Visual Literacy: What, Why, How?

WAYS of SEEING

Ian McDermott
Assistant Librarian
Yale Center for British Art
April 19, 2009
ARLIS/NA Annual Conference
Indianapolis, Ind.
Contents

Origins
Definitions
Skills
Tools
Pros/Cons

Conclusion
2007 Kress Fellowship in Art Librarianship, Yale University Arts Library - focus on public services

Yale University Library, Visual Literacy Instruction Fellow - charged with creating 3 visual literacy instruction tools over 8 months for specific instructional settings.

Literature review - available literature in a variety of fields and disciplines: museum studies, history of art, education, library science, critical theory…
"Visual literacy is the ability to see, to understand, and ultimately to think, create, and communicate graphically. Generally speaking, the visually literate viewer looks at an image carefully, critically, and with an eye for the intentions of the image's creator. Those skills can be applied equally to any type of image: photographs, paintings and drawings, graphic art (including everything from political cartoons to comic books to illustrations in children's books), films, maps, and various kinds of charts and graphs. All convey information and ideas, and visual literacy allows the viewer to gather the information and ideas contained in an image, place them in context, and determine whether they are valid."

Melissa Thibault & David Walbert, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Learn NC
Reading images: an introduction to visual literacy: http://www.learnnc.org/articles/vlintro0602
Contents

Origins
Definitions
Skills
Tools
Pros/Cons

Conclusion

Discovery - Interpretation – Use
Discovery

Research Services and Collections

Aggregates links to interdisciplinary digital images collections, at Yale and elsewhere

Created for Research Services and Collections but a general resource for all users

Out with the old…
http://www.library.yale.edu/bass/finddigitalimages/vlit.htm

… In with the new
http://guides.library.yale.edu/findimages
Interpretation

Yale University Art Gallery

Podcasts demonstrating varying interpretations of images
Available soon via Yale’s iTunes U
http://itunes.yale.edu/

Visual Thinking Strategies
What do you see?
What do you notice?
What’s going on?

Focuses on looking and describing what you see, not context
Sarah Stolfa, *New London, CT*
Use

Practice responsible scholarship as it relates to image citation

Online tutorial for responsible scholarship (image use & citation)

Used VoiceThread to create a narrated tutorial

Contents

Origins
Definitions
Skills
Tools
Pros/Cons

Conclusion

AP World Wide Photo/Bill Hudson
Police dogs attack a 17-year-old civil rights demonstrator in Birmingham, Ala., 1963.
http://voicethread.com/#u75939.b100536.i550607
Contents

Origins
Definitions
Skills
Tools
Pros/Cons

Conclusion

Pros
Opportunity to investigate a neglected area of librarianship in general and art librarianship specifically

Cons
Not enough time
Not enough time
Not enough time
Not enough time…

Learned how disciplines outside the arts think about visual materials
Contents

Origins
Definitions
Skills
Tools
Pros/Cons

Visual literacy is not a fixed concept

Conclusion
Is it a useful term?
Too often refers to the reception of visual material
Communicating effectively *with* visual materials needs more attention
Selected Bibliography


Selected Bibliography, cont.


Thank you

Ian McDermott
ian.mcdermott@yale.edu

XXX