

## **Framing Activity**

**Teaching Notes:** The following activity may be completed using the images of *American Gothic* depicted; however other images may be easily substituted, if you wish. There are many online digital resource sites for visual images, including the Paul R. Jones Collection at the University of Delaware: [http://www.museums.udel.edu/jones/archive/archive\\_pages/guides/medium.html](http://www.museums.udel.edu/jones/archive/archive_pages/guides/medium.html). Many of the images available at this site have zooming capabilities to allow the viewer to examine portions of the images in close detail. This activity is designed to be used as is or to be adapted to your teaching context. If used as is, time allocated to complete the assignment would be approximately forth-five minutes to one hour. You may choose to complete a portion of it in class or to give it as an out of class assignment. You may choose to use some or all of the discussion prompts below. The images may be printed or reproduced in another format for use in a non-technology classroom setting, but students will need access to a computer outside of class to read the resource links. Additional questions that may prove useful when considering contextual issues such as framing can be found in the Bank of Questions: <http://www.arhu.umd.edu/vislit/bank.html>.



Online color versions of images: <http://www.arhu.umd.edu/vislit/exercises/images.html>

Without accessing any additional information about the images displayed above, answer the following questions to the best of your ability. (Students may be asked to complete this activity individually, in partners, or in small groups.)

- 1) What is the medium used to produce the objects depicted in each of these images? Indicate one way in which your experience of the two images is impacted by the medium used to produce each image?
- 2) If you had to guess, when would you say each image was created? (Within a 10 year period.) Explain your response in no more than 2-3 sentences.
- 3) Who do you think created each image? Write a brief imaginary bio of the person(s) who created these images. Include the following information:
  - a. Age of artist(s) when image depicted was produced
  - b. Race, class, nationality, gender of artist(s) – why do you think so?
  - c. Region/Geographic Area most connected with the meanings of the images as you understand them. Explain your response in now more than 2-3 sentences.
  - d. What prompted the artist(s) to create each of the visual objects depicted? Construct a brief narrative (3-5 sentences) for each image. Explain what you understand from examining each image, particularly what you imagine the artist intended to convey by constructing the object. Who are the people depicted and why are they there? What is the back story of the image?
  - e. Note at least one question you have about the image(s) that you would like to explore further with additional resources?

After recording your first response to the questions above, access the following resource links for these images. (NPR stories:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5250990>;

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4748148>; bios:

[http://www.masters-of-photography.com/P/parks/parks\\_gothic\\_full.html](http://www.masters-of-photography.com/P/parks/parks_gothic_full.html);

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma98/haven/wood/intro.html>).

After reading these resource links, complete the following:

- 1) Return to each question above and add one piece of information you gained from reading the resource links that validates or changes your response.
- 2) Write a second sentence for question (e) that asks an additional question about either or both of the images that you would like to have answered as a result of completing this assignment.
- 3) Compose a response to the following question, which you may label as (f): Why do you think Gordon Parks chose Grant Woods' *American Gothic* as a reference for his photograph of Ella Watson. How does this *framing* of Parks' image impact your experience of the two images? How do you think Parks' meaning of the title is different and/or similar to the meanings Woods had in mind when he painted *American Gothic*?
- 4) In preparation for our next class meeting, consider what other methods (aside from digital internet display) might be used to *frame* either or both of these

images. For example, in what other settings might these images be usefully displayed? Where might the literal objects be displayed? How would they be displayed, that is, with what other objects? Who would be likely to view the objects? Does the setting in which they are displayed change the potential viewers? How? Try to imagine multiple and distinctive physical framings/settings for these objects. Write a paragraph of not more than 250 words in response to these guiding prompts. Bring it with you, along with your responses (a-f) to our next class session, where we will discuss these questions together as a class. A more in-depth discussion of the concept of *framing* a visual image or object can be read here:

<http://www.chicagoschoolmediatheory.net/glossary2004/frame.htm>

### **Activity Extension:**

- 1) Direct students to examine the online image of a 1999 painting by William Beckman titled *American Modern*. This could be done in small groups or individually. <http://www.forumgallery.com/adetail.php?id=80&imagenum=11>
  - a. Ask students to describe this image using tools from the Form, Content and Context part of the toolbox.
  - b. Ask students to compare and contrast this image to the two images of *American Gothic* and respond to the following questions.
    - i. In what ways does it appear to have drawn from either image?
    - ii. In what ways it is different from each image?
    - iii. Using the framing questions above, as well as the gaze questions below, discuss how the image is interpretatively framed by *American Gothic*.
    - iv. What are the kinds of gaze employed in this image? Explain your response. Discuss identity considerations, both for the persons figured in *American Modern* and *American Gothic* (both versions) and for the viewers. What meanings do you construct from this image and how are those meanings framed by knowing something about *American Gothic*? How are they framed by your identity as a viewer and your response to the three images discussed?
  
- 2) Have students repeat the activity above using the images available from the Library of Congress online catalog of Prints and Photographs. You may wish to ask students to search for contextual information as a part of the assignment, or simply ask them to use the image as a reference to respond to the questions on frame and gaze above without additional information.
  - a. *Family on Relief* by Russell Lee (LC-USF34-038791-D):  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query>
  
  - b. An image of their choice from the display page (select the link for people):  
<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html>