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How Many Words Is a Picture Worth? Integrating Visual Literacy in Language Learning with Photographs

A photograph is usually looked at—seldom looked into.
—Ansel Adams

The phrase "a picture is worth a thousand words" indicates that a complex idea can be communicated by a single image. We might spend an hour reading an article about the devastating effects an oil spill has on wildlife ecology. But a photograph of an oil-drenched pelican gasping for air evokes in us an instant emotional response. While both the article and the photograph communicate the magnitude of the damage that oil spills can cause, the power of an image allows us to grasp this message within nanoseconds.

Indeed, cognitive research has shown that the human brain processes images quicker than it processes words, and images are more likely than text to remain in our long-term memory (Levie and Lentz 1982). With the expansion of technology that allows people from all walks of life to create and share photographs with a few clicks, our world seems to value visual media more than ever before.

What if we slow down this image-viewing process to unpack those thousand words that underlie each picture? As language teachers, we may be tempted to focus our attention on the textual demands of instructional material—vocabulary, syntax, discourse, and so on—only glancing at photos as they happen to support text passages. Instead of regarding pictures as simply complementary to text, I suggest that we put images at the forefront of instruction, embracing the possibilities that visual media offer for language learning. Photographs hold potential for eliciting language across all four domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Incorporating images in language instruction will appeal to digital native learners, those students who grew up in a world where using smartphones, laptops, and social media is part of everyday life (Prensky 2001).

However, these digital natives are not intuitively adept at analyzing and critiquing images, skills that can be considered part of visual literacy (Brumberger 2011). Knowing how to upload smartphone photographs to Facebook or Instagram does not make someone visually literate. We are too often

passive consumers of images in the media, missing out on opportunities to explore underlying messages that the creators may consciously or unconsciously convey.

Communicative language classrooms are an ideal location to cultivate the visual literacy skills involved in viewing and creating images. In this article, I describe ways to use images to support students' language skills while honing their abilities to analyze and create messages; sophisticated technology or high-resolution cameras are not required. I first summarize ways educators have defined visual literacy, provide a rationale for connecting visual literacy to the language classroom, and then give examples of instructional techniques with photographs.

WHAT IS VISUAL LITERACY?

As archaeologists uncovering hieroglyphics can attest, using images to create and interpret messages has distinguished humans from other living things since the dawn of civilization (Burmark 2002). The term *visual literacy*, however, did not appear in education literature until 1969, when Debes described the concept as a set of competencies that "a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences" (1969, 27). Debes argued that these visual competencies enable individuals to communicate with others, establishing a clear connection between visual literacy and language education.

Over the past four decades, scholars and practitioners from a variety of fields have conceptualized visual literacy, offering perspectives ranging from theoretical to pragmatic (Schiller 1987). The absence of a common definition suggests the complexity of the processes involved in interpreting and creating visual messages. For the purposes of this article, I assume a relatively broad definition of the term that reflects seminal concepts from the literature: visual literacy is the competency to make meaning from what we see and to create images that convey implicit and explicit messages to others.

CONNECTING VISUAL LITERACY WITH LANGUAGE LEARNING

Images have played a critical part in my work as an English language teacher and teacher trainer. Pictures are sometimes used to support comprehension, as a scaffolding tool to help students quickly associate unfamiliar words with concepts (Beck, McKeown, and Kucan 2002). However, images also hold the power to stimulate complex language use, pushing students to extend their abilities. Therefore, while visual literacy can be integrated with different content areas, activities with images make an especially effective contribution to language learning.

Meaningful oral interaction

Exploring visual images can stimulate extended linguistic production. The way we perceive pictures depends on our existing schema, a product of memories and past experiences unique to each of us. Because interpretation of what we see is subjective, analyzing images provides opportunities for meaningful student-to-student interaction. When using images in the English language classroom, challenge students to share the feelings that an image provokes or express why they like or dislike particular photographs. This kind of oral interaction is truly communicative.

Critical thinking skills

Rarely is there only one way to understand an image, and expressing opinions takes infinite forms. Interpreting images requires skills high on Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, such as evaluating, synthesizing, and analyzing. Often called "critical thinking skills," Bloom's higher-order skills are essential when communicating abstract thoughts through language. Visual literacy activities can help students hone these skills. For instance, instructional techniques that foster visual literacy call for open-ended questions, such as those beginning with "Why" and "What if," that require extended responses and higher-order thinking skills. Justifying why they understand images in particular ways requires students to analyze pieces of

Images provide a means for students to interact with phenomena from across the world.

the image before producing a response based on evidence from the image. Stating that one "likes" or "does not like" an image is not sufficient for visual literacy; instead, students are challenged to link vocabulary from the visual representations with abstract ideas or past experiences.

Global perspectives

Images provide a means for students to interact with phenomena from across the world; observing images from different perspectives occurs in seconds and can be done by learners of all language levels. And perspective taking, or seeing phenomena from a point of view other than one's own, is associated with language acquisition and development (MacWhinney 2005); in fact, MacWhinney argues that "perspective taking is at the very core of language structure" (198). Photographs compel the viewer to observe objects by the way in which the camera frames them. Comparing different photographs of the same image reinforces students' recognition that an object can be shown in different ways, not unlike the way a concept can be expressed using different languages. Images enable students to perceive objects not only from varying spatial perspectives, but also to explore visual stimuli from different global perspectives.

Potential for scaffolding

Using images can serve as a type of instructional scaffolding, the construct described by Bruner (1975) as specialized support that facilitates learning tasks that are beyond the independent capacity of the student. Images can be used as an intermediary support for students who have not yet mastered particular vocabulary or sentence structures. For instance, teachers might refer to photographs or icons when introducing new topics or vocabulary so that students quickly grasp the meaning of new terms. Using graphic organizers to spatially represent conceptual relationships is another example of support in language activities. Research shows that students who utilize these kinds of visual aids perform better on language tasks than those who do not (Baratta and Jones 2008; Nunan 1999). Importantly, though, scaffolding mechanisms are by definition temporary; the supports should eventually be removed as students gain more proficiency and are able to complete tasks independently. The goal is not to eliminate visual elements from instruction, but instead to change gradually the ways students use images as supports. For instance, beginning language learners might move from making single word utterances to labeling items in a photograph to forming complex sentences that make inferences about the context of the photograph.

Linking content with language

Visual literacy activities also provide an opportunity to link language to content (e.g., science, math, social studies). Language researchers have long called for language education to be linked to content, whether it be through a structured instructional program, such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010) or Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (Echevarría, Vogt, and Short 2012), or simply by using thematic topics that are meaningful for students. Using images in the classroom is one way to enhance the content so that students interact with language to communicate about a particular concept rather than memorizing grammar or vocabulary in ways that may seem arbitrary. Images are a form of authentic material. Just as educators intentionally choose texts they use in the classroom, they should also strategically select images to complement content learning goals. Content material can be integrated into any of the strategies described in this article, thereby transforming a language lesson into one that meets the goals of the content classroom as well.

Next, I describe four strategies for integrating visual literacy into language instruction. The

only required materials for the activities are photographs.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES USING VISUAL IMAGES

Strategy 1: Photo Analysis

The practice of photo analysis facilitates students' observation skills while challenging them to identify and use language that is part of the photograph. This activity, which is adapted from an online lesson at the National Archives and Records Administration (www.archives.gov/education/lessons), works best when students work in groups of four.

Preparation

For each group of students, select one photograph of an event that is familiar or relevant to your students. All groups can work with the same image, or you can distribute a different photograph to each group. If possible, print copies of the photograph so that each student has his or her own copy. In addition, students will need a three-column chart with the headings "People," "Things," and "Actions." They can make this chart themselves, or you can create one for them.

Step 1. Discuss the overall impression

Student groups discuss their initial impression of the photograph. To guide discussion, you can ask questions such as:

- What is going on?
- What is this photograph about?
- How does this photograph make you feel?

For instance, a photograph of a crowd waving signs and flags outside a government building may be an example of democracy-in-action with peaceful protestors, evoking feelings of patriotism or excitement among some students. On the other hand, a photograph of a nearly empty city alley with a seemingly poor person next to a tourist may be about urban poverty and evoke feelings of sadness. Because students will return to these initial ideas later in the activity, they should make notes of their ideas or jot down words they associate with the photograph. Depending on the group and the photograph, students might have different and even contrasting opinions. For example, some students may associate the photograph of the crowd of people with dangerous subversion rather than patriotism. Encourage groups to jot down all representative ideas. Forming a holistic impression does not need to take longer than five minutes, but discussing the photograph as a whole ensures that students have a clear context of the photograph before they focus on details.

Step 2. Observe closely

Divide the photograph into four quadrants. Assign one student in each group to a quadrant. Students might cover up the other parts of the photograph with a blank piece of paper so they can focus on their assigned quadrant.

Step 3. List

Students use the three-column chart to list people, things, and actions they see in their quadrant. Challenge them to list as many items as they can.

Step 4. Share

Students share the items on their list with their group members. Because each student observes a separate quadrant of the photograph, the lists will be different.

Step 5. Compare parts to the whole

Students then return to their initial impressions. They discuss how their lists support (or do not support) these impressions. Instruct students to "identify items on your list," "support your initial impression," or "use your list to tell why you had your initial impression." Viewing an image holistically and then moving to an examination of details gives students opportunities to defend ideas with examples and to practice critical thinking skills. For instance, students might justify that the photograph of the demonstrators made them feel patriotic because it shows people waving

flags. Or they might say that they knew one of the people in the city alley image was a tourist because he had a camera around his neck. Alternately, students might use the details to challenge their initial impressions. Perhaps they originally assumed that one of the people in the city alley was a beggar, but upon closer inspection realized that while the person next to the tourist was wearing tattered clothing, he was not actually asking for anything.

Step 6. Make inferences

Using the compiled lists and initial impressions, students in each group agree on three inferences they can make about the photograph. Each inference must include justification based on the people, things, or actions they observed in the photograph. This means students will use the vocabulary they noted on their three-column list. This is an opportunity to help students understand how to infer and what an inference is. Make sure students understand these terms by explicitly pointing out that making overall impressions based on details is an example of inferring. Explain that inferences are based on observable facts (e.g., items on their lists) but can also involve invisible assumptions. For instance, students might infer that people are demonstrating for a political cause in one of the photographs because gathering in crowds with signs and flags—an observation from the photograph—is in many countries a means for expressing dissent to the government, a fact that may be part of students' background knowledge.

Step 7. Pose questions

Lastly, students extend their thinking by listing open-ended questions that the photograph raises. These should be questions that are not easily answered by looking at the photograph, but instead require additional investigation about the context of the photograph. Such questions might begin with "Why … " or "What if … ." For the photograph with the crowds of people, students might ask, "Why are they demonstrating?"

Adaptations and supports

- Vary the items that students write on their three-column list to match the content of the photograph or class-wide language-learning objectives. For instance, rather than listing people, things, and actions, a class that is focusing on descriptive words might list colors, shapes, and textures.

- When instructing students to make inferences, require that they use the words they compiled in complete sentences. If necessary, provide sentence stems such as, "I infer ____________ because I see ____________ and ____________."

- To help students grasp the concept of *inference*, provide a graphic. One example is a math equation: the word *inference* equals an icon of a pair of eyes, to represent observable items, plus an icon of a thought bubble, to represent background knowledge.

- As a follow-up to this activity, students can postulate answers to their questions or brainstorm ways to find the answers.

Strategy 2: Mystery Photo

In this activity, the instructor obscures a photograph and gradually reveals parts of it for students to guess the image. Like the Photo Analysis activity, Mystery Photo elicits descriptive language. This activity also engages students in inductive reasoning, providing an element of suspense that involves the language of prediction.

Select a photograph that is pertinent to an upcoming topic as a way to introduce students to the new content and pique their interest.

Preparation

Select a photograph. Photographs with multiple items, colors, or people work well because one section of a photograph may be completely different from another. For instance, famous landmarks pictured from a distance show perspectives that are not usually captured in guidebooks. Alternately, zoomed photographs, in which a relatively small item fills the space, are also effective because identifying the image is difficult without being able to perceive it as a whole.

Once a photograph has been selected, prepare five to eight pieces of paper that completely cover the photograph. If a computer and projector are available, consider using PowerPoint by inserting a digital photograph, placing opaque text boxes on top of it, and then animating the boxes so that they can disappear one at a time.

Step 1. Obscure the photograph

Show students the photograph completely covered by pieces of paper, like puzzle pieces.

Step 2. Uncover the photograph

Students gradually uncover the photograph by selecting pieces of paper to remove. You might number the pieces covering the photograph so that students can easily identify the pieces they want to remove. If you are conducting this activity with the entire class, establish a procedure for selecting students to uncover each square. One strategy is to write students' names on pieces of paper, then draw a name randomly. After students understand the procedure, they might engage in this activity in groups of four to six students. Each group has a separate photograph, and students take turns uncovering it.

Step 3. Make guesses

As each section of the photograph is revealed, students describe what they see. Students then hypothesize about what the full image may entail. As more pieces are revealed, not only will students use the description of each section to make their hypotheses, but they will also need to connect to the prior pieces. In making these guesses, students practice using the language of prediction (e.g., "I predict that it will be … " or "I think it will be … ") as well as vocabulary associated with the photograph. With a large class, rather than calling on only one or two students to share, ask students to talk with a neighboring student about their predictions. Such pair work ensures that all students are engaged and using the predictive language.

Step 4. Debrief

After the final reveal of the image, students talk about the process of guessing what the photograph might be. This kind of discussion involves metacognition, as students articulate how they were able to connect pieces of the image to form the full image. To facilitate this discussion, ask questions such as, "Were you surprised about the photograph?" Or "At what point could you identify the photograph's content?" Or "Which part of the photograph gave it away?" A debriefing conversation also allows students to discuss how seeing only a piece of a picture often gives different connotations and perspectives than seeing the photograph in its entirety. When I used a photograph of a saltwater fish tank with colorful coral formations, students said they first thought the photograph showed a high-end handbag store in the mall. It was not until I uncovered bubbles in a top corner that they realized the photograph was under water.

Adaptations and support

- When describing pieces of the photograph, students with beginning English proficiency may use one- or two-word utterances; more advanced students can be challenged to use complex sentences.

- Students might also move from describing concrete objects in the photograph to expressing subjective impressions of each part, such as feelings or memories that the images provoke.

- As an extension, students might work in groups to develop their own mystery images and facilitate the activity with

peers. To enhance language use, students can give hints about the photo to help their peers identify the full image.

- This activity might work well as a warm-up, especially once students are familiar with the procedure. Select a photograph that is pertinent to an upcoming topic as a way to introduce students to the new content and pique their interest. For example, I used this activity when teaching about habitats. At the beginning of each unit, I selected a mystery photograph of the particular habitat we were studying (grassland, rainforest, etc.). Students not only engaged in inductive thinking, but they also previewed concepts and vocabulary associated with the upcoming lesson.

Strategy 3: Collaborative Stories

As its name suggests, Collaborative Stories involves storytelling by a group of students and reinforces narrative structures, a concept required in content-area literature classes. Using images as prompts, students work together to produce a story with a beginning, middle, and end.

Preparation

Select three photographs. The photographs could have a common theme or setting and should include people or animals. A current or recently studied topic might connect the photographs. The activity also works well if the images share no discernible theme. In fact, dissimilar photographs offer an additional cognitive challenge for students, as they will have to create their own links.

Step 1. Group students

Arrange students in groups of three. Explain that each group will work together to create a story based on a series of three photographs. To focus on writing skills, require that students write the narrative of the story as they create it. Students in each group count off from one to three.

Step 2. Display the first photograph

This photograph might be the same for the entire class or different for each group. The students assigned number one create the beginning of a story based on the people or events shown in the photograph. Instruct students to describe the main character and setting, and to introduce a problem for their story. While the first student is speaking, the other students in the group listen, as they will soon need to continue the story. Instruct students to include as many details as possible connected to the photograph while also creating a narrative story.

Step 3. Display the second photograph

Students assigned number two will continue the story but bring in details from the second photograph. This process challenges students to make connections to the beginning of the story while also integrating details from the second photograph. The second part of the story should expand on the problem introduced by the first student.

Step 4. Display the third photograph

Students assigned number three use details from the third photograph to conclude the story that their group members started. Remind students that the conclusion should involve the resolution of the problem introduced and described by the first and second students.

Step 5. Share completed stories

Students in each group review all three photographs and retell their story. If you have time, each group can share its completed story with the class. Discuss how the same photographs elicited different stories from all groups of students.

Adaptations and supports

- If students struggle to think of a story, ask them to consider questions such as, “Who is the person in the photograph?”; “What is the person doing?”; “Why is the person doing this?”; and “What happened right before this photo was taken?”

- Provide supportive scaffolds by giving story-starter prompts such as, “Once upon a time there was … ” or sequencing terms such as, “First,” “Next,” “Then,”

and "Finally." Another way to support students is to provide vocabulary words or phrases related to the photograph.

- Create a graphic organizer showing the elements involved in the beginning, middle, and end of stories. See Table 1 for an example.

- To facilitate fluency and speed, limit the time allotted for students to describe the photograph. Select photographs that elicit target vocabulary or sentence structures, or photographs that include themes from content-area classes, such as photographs of historical events that students may be studying in their history classes.

- During this activity, two students have the task of listening to one speaker. If students complete this activity as a writing task, rather than a speaking task, then potentially two students will be idle while one student writes. To engage all students simultaneously, distribute the three photographs at once: give a different picture to each student. Everyone will write a beginning based on his or her photograph, then rotate the photographs so that the image one student used to write the beginning will be the image the next student in the group uses to write the middle, and so on. This way, all students will be writing—or reading each other's stories—at the same time. By the end of the activity, each group will have produced three distinct stories using the same three photographs, but in different sequences.

- Students might also work collaboratively. Partners or small groups could write or tell a story about an image together. Groups could approach the story holistically, writing a story with a beginning, middle, and end, and then tell or read their story to the class.

Strategy 4: Selfies

The Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2013 was *selfie*—a photograph of oneself taken by oneself. In today's culture of smartphones and webcams, selfies are growing in popularity. Educators can exploit this trend to motivate students, integrating the concept into language instruction. Using selfies gives students a sense of ownership in their learning, as they are not only interpreting photographs, but also creating them. Rather than describing a step-by-step procedure for the selfie activities, I provide a general description of how to apply selfies to three established instructional strategies that are familiar to many language teachers.

Beginning	Middle	End
Sequencing phrases to develop story		
In the beginning … A long time ago … Once upon a time …	After that … Then … Next … A little while later …	Finally … At last … In the end …
Question prompts to provide story ideas		
Who are the main characters? Where is the setting? What is the problem?	Tell more about the problem. What happens to the characters? How do the characters try to solve the problem?	What is the solution to the problem? What happens to the characters? How are things different at the end than they were at the beginning?

Table 1. Graphic organizer for Collaborative Stories

1. Information Gap

In information-gap activities, students have different pieces of information and must communicate with each other to complete a task. Long noted as an effective technique in communicative classrooms (e.g., Doughty and Pica 1986), information gaps engage students in authentic conversations that require asking and answering referential questions. For example, students receive different parts of a map and are instructed to talk with each other to complete their map, literally filling in the gaps. Teachers can adapt this activity using images so that only one student in a pair has an image and the other student must ask questions in order to recreate the image. Using selfies is a way to personalize the activity. Unlike random photographs, selfies involve language beyond basic description of the photograph, as students engage in narrative stories to tell background contexts that only personal photographs can elicit.

2. Speech Bubbles

One instructional technique in language classrooms is to use cartoons with speech bubbles. Teachers can delete the words in the speech bubbles and ask students to provide language based on the cartoon images. As an adaptation using selfies, students write in speech bubbles to tell what they are thinking in the selfie. Putting words to their photographs adds an element of self-reflection. Moreover, the limited space of a thought bubble requires precision in language, a high-level skill. Students can complete this activity using their own selfie, or they may exchange selfies and guess what their peers are thinking or saying in the photograph. To engage in creative thinking, students can brainstorm multiple options for the speech bubble. Students with advanced language skills might develop a selfie with a speech bubble into a story, describing what happened before and after the selfie was taken. You can activate oral language use by arranging students in pairs or small groups so that they need to talk with each other to determine the best option for the speech bubble.

3. Selfie Story

Teachers often provide opportunities for students to share details about their lives outside the class. For instance, students might describe what they did over the weekend or bring in an artifact from their home and tell why it is important to them. Selfies can enhance the traditional sharing activities. If students have access to cameras, they can take selfies as a homework assignment. You might assign students to take photos of themselves at their favorite places. This activity works particularly well during extended breaks when students have time to go different places. Students then use their selfies to tell stories about what they did outside school. Collaborative student groups and pairs work well; students use their selfie as a springboard to share with each other about what they did. You can require students in the audience to ask the speaker meaningful questions as a way for students to practice active listening skills. To integrate literacy skills, ask students to write a story about their activities.

SOURCES FOR PHOTOGRAPHS

Locating photographs to use in the classroom should not pose a problem for teachers with Internet access. In fact, the challenge may be selecting the appropriate photograph, as a Google Images search might populate thousands of instantly available images. As with selecting any teaching materials, it is important to be purposeful and systematic when choosing photographs to use in instruction. Consider the possibilities to link content to instruction by choosing photographs that include themes from other courses that students are taking. At the same time, think about photographs that would capture students' attention or appeal to their interests in order to heighten motivation. Before applying the instructional activities with particular photographs, "try out" the activity as a student using different possible photographs. By previewing the activity from a student perspective, you can identify the vocabulary and sentence structures that the photograph might elicit. You will also be able to anticipate challenges students may encounter and be prepared to offer support.

Use magazine photographs to facilitate discussions about digitally altered photographs, helping students become critical viewers rather than passive consumers.

Perhaps the best sources of photographs are you and your students. Make a habit of taking along your camera (or camera phone) during special events or travels, as well as in your daily life, so you can capture unexpected phenomena that you come across. Students are often interested in learning about their teachers as people outside the classroom, and your photographs allow you to share selected details about your personal life in an instructional way. Furthermore, you know the circumstances in which you took your photos, and this background context can be used to enhance conversations about the images.

Likewise, not only can students take selfies, but they can also snap photos of places and people they encounter inside and outside school. Depending on the age and background of your students, though, you might need to teach students about camera etiquette, such as when it is and is not appropriate to take photos. You need to instruct students to ask permission before taking photographs of people's faces. In addition, remind students about appropriate content for school. What is considered appropriate will vary from school to school depending on local and national context. Refer to standards at your institution and provide clear parameters for students' photographs.

Other sources of photographs are media, such as newspapers and magazines. While these sources do not offer the personalization that your own photographs do, they open opportunities for discussing or critiquing mass media, and students can discuss underlying political or social messages. For instance, you might ask students to contrast how magazines or websites with different political affiliations portray the same individual. You might also use magazine photographs to facilitate discussions about digitally altered photographs, helping students become critical viewers rather than passive consumers. Have students look for photographs in advertisements and calendars, and on photo-rich websites such as the *National Geographic* site (photography.nationalgeographic.com/photography).

INTERNET RESOURCES

The Internet not only provides sources for photographs, but it also offers interactive websites for students to manipulate photographs as part of language activities. Internet access is not a necessary condition for applying any of the instructional strategies described in this article; however, for teachers and students who have access to computers with Internet connections, online tools can be used to enhance the activities. Table 2 provides a non-exhaustive annotated list of websites for visual literacy activities that have the potential to elicit language use. You can refer to these websites as resources for ideas to adapt your own lesson plans or use the direct links for student activities. Note that the website links listed may change or be deleted at any time. Likewise, educators and scholars are regularly creating new websites, so it is a good idea to conduct your own Internet searches for websites. While many photographs on the Internet are protected by copyright, educators can use them freely under the Classroom Use Exemption if they use the material in an instructional setting (e.g., classroom), provide face-to-face or in-person teaching, and work at a nonprofit educational institution. If you do not qualify for the Classroom Use Exemption, you might email the website publisher to explain your situation and ask for written permission to use the material.

Site Name	Web Address	Description	Considerations
Fotobabble	fotobabble.com	Users record their voice for up to one minute as they talk about particular photographs. After each recording, users can listen to their voice and have the option to re-record.	To use this site, you must complete a free registration process. An application for smartphones is also available. This activity supports speaking skills and provides a safe space for students to self-evaluate their pronunciation. One idea is for students to complete a recording at the beginning of the course and then at the end to assess their speaking progress.
Image Detective	cct2.edc.org/PMA/image_detective	Students answer guided questions about historical photographs and can access background information about the photos and time period.	The images on this site are based on U.S. history. However, you can adapt this activity for use with other historical photographs. The interactive website is not needed but can serve as a model for asking questions, gathering clues, researching background information, and drawing conclusions.
What's Going On in This Picture?	learning.blogs.nytimes.com/category/lesson-plans/whats-going-on-in-this-picture	Includes daily photographs from *The New York Times* with three guiding questions: (1) What's going on in this picture? (2) What do you see that makes you say that? (3) What more can you find? Explanations that provide background information about the photos are available.	You can use other photographs from local newspapers and ask the same three questions. To support reading comprehension, you can use this activity as a pre-reading strategy before reading a newspaper or magazine article.
Pic-Lits	piclits.com	Users select a digital photograph from a series that changes daily. They label the image with words to create a "pic-lit." Users can choose from "Freestyle," in which they type their own words, or "Drag-n-drop," in which they select words from a list organized by part of speech.	The selection of images changes daily. You can differentiate the activity for students with varying levels of English skills. Advanced students can choose the "Freestyle" option and write a poem or creative writing piece about the photograph. Beginning students can choose the "Drag-n-drop" option and label items in the photograph to build vocabulary.

Table 2. Interactive websites for images

CONCLUSION

Educators have long emphasized the importance of authentic learning experiences for English learners. Activities in the language class are effective if they replicate the kinds of interactions that students encounter outside the classroom. In today's world of smartphone cameras and Instagram and Facebook applications, images play a central role in our students' lives, whether they are young learners or adults. Photographs should thus be part of the authentic learning experiences we strive to create. We can draw upon images to elicit communicative language from students through activities such as those described in this article. As students become familiar with ways to talk about images, visual literacy can be integrated into daily classroom routines. Rather than a stand-alone lesson, discussions about photographs can occur regularly to enhance other learning.

To conclude, I return to the opening quote from Ansel Adams, a prominent American photographer: "A photograph is usually looked at—seldom looked into." Adams recognized the potential that photographs have to elicit meaningful conversation. While images are often touted as a means to communicate messages faster than words can, I suggest that we take Adams' implicit advice to linger on photographs, exploring the layered understandings that each photograph contains. The activities described in this article cultivate reflective students who are able to "look into" photographs by eliciting deep thinking, creativity, and sophisticated language. Along with trying out these activities, I challenge us as educators to hone our own observation skills, searching for ways to take advantage of the language-use possibilities that lie within images we—and our students—encounter every day.

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