

**Museum Label Assignment
Image Analysis Assignment
(a historian's guide to visual analysis)**

max 400

GENERAL OUTLINE OF ASSIGNMENT:

For this exercise I would like you to choose a single focus image and then place that image within multiple contexts – visual and aesthetic, historical and ideological (see steps 1-4 below). In addition, but only AFTER you have completed steps 1-4, I would like you to craft a brief “label” for your image, much like you would expect to see on the wall next to the image in a museum exhibition.

STEP ONE:

Tell me what you see. This section can be done free form, and it can be as long or as short as you want it to be – but be thorough. Consider not only people, objects, or landscapes, but also colors, contrasts, sizing, shading, shapes, textures, vertical/horizontal, use of different media (ink vs. photography, for example), juxtaposition, repetition, and the use of words (text). Where is the visual focal point? (is there more than one?) How static (or dynamic) is the image? Is there a clear direction to the image?

STEP TWO:

Visual context. Select at least 2 related images from the time period, and relate your focus image to them visually, pointing out meaningful similarities and differences. Begin to develop your understanding of how the various objects, people, and landscape(s) in the image relate to each other, and to the viewer. How would you describe the “tone”? Is there any stereotyping going on? Any recognizable symbols? Consider issues like gender difference, age, ethnicity, or place. Do the images project an ideal reality? Do they reflect actual people or scenes? Or is there a mix?

STEP THREE:

Historical Context. Based on what you know about contemporary events, analyze the image's main messages and themes. To help build your context, you might bring in 1-2 written texts (primary or secondary sources). Where might one expect to find this image displayed or stored at the time it was originally produced? Given what you know about the time period, what is NOT being shown in the image (what might have been omitted and why?)

STEP FOUR: Consider ideological context, if appropriate, or issues of historical impact and/or memory.

FINAL CHALLENGE (and leave ample time for this one!):

Construct a draft of a short “wall label,” distilling the most important points from the visual, historical, and ideological context into a coherent narrative. Also list the artist (if known) and the date of the image.

NB: This assignment does not need to be written up as a formal paper – feel free to structure your analysis as suggested above (ie, Step 1 or Part 1, Part 2, etc). Just be

sure to include an indication of the image you are working with (if possible, by title, author, date – whatever you've got!)