities for differentiation

- Encourage some students to work with a partner when summarizing the conditions.
- Allow students to complete their summaries orally, in writing or in pictures.

Reflect

- Explain to students that *Explain the image* is a strategy that can be used independently, both in and out of school, to gather information about a historical or contemporary situation or place. Following these activities, distribute the *Student Guide*.

Student activity

Explain the purpose of *Explain the image* to a partner. Discuss possible ways to use the *Explain the image* strategy both in and out of school. Brainstorm the steps, in sequence, when applying the strategy. Compare your sequence to the suggestion in the *Student Guide*.

Possible responses

Purpose:
- to better understand historical or contemporary situations or places
- as a way of gaining background information about a topic or extending what we already know

Ways to use the strategy:
- focus our observations on details in images and write detailed summaries
- draw plausible inferences about what we observe in images
- understand or explain what is happening in images found on the Internet and in other subject areas, newspapers, magazines, and textbooks

Assess the sample

- Review the sample use of the strategy. Introduce the rubric as another assessment tool.

Student activity

Use the rubrics to assess the sample use of the strategy.
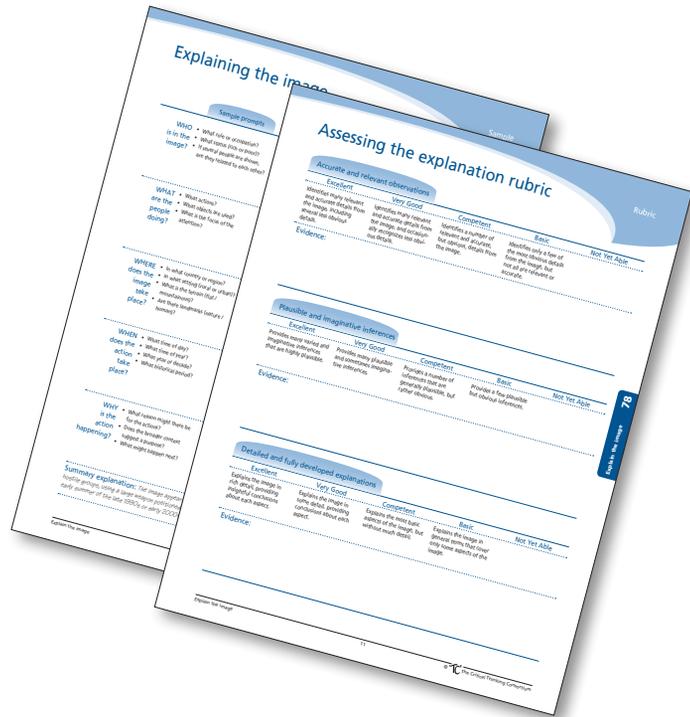
Explain the image

using visual clues to develop informative explanations of images

Purpose

This strategy helps me gather and analyze details of an image and develop informative explanations of what is happening in that image. Explaining what is seen in an image helps to improve understanding of the historical or contemporary situation or place shown.

Instructions

- Examine the image carefully. What direct observations can be made for each of the 5Ws? Record your observations on the activity sheet.
- Draw plausible inferences (logical, informed conclusions) about each of the 5Ws. Record the inferences on the chart.
- Take a second look at the image. What details have you overlooked? Notice the less obvious details in the image, including those in the foreground, middle ground, and background. Add further observations and refine your inferences.
- Reread the inferences for each of the 5Ws. Decide on the most reasonable ones, e.g., the ones most likely to be true, given the clues in the image and other facts on the topic.
- Combine these into an extended sentence or short paragraph. Remember, if you have little knowledge of the topic, use such terms as "may be," "possibly," and "perhaps" in your explanation.
- Confirm the plausibility of your explanation by referring to additional images of the same topic or to outside sources, e.g., an atlas, a textbook, or the Internet.
- Revise your explanation as needed, in light of this new information.
- Investigate other images, using the *Explain the image data chart*. Ask yourself, "What do the explanations tell me about the events shown in the images? What conclusions can I draw about the circumstances and conditions?" Summarize what you have learned.

Explaining the image

using visual clues to develop informative explanations of images

Name: _____

	Sample prompts	Observations	Possible inferences
WHO is in the image?	• What role or occupation? • What status (rich or poor)? • If several people are shown, are they related to each other?		
WHAT are the people doing?	• What actions? • What objects are used? • What is the focus of the attention?		
WHERE does the image take place?	• In what country or region? • In what setting (rural or urban)? • What is the terrain (flat / mountainous)? • Are there landmarks (nature / human)?		
WHEN does the action take place?	• What time of day? • What time of year? • What year or decade? • What historical period?		
WHY is the action happening?	• What reason might there be for the actions? • Does the broader context suggest a purpose? • What might happen next?		

Summary explanation:

Explaining the image

	Sample prompts	Observations	Possible inferences
WHO is in the image?	• What role or occupation? • What status (rich or poor)? • If several people are shown, are they related to each other?	Two men are dressed in casual clothing that is common among Muslims. They are posing with a large, motorized weapon. They have no side arms and no secondary weapons are visible. One of the men is wearing a prayer cap.	The two men are likely members of some type of informal army or militia, because an organized military unit would wear uniforms. The man standing might be the leader. They are not likely to be members of a radical Islamic group.
WHAT are the people doing?	• What actions? • What objects are used? • What is the focus of the attention?	They have little camouflage or protective cover. They look as if they are situated at the edge of a road that has a view of a large area. One of the men appears to be using a communications device.	They could be setting up their large weapon and ammunition along a road checkpoint or lookout spot. They seem to be monitoring the situation, rather than preparing to fire their weapon.
WHERE does the image take place?	• In what country or region? • In what setting (rural or urban)? • What is the terrain (flat / mountainous)? • Are there landmarks (nature / human)?	There are no buildings in sight. The land appears to be a semi-arid plain with mountains in the background. Their location seems to be slightly higher than the surrounding ground.	They could be on a ridge along the edge of a rural road in a Middle Eastern country such as Afghanistan or Pakistan.
WHEN does the action take place?	• What time of day? • What time of year? • What year or decade? • What historical period?	The clothing appears to be contemporary dress for Islamic men (fitted shirts and modern textiles). The weapons also appear to be contemporary. The fields appear to be still green and not yet burned by the hot summer weather.	It appears to be late spring or early summer, within the last 20 years or so.
WHY is the action happening?	• What reason might there be for the actions? • Does the broader context suggest a purpose? • What might happen next?	They are observing others. They have a substantial military weapon but do not seem in a hurry; they are positioned by a road.	They may be trying to screen traffic along the road to prevent undesirable groups from entering the region.

Summary explanation: The image appears to portray two Islamic members of a militia who are safeguarding the region from hostile groups, using a large weapon positioned to monitor a large rural area, in a Middle Eastern country during the late spring or early summer of the late 1990s or early 2000s.

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Understanding the criteria

Check to see how well a student-created example meets the criteria for an effective answer. For each criterion, find details from the answer that offer evidence of how well each criterion is met, make helpful suggestions and offer an overall assessment

Criterion #1: Accurate, relevant observations

Evidence from the sample answer	Suggestions for improvement

Excellent ———————————— Not yet

Criterion #2: Plausible and imaginative inferences

Evidence from the sample answer	Suggestions for improvement

Excellent ———————————— Not yet
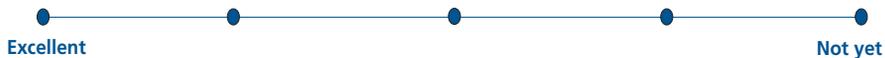
Criterion #3: Detailed and fully developed explanations

Evidence from the sample answer	Suggestions for improvement

Excellent ———————————— Not yet

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Assessing the explanation rubric

Accurate and relevant observations

Excellent	Very Good	Competent	Basic	Not Yet Able
Identifies many relevant and accurate details from the image, including several less obvious details.	Identifies many relevant and accurate details from the image, and occasionally recognizes less obvious details.	Identifies a number of relevant and accurate, but obvious, details from the image.	Identifies only a few of the most obvious details from the image, but not all are relevant or accurate.	

Evidence:

Plausible and imaginative inferences

Excellent	Very Good	Competent	Basic	Not Yet Able
Provides many varied and imaginative inferences that are highly plausible.	Provides many plausible and sometimes imaginative inferences.	Provides a number of inferences that are generally plausible, but rather obvious.	Provides a few plausible but obvious inferences.	

Evidence:

Detailed and fully developed explanations

Excellent	Very Good	Competent	Basic	Not Yet Able
Explains the image in rich detail, providing insightful conclusions about each aspect.	Explains the image in some detail, providing conclusions about each aspect.	Explains the most basic aspects of the image, but without much detail.	Explains the image in general terms that cover only some aspects of the image.	

Evidence:

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Explain the image