

Why are images a good way to understand writing?

- Images suit the nature of our modern world as we are constantly bombarded with visual messages at home and in public spaces (Christodoulou and Damaskinidis, 2014).
- Writing can be a source of high anxiety with concerns for ability and others' opinions (Martinez, Kock and Cass, 2011). Images can help break such barriers into writing (Zenkov and Harmon, 2009).
- Traditional notions of literacy like reading or writing have now expanded to become multimodal, including new 'texts' such as images, videos and web pages (Miller and McVee, 2012).
- Images are social documents: 'No other kind of relic or text from the past can offer such a direct testimony about the world which surrounded other people at other times' (Berger, 1972, p.10).

Reference list:
 Berger, J. (1972) *Ways of seeing*. London: Penguin.
 Brown, E. (2005) 'Reading the Visual Record'. In Cameron, A., ed. *Looking for America: An Historical Introduction to the Visual in American Studies, 1900-2000*. Blackwell, 362-370.
 Christodoulou, A. and Damaskinidis, G. (2014) 'The development of a visual literacy course in Higher Education', in Zantides, E. (ed.) *Semiotics and visual communication*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, pp. 193-207.
 Martinez, C.T., Kock, N. and Cass, J. (2011) 'Pain and Pleasure in Short Essay Writing: Factors Predicting University Students' Writing Anxiety and Writing Self-Efficacy', *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 54(5), pp. 351-360.
 Miller, S.M. and McVee, M.B. (2012) *Multimodal composing in classrooms: Learning and teaching for the digital world*. London: Routledge.

Task: Working with the image below, follow the 3 stages of analysis in order to produce an academic piece of writing.

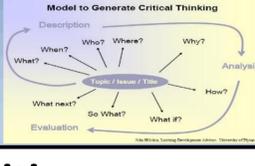


E. M. Ward, *The Last Toilet of Charlotte Corday*, London, c.1869

The Last Toilet of Charlotte Corday

This exercise takes writing out of its purely verbal form and puts it in the realm of the visual.

The model of developing a piece of academic writing, however, can be applied to any subject and is not confined to images. The 3-stage approach can assist in writing on any issue, text or document, as it follows the critical thinking model (Hilsdon, 2010).



Stage 1

Describe the image – what do you see?

Examples of questions to ask:

- What is the subject matter?
- Who is involved?
- What is happening in the picture?
- What objects can you identify?

Patently describe all the elements you can identify, so you can interpret them in the next stage.

Descriptive writing

- Describes, outlines, summarises, defines a theory, a viewpoint or a situation
- Provides context (background) to a subject
- Tells or restates

Descriptive writing

In this black and white engraving, a woman is sitting in a prison cell, clad in an elegant white dress, with hands interlaced on her knee. A man in a conical cap is cutting her hair while she's looking longingly at a painting on the easel to her left. Her eyes look alert. An artist is watching her as he is packing up his paints on the table. Other objects in the cell include a palette knife in the right hand corner and a quill pen on the left, as well as a heap of dark fabric at the foot of the woman.

Stage 2

Analyse the image – what does it mean?

Examples of questions to ask:

- How do the woman's clothing, posture and facial expression reveal her personality, mood and status?
- Similarly, what do these elements tell us about the men?
- Why did the artist create the picture in this particular way?
- How does it relate to society?
- What are the symbolic messages?

Interpret all the elements you have identified in Stage 1 – be bold!

Analytical writing

- Compares, explores, assesses strengths and weaknesses
- Provides reasons and draws informed conclusions
- Comments, makes links and shows implications

Analytical writing

The central focus of this black and white engraving is Charlotte Corday sitting in a prison cell, a seemingly unlikely place for a beautiful woman like that. She is clad in an elegant white dress, which stands out in the darkness of the surroundings creating a jarring and intriguing portrait that evokes threatened innocence and virtue. Her hands are clasped on her knee, implying modesty and anxiety. A man in a conical cap, reminiscent of nineteenth-century revolutionaries, is cutting her hair – symbol of her femininity – while she's looking longingly at a painting on the easel to her left. The shearing is a humiliating ritual and her eyes look alert, creating an impression of determination in the face of indignity. An artist is watching her, perhaps looking for approval of his portrait, as he is packing up his paints on the table. Other objects in the cell include a palette knife in the right hand corner, which hints at a possible crime Corday committed, and a quill pen on the left that symbolises the power of written word, as well as a heap of dark fabric at the foot of the woman. The mood is sombre and anticipating as she will soon be walked off to her execution.

Stage 3

Reveal the image – what do you know?

What is the title of it?
The Last Toilet of Charlotte Corday

Who was Charlotte Corday?
Assassin of Jean-Paul Marat, French Revolutionary journalist (1793)

What historical event is it related to?
The French Revolution, 1789-1799

When was it created?
c.1869, in London

What else would you need to know in order to verify your interpretations and produce a complete analysis?
About...

- Corday and Marat
- the Revolution in general
- this execution in particular
- women's representations in art.

Read as much as you can in order to gather support for your readings and verify your interpretations.

Academic (critical) writing

- A combination of descriptive and analytical
- Uses research to discover context
- Supports claims with evidence
- Uses reputable sources to aid analysis
- Supports analysis with research

Academic (critical) writing

The central focus of this black and white engraving is Charlotte Corday sitting in her prison cell, a seemingly unlikely place for a beautiful woman like that. It was created by E.M. Ward, English historical painter and illustrator (Bendiner, 2004), published in London in 1869 (The British Museum), seven decades after the event it represents. As the famous assassin of the French revolutionary Jean-Paul Marat during the terror stage of the French Revolution, in 1793, Corday quickly became a subject of not only multiple paintings, engravings and cheap illustrations but also plays, novels, short stories and historical narratives (Kindleberger, 1994, p.971). In this representation, she is clad in an elegant white dress, which stands out in the darkness of the surroundings creating a jarring and intriguing portrait that evokes innocence and virtue and virginity, which her post mortem confirmed much to the chagrin of her critics (Gelbart, 2004, p.205). Her hands are clasped on her knee, implying modesty and anxiety. A man in a conical cap, also called a Phrygian cap or a liberty cap as it was a Roman symbol of freedom (Korshak, 1987), is cutting her hair – symbol of her femininity – while she is looking longingly at a painting on the easel to her left. Her ultra-feminine portrayal could be seen as a response to the contemporary negative representations of her as an unattractive, embittered and man-hating militant (Gullickson, 2014). The shearing is a humiliating ritual and her eyes look alert, creating an impression of determination in the face of indignity. The artist whom she requested to paint her portrait, possibly Jean Jacques Haure (Gelbart, p.204), is watching her, perhaps looking for approval of his portrait, as he is packing up his paints on the table. Other objects in the cell include a palette knife in the right hand corner, which hints at the crime Corday committed when she plunged a kitchen knife into Marat's heart killing him instantly, and a quill pen on the left that symbolises the power of written word, which is what Corday acknowledged by assassinating the journalist whom she saw as instigating hatred and representing the 'tyranny of the mob' (Yarrington and Everest, 2016, p. 7). The mood is sombre and anticipating as she will soon be walked off to her execution at the guillotine, the preferred method of decapitating the enemies of state during the Reign of Terror in Revolutionary France (Croker, 1853). Following her political act, Corday became a mythical figure, a symbol of the French revolution, to which visual representations such as this one significantly contribute (Hilger, 2010, p.71).

Developing ideas into paragraphs: an example, c.700 words

Charlotte Corday has fascinated artists for over two centuries, becoming a subject of not only multiple paintings, engravings and cheap illustrations but also plays, novels, short stories and historical narratives (Kindleberger, 1994, p.971). These portrayals vary greatly in terms of the sympathies expressed by their creators – from artists presenting Corday as an unattractive madwoman to those hailing her as a revolutionary heroine. The black and white engraving produced by E.M. Ward, an English historical painter and illustrator, and published in London in 1869 (The British Museum), stands out as a unique portrayal of this assassin of the French revolutionary Jean-Paul Marat during the French Revolution. Through a skilful use of allegory and deep knowledge of the historical context, Ward created a portrait that is both visually appealing and conveys a political perspective that aimed to recover Corday's legacy and inspire the artist's contemporaries in Victorian Britain.

By including a range of heavily symbolic items in the painting, E.M. Ward offered a new and visionary interpretation of Charlotte Corday's actions, over seven decades after her tragic death. The image's central focus is Corday herself, sitting in a dark prison cell, a seemingly unlikely place for a beautiful woman like that. Other striking objects in her surroundings include a palette knife in the right hand corner, which hints at the crime Corday committed when she plunged a kitchen knife into Marat's heart killing him instantly, and a quill pen on the left that symbolises the power of written word, which is what Corday acknowledged by assassinating the journalist whom she saw as instigating hatred and representing the 'tyranny of the mob' (Yarrington and Everest, 2016, p.7). Ward presents Corday's face as beautiful and her pensive look makes her seem aware of her fate, calling for the viewers' sympathy.

Positioned at the centre of the painting, Charlotte Corday is the suggested heroine we are invited to admire. She is clad in an elegant white dress, which stands out in the darkness of the surroundings creating a jarring and intriguing portrait that evokes innocence and virtue. This use of white is a visual reminder that despite Corday's critics' attempts to smear her character and present her as a woman of loose morals, her post mortem confirmed that she was actually a virgin (Gelbart, 2004, p.205). While her contemporaries tried to denounce her brave actions by exploiting the perceived gender-based weaknesses of her persona, Ward's portrait reinforces the positive elements that transcend the confines of eighteenth century's society and politics.

Corday's ultra-feminine portrayal in the painting could be seen as a response to the contemporary negative representations of her as an unattractive, embittered and man-hating militant (Gullickson, 2014). The positioning of her body, with hands clasped on her knee, strongly implies modesty and anxiety, while her long, wavy and slightly exaggerated mane represents vulnerable femininity. A man in a liberty cap – a Roman symbol of freedom (Korshak, 1987) that was popular in mid-nineteenth century – is just about to cut this hair, thus taking away her innocence and beauty. The shearing is a humiliating ritual and her averted eyes seem alert. The artist's juxtaposition of Corday's good looks and the shearer's crude treatment of her creates an impression of determination in the face of indignity, resulting in the viewers' empathy for the victim.

The mood of the painting is sombre and anticipating as Corday will soon be walked off to her execution at the guillotine, the preferred method of decapitating the enemies of state during the Reign of Terror in Revolutionary France (Croker, 1853). While being prepared through her 'last toilet', Corday is looking longingly at a painting on the easel to her left. The artist whom she requested to paint her portrait, possibly Jean Jacques Haure (Gelbart, p.204), is packing up his paints on the table and watching her, looking for her approval of the portrait. This is perhaps Ward's indirect way of asking his own audience for an approval of his work, as he followed in the footsteps of many other artists who were fascinated with Corday. Following her political act, Corday became a mythical figure, a symbol of the French revolution, to which visual representations such as this one significantly contribute (Hilger, 2010, p.71). Ward's engraving, with artistic choices that reveal his political stance on her act as gallant and heroic, adds a significant voice to the cultural legacy of Charlotte Corday.

Plain text = descriptive Green text = analytical Red = academic writing

Reference list (Harvard):

Bendiner, K. (2004) 'Ward, Edward Matthew [1816-1879]', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press.
 British Museum Collection Online, *The Last Toilet of Charlotte Corday*. <http://tinyurl.com/zw7bd99> [Accessed 20 June 2016].
 Croker, J. W. (1853) *History of the Guillotine*. London: J. Murray.
 Gelbart, N. R. (2004) 'The Blonding of Charlotte Corday', *Eighteenth-century studies* 38.1: 201-221.
 Gullickson, G. L. (2014) 'Militant Women: representations of Charlotte Corday, Louise Michel and Emmeline Pankhurst', *Women's History Review* 23.6: 837-852.
 Hilger, S. (2010) 'The Murderess on Stage: Christine Westphalen's Charlotte Corday (1804)', in: Clare Bielby and Anna Richards, eds., *Women and Death 3: Women's Representations of Death in German Culture Since 1500*. New York: Camden House.
 Kindleberger, E. R. (1994) 'Charlotte Corday in text and image: A case study in the French Revolution and women's history', *French Historical Studies*: 969-999.
 Korshak, Y. (1987) 'The Liberty cap as a revolutionary symbol in America and France', *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 1.2: 53-69.
 Yarrington, A., and Everest, K., eds. (1993) *Reflections of Revolution: Images of Romanticism*. London and New York: Routledge.

Structuring your writing

The tricolour text above, which is the result of applying 3 stages of analysis, combines description, analysis and scholarly support for the ideas. It is not, however, structured into a coherent academic essay. Structure requires organising information into paragraphs.

The example to the left is not perfect, but it is one way of organising ideas. The introduction presents an argument (can you find it?) while each paragraph that follows develops a point that supports the main claim. In such a short piece, the conclusion does not have to be well defined but should bring all ideas together and provide a clear closing statement.