

Explain the image

Use visual clues to develop informative explanations of images

Purpose

- Introductory analysis:** To help students understand the basic contents of an image in anticipation of involving them in other activities requiring deeper analysis of the image.
- General information:** To help students gather general information about a historical or contemporary situation or place — either to extend what they have already studied or to provide a starting point for an inquiry into a new topic.

Image selection

- Select one or more images, without captions or explanations, that meet the following criteria:
 - create some mystery about the event depicted;
 - allow students to draw several inferences about each of the 5W questions.



Northern Alliance guards on the road to Kabul —
Image available at <http://www.tc2.ca/wp/electronicsourcebook/investigatingimages>



Investigating images
Explain the image

EXAMPLE



Explaining the image

	Observations	Possible inferences
WHO is in the image?	Two men are dressed in casual clothing that is common among Moslems. They are posing with a large motorized weapon. They have no side arms and no secondary weapons are visible. One of the men is wearing a prayer cap.	The two men are likely members of some type of informal army or militia because an organized military unit would wear uniforms. The man standing might be the leader. They are not likely to be members of a radical Islamic group.
WHAT are the people doing?	They have little camouflage or protective cover. They look as if they are situated at the edge of a road that has a view of a large area. One of the men appears to be using a communications device.	They could be setting up their large weapon and ammunition along a road checkpoint or lookout spot. They seem to be monitoring the situation rather than preparing to fire their weapon.
WHERE does the image take place?	There are no buildings in sight. The land appears to be semi-arid plains with mountains in the background. Their location seems to be slightly higher than the surrounding ground.	They could be on a ridge along the edge of a rural road in a Middle Eastern country such as Afghanistan or Pakistan.
WHEN did the action in the image take place?	The clothing appears to be contemporary dress for Islamic men: fitted shirts and modern textiles. The weapons also appear to be contemporary. The fields appear to be still green and not yet burned by hot summer weather.	Late spring or early summer; within the last 20 years or so.
WHY is the action happening?	They are observing others. They have a substantial military weapon but do not seem in a hurry; they are positioned by a road.	They may be trying to screen the traffic along the road to prevent undesirable groups from entering the region.

Summary explanation: The image appears to portray two Islamic members of a militia with a large weapon positioned to monitor a large rural area in a Middle Eastern country during the late spring or early summer of the late 1990s or early 2000s in order to safeguard the region from hostile groups.

This resource was produced with the support of the Government of Canada through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). We also acknowledge the contributions of Library and Archives Canada and the Social Sciences and Humanities Council (SSHRC). Credits: Featured photo: © CIDA photo Roger LeMoine. Small images: (top) Glenbow Museum NA-2445-3; (middle) Library and Archives Canada e000762644; (bottom) © Susan Duncan. Design: Poissy Design Inc., Vancouver

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Instructions

- **Distribute image(s):** Use the image featured on the previous page or another image to demonstrate the activity before students investigate other images independently. Provide pairs of students with a sample image, or display the image on a screen. Allow two or three minutes for each pair to discuss what it sees.

- **Introduce the task:** Discuss the value of images as sources of information. Explain that students will be asked to uncover detailed information about the situation portrayed in the image. Their task — like that of a reporter or historian — is to develop an informative explanation of the image. Distribute a copy of *Explaining the image* to the students.

- **Explain inferences and observations:** Explain that the students' task is to draw inferences based on visual clues or observations. Provide an example of a direct observation from the image (such as, the two men have a large gun) and an inference (for example, the men might belong to a military group). Point out that the observation provides the evidence for the inference. Invite students to make other observations and suggest possible inferences (for example, the fact that the men don't appear to be wearing uniforms may suggest that they are not part of the regular military forces).

- **Introduce the 5Ws:** Review the 5Ws (Who? What? Where? When? Why?). Suggest that the 5Ws are an effective strategy for reading images and drawing inferences. Invite students to suggest the most obvious responses in the featured image to one or two of the 5W questions.

- **Look for details:** Encourage students to look beyond obvious clues, trying to extract as much information as possible from the image. Invite students to use the sample prompts on *Explaining the image* to generate more specific questions to guide their investigation. If necessary, provide an unfounded inference (for example, the men are about to be arrested) and invite students to explain why this cannot be supported by the image. If students have already studied the topic featured in the image(s), encourage them to draw upon their background knowledge when making inferences. If they have little background knowledge of the topic, encourage students to be very tentative in their inferences. Suggest that they qualify their conclusions by using terms such as "may be," "possibly," and "perhaps."

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIFFERENTIATION

- Make the activity easier by highlighting for students details from the image that are particularly helpful in developing an explanation.
- Provide some students with fewer, more easily interpreted images; introduce additional, more enigmatic images to challenge students.
- Where needed, review the concepts of "evidence" and "conclusion" using simple, everyday examples (such as, Sally is tired. What evidence might show this?).
- For students who are struggling, provide a few plausible conclusions and invite students to identify supporting details from the image.
- Help students focus on the detail in the image by suggesting that they use squares of paper to conceal all but one-quarter of the image at a time.

Explaining the image

Name: _____

Image: _____

Question	Answer
Who?	
What?	
Where?	
When?	
Why?	

Explain the image by writing a detailed summary of the situation portrayed in the image. Use the 5Ws to guide your explanation.

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

Confirm students' understanding of inferences and observations by asking for examples of each.

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

Confirm that students can correctly identify key details of the image(s) and draw plausible inferences.

- **Discuss criteria:** Invite students to discuss with a partner what makes an explanation informative. If necessary, provide examples of poor explanations and invite students to critique them (for example: The men are having a picnic. They are attacking a city.). Based on student discussion, introduce the following criteria for identifying an informative explanation:

- ♦ *accurate and relevant observations:* the observations that are offered accurately describe the relevant details in the image;
- ♦ *plausible and imaginative inferences:* the inferences go beyond the very obvious conclusions and are supported by several pieces of evidence found in the image or based on other facts known about the topic;
- ♦ *detailed and fully developed explanation:* the explanation provides appropriately detailed but tentative answers to each of the 5W questions.

- **Develop explanations:** Invite students working in pairs to examine the assigned image and to record their observations and possible inferences on the chart. Remind students that an inference must be supported by one or more observations from the image. Instruct students to develop a detailed summary explanation addressing each of the 5W questions by incorporating the most reasonable inferences into an extended sentence or short paragraph. Remind students to consider the criteria for identifying an informative explanation and to avoid making definitive statements.

- **Share findings:** Invite student pairs to share their explanation of the image with another pair of students.

- **Seek corroboration:** Encourage students to confirm the plausibility of their explanations by referring to additional clues in the image or in other images of the same topic or to outside sources (such as an atlas, a textbook, or the internet) that can corroborate and supplement their conclusions.

- **Investigate other images:** When students understand what is required of this form of investigation and have received feedback on one or more completed data charts and summary explanations, provide additional images to investigate and a copy of the data chart for each image.

- **Summarize information:** Drawing on all the images, as a class, summarize what has been learned about the historical or contemporary event. Provide additional information about the topic or the image(s) to challenge any dubious conclusions that have been proposed.

- **Further investigation:** If desired, introduce students to other activities in this series to help them explore the same images using different investigative lenses.

Assessment

After students have received feedback on several attempts to develop informative explanations for images, use *Assessing the explanation*, to evaluate their completed charts.

Assessing the explanation

Name: _____

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Accurate and relevant observations				
Plausible and imaginative inferences				
Detailed and fully developed explanation				

Comments: _____

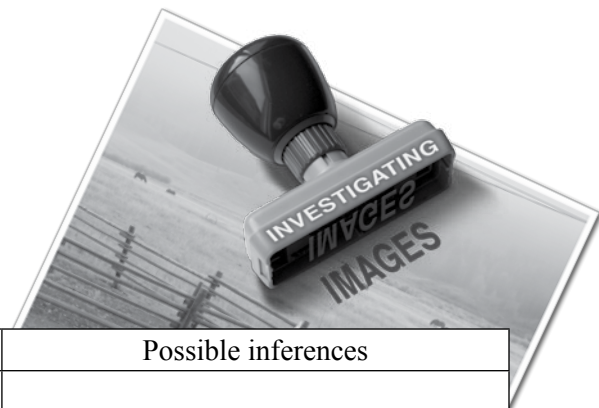
ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

Encourage students to provide feedback on other students' completed data charts based on the criteria, perhaps using the assessment rubric.

Explaining the image

Name: _____

Image: _____



	Sample prompts	Observations	Possible inferences
WHO is in the image?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What role or occupation? What status (rich/poor)? If several people, are they related to each other? 		
WHAT are the people doing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What actions? What objects are used? What is the focus of attention? 		
WHERE does the image take place?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In what region or country? In what setting (rural or urban)? What is the terrain (flat/mountainous)? Are there landmarks (natural and human)? 		
WHEN did the action in the image take place?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What time of day? What time of year? What year or decade? What historical period? 		
WHY is the action happening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What reason might there be for the actions? Does the broader context suggest a purpose? What might happen next? 		

Summary explanation:

Criteria for an informative explanation

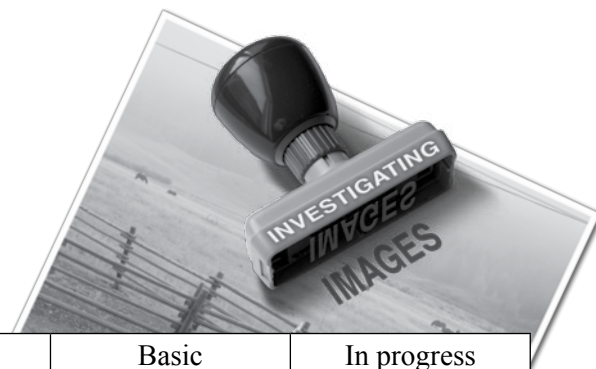
Accurate and relevant observations: the evidence accurately describes the relevant details in the image;

Plausible and imaginative inferences: the inferences go beyond the very obvious conclusions and are supported with several pieces of evidence found in the image or based on other known facts;

Detailed and fully developed explanation: the explanation includes suggestions with appropriate detail for each of the 5W questions.

Use with *Explain the image*

Assessing the explanation



Name: _____

	Outstanding	Very good	Competent	Basic	In progress
Accurate and relevant observations	Identifies many relevant and accurate details from the image, including several less obvious details.	Identifies many relevant and accurate observations from the image, occasionally recognizes less obvious details.	Identifies a number of relevant and accurate, but obvious details from the image.	Identifies only a few of the most obvious details from the image, not all of them are relevant or accurate.	Struggles to identify any relevant and accurate details from the image.
Plausible and imaginative inferences	Provides many varied and imaginative inferences that are highly plausible.	Provides many plausible and sometimes imaginative inferences.	Provides a number of inferences that are generally plausible but rather obvious.	Provides a few plausible but obvious inferences.	Struggles to provide any plausible inferences that build upon the observations.
Detailed and fully developed explanation	Explains the image in rich detail, providing insightful conclusions about each aspect of the image.	Explains the image in some detail, providing conclusions about each aspect of the image.	Explains the most basic aspects of the image but not with much detail.	Explains the image in general terms that cover only some aspects of the image.	Struggles to explain any aspects of the image in any detail.

Comments:

Use with *Explain the image*