

Writing with Images

*“Wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric.
And wherever there is ‘meaning,’ there is ‘persuasion.’ ”*

—Kenneth Burk, *Rhetoric of Motives*, 172

“Seeing comes before words.”

—*Ways of Seeing*, John Berger, 1

As members of a visual culture, we must learn how to navigate, interpret, and analyze the messages conveyed to us via imagery. Many English 134 instructors ask students to study images through a rhetorical lens, which means that students learn how images make rational arguments, how they evoke an emotional response from a viewer, or how (when used effectively) images can enhance a writer’s or speaker’s credibility. Yet focusing on images in a writing course raises certain questions: What do images have to do with writing? What do they have to do with argumentation? In effect, the images permeating our day-to-day experiences influence how we formulate arguments.

Visual rhetoric allows us to understand both the explicit and implicit arguments that images make about our culture. Many people wrongly regard the act of examining an image as an effortless process, assuming that only a casual, quick glance is required. The sheer pervasiveness of images seems to place them outside the reach of critical reflection. Writing, on the other hand, is often regarded as something that takes careful planning and decision making to become effective. However visuals and writing have much in common: they are intricately bound as they seek to entertain, to educate, and to persuade. Better understanding this relationship will enable you to approach the images you encounter—in advertising, in films and television, on YouTube and My Space, and even in video games—with a greater critical eye.

Readers are not persuaded by written arguments alone; thus when an image is effectively paired with text, the reader can get a fuller understanding of an issue. As

you read *Fresh Voices*, focus on the relationship between the images and the writing. For example, Leah Johnson uses images in her essay “A Born Killer?” to draw emotion from her readers. Would her argument be effective without her images? In addition, the technical drawings Alex Vincent created for his essay “Solve With Sustainability” show his audience how his proposal might be implemented. Without his images, the audience may not be able to adequately conceptualize his ideas. Examine the other images in this collection. Could the content of any of the other essays be enhanced by a thoughtful integration of images?