# Suggested Additional Strategies

Many writers create pictures with words; many artists convey a complicated idea in a single image; and, increasingly, many people use words and images in combination to create meaning. As students become better readers of the diverse texts in *Seeing & Writing* and better writers of their own texts, we hope that they also will become more conversant with the distinctions between types of texts and among the different genres. The following eight groups of suggestions offer possible strategies for helping students begin to approach a range of verbal and visual texts: images, essays, advertisements, poetry, paintings, photographs, short stories, and mixed media.

## Reading an Image

*Seeing & Writing* features many different types of images, including photos, ads, paintings, prints, and film stills and frames. The following gives general guidelines for reading and making meaning of various kinds of images.

**Determine the initial source of the image.**

In some cases, images that appear to be photos are actually stills or frames from films. This means that the shot is cut from a larger whole, which might change the meaning (e.g., the stills from the JFK films in Chapter 3, pp. 139–40). In other cases, images that appear to be photos may be paintings (e.g., Alfred Leslie's *Television Moon* in Chapter 1, p. 36). In other cases, images are clearly photos or paintings.

Viewers should consider the context and construction of each image. In looking at a movie still, it is important to have an understanding of the film, as this is probably assumed by the artist. You should also be aware of the different limitations and opportunities available to photographers as opposed to painters. Photographers can

and often do enhance and transform their shots, but initially they begin with an image that captures a specific and finite moment in time. Painters may capture the mood of a moment, but not with the click of a shutter. A photographer is expected, on some level, to be "true" to his or her subject; a painter is not. Thus, when a photographer alters the image, the reader should ask why—as she should when a painter attempts to exactly re-create life.

**Determine what is the figure and what is the background.**

These are terms from Gestalt theories of visual organization. They are useful in determining the most important object in an image. The figure is what draws the viewer's attention; the background is its immediate context. Just as a story might have a protagonist, a visual image has a figure—what the viewer should follow through the narrative of the image. This figure might be a building, a person, or an object. The background is all else.

Often the viewer's eye works almost unconsciously to find the figure in a visual image. For example, it is fairly easy to determine that the figure in Mark Peterson's "Image of Homelessness" (p. 107) is the homeless man in the appliance box. The viewer intuits this information because in many ways the photo is a standard, centered portrait. However, in an image like Joel Sternfeld's "Lake Oswego, Oregon" (pp. 96–97), it might take a moment to think through what the figure is. Depending on how the viewer defines the figure, he or she may read the photo quite differently.

**Determine the narrative of the image.**

Every image is communicating something to the viewer. Our culture is driven by narrative, driven by a desire to draw connections. Those who study visual perception and literacy even refer to people as *homo significans*—"meaning makers." So, the easiest way to first read an image is to determine its story, its message. What are the denotative and connotative meanings of the objects, people, and places within the image? Where are the items in the image placed in relationship to each other? In our drive to make meaning, we often connect elements that are in close proximity and establish relationships between or among them. This is just as true for objects (e.g., the jugs of juice in Wolfgang Tillmans's photo on p. 4) as it is for people (e.g., the people sitting around the table in Tina Barney's photo on p. 133). Viewers, just like readers, prefer an interpretation that offers closure.

Because viewers come from different backgrounds and read with different perceptions, the narrative of an image may be perceived differently by different viewers.

In some cases, such as with images we think of as "art," these varying perspectives add depth to a reading. However, in other cases, such as with images we think of as "ads," the varying perspectives can destroy a product. For example, Neil Winokur might be quite pleased if a variety of viewers were to find a variety of narratives in his *Homage to Outerbridge* (pp. 28–29). But if some viewers were to read the AT&T image (p. 122) as a parody of family connections rather than as a paean to them, the AT&T ad agency might soon find itself out of a job.

**Break the image into visual fields, looking for focal points.**

Images direct a viewer's eyes. Some aspects of the image draw our attention, whereas others recede. Our initial impulse is to focus on the center of an image because it offers balance, but often an artist shifts the viewer's focus through the use of color, light, or line. If the viewer can locate the composition's focal point (or points), this can serve as a clue to interpreting the image. It might help first to divide an image by finding its horizontal or diagonal line. Sometimes this line is self-evident, as in Richard Misrach's "Waiting, Edwards Air Force Base" (p. 115), where it is an actual horizon. At other times this line is not as self-evident but still present, as in the bicycle ad (p. 21), where it is the textual line "Save Money—Save Time—Save Temper." Such lines direct the viewer's attention, leading it up or down or across, and they also provide smooth movement within an image, which is crucial for the visual perception of most viewers.

If the viewer's initial reaction is to stare at the center of an image, then the artist must have some reason for fighting this impulse. The viewer should think about how the focal point (its position, its composition, its identity) helps to construct the meaning of the image. For example, in the series of Wolfgang Tillmans's photos (p. 4), the one in the upper right leads the viewer almost out of the image in the search for a focal point. Why? Perhaps because the viewer is searching for the image's source, sliding along the wet surface for something to hold on to. The photo in the lower left has a focal point slightly off dead center. Why? It offers a threatening presence, almost as though the viewer were staring down into the center of a volcano. Yet rather than center the image, Tillmans shifts it a bit, almost mimicking the asymetrical center of the object.

**Look for patterns of color, shape, or shadow in the image.**

Viewers organize information by establishing relationships of similarity, by looking for patterns. And patterns may be established by repeating a color or a shape, by repeating the use of light or dark. Just as a writer might use alliteration or rhyming to draw a

reader's attention to connections in a poem, a visual artist uses repetition to draw a viewer's eye. The question is, "Why is my eye being drawn in this way?" The pattern may hint at the image's meaning—or part of that meaning—or it may be a pattern wholly imposed by a viewer longing for closure.

Advertising images rely heavily on repeated patterns to convey and then hammer home their message. So, for example, a viewer can easily find a repetition of color in the 1953 Roadmaster ad (p. 22). The color red links the bike, the AMF and Roadmaster logos, the slogan, the star, the package under the tree, the boy's pajamas, the curtain, and the boy's hair. In the end, the message is simple: Christmas = Roadmaster. Yet patterns are not exclusively the domain of commercial art. Instead, they may be traced within one painting, like the red in Carmen Lomas Garza's *Tamalada* (p. 130), or across a series of images to determine an artistic style, like the intense color saturation of Winokur's photos (pp. 28–29).

**Look for visual manifestations of metaphor, metonymy, or symbolism.**

Visual artists employ many of the same devices that verbal artists use. Thus, when a viewer considers an image, he or she should look for metaphor, metonymy, and symbol. Whereas readers frequently find metaphor, viewers frequently find metonymy. The concept of "part for whole" is particularly well suited to a visual medium. Thus, an artist might show only a fragment of a larger object in order to send a message to a reader. For example, in Catherine Opie's "Untitled #20" (pp. 112–13), she gives only a hint of the curve of the freeway. We do not need to see the entire U.S. Interstate system in order to understand what is being represented. In addition, this section is cut from the whole and now stands as an aesthetic object, which a standard freeway overview would not.

Viewers should also look for symbolic images, often referred to as cultural icons. A culture often has a visual shorthand language, and within this language certain images have specific, shared meanings: for example, the American flag, a cowboy, Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe. These symbolic images may be used in a way that is true to their accepted cultural currency or in a way that subverts this cultural meaning. For example, the Graphis image entitled "Man Turning into a Barcode" (p. 26) plays on our cultural understanding of the bar code. Such codes mark commercial products, track inventory, and encode prices. So, when a person turns into a bar code, what happens to him? He is now a product, a piece of inventory just like, say, a bottle of mouthwash.

**Remember that a complete reading should account for all design elements that were within the control of the artist.**

Viewers should understand that all images are composed. The elements within them are like the elements in a poem. When a reader analyzes a poem, she accounts not just for the language of the poem but also for the capitalization, the punctuation, the arrangement into lines and stanzas, and so on. When a viewer analyzes an image, she should think about it in essentially the same way, asking the following questions about its design:

- Is there any obvious distortion in the image (things taller, smaller, flatter, fatter, brighter, darker, etc.)? How does this distortion relate to or shape the meaning of the image?
- Is there anything only partially within the frame of the image? Why?
- What is the perspective of the image? Is the viewer placed above the image, below it, or at the same level? How is this related to the meaning of the image?
- What is the size of the image? Is it a miniature or a magnification? How does this relate to the message?

An active reader remembers how the artist has chosen to present his or her final image: photo or painting, watercolor or oil, black and white or color. These statements hold true for painters, graphic designers, and photographers. For example, one of the most popular contemporary photographers, Lorna Simpson, often dramatically enlarges her photos and has them printed to feltboard. In this case, a viewer wishing to read the images needs to also account for the manner in which a photo printed to felt is very different from a photo printed to glossy paper. The picture of the painting by Chuck Close that is reproduced in the textbook (p. 62) is small; but in a museum, a viewer looking at a painting by Close would see a massive work, usually 7 feet by 8 feet. The size of this work is crucial to reading it.

## Reading an Essay

Each essay in *Seeing & Writing* is part of a larger whole—a textbook—composed of written and visual texts. Each essay should be read not only for what it says but also for how it is laid out (how words and images are distributed) and how it fits into the entire chapter. What inferences can be made about *Seeing & Writing* from the way the

texts are presented? Looking at essays as physical objects can be an important step in seeing (and developing one's own) written texts with a fresh eye.

The core activity of reading an essay involves being a careful observer, first getting the facts straight through a series of precise observations.

- Exactly what happens in the essay? What process occurs between the opening and the closing paragraphs?
- Where does the voice of the essay originate? (Who is speaking?) In what tone does the voice speak? What kind of language does it use?
- Where does the essay take place? What details are given to help the reader visualize the world of the essay?
- What images or ideas predominate? What patterns or shifts in images or ideas occur during the course of the essay?
- What is the purpose of the text? Is it to describe, to argue, to tell a story, to explain, to compare—or a combination of these?

The more accurate and plentiful a reader's observations are about a given text, the more opportunities there will be to construct and defend meaningful inferences.

## Reading an Advertisement

There are many examples of advertisements in *Seeing & Writing*, spanning a wide range of products and pitches from throughout the twentieth century. The advertisement as a genre has probably existed for as long as the market economy has; a combination of words and pictures is used for a single purpose, no matter the product—to entice consumers to buy. Because ads often must make their points in a page or two, they combine visual and verbal strategies to shape the most powerful message possible in the briefest amount of space. Most of us encounter more advertisements in a day than any other kind of text; the following questions will facilitate critical reading of these texts.

**What is foregrounded in the frame of the advertisement? Where is the viewer's eye drawn first?**

In the Coca-Cola advertisement at the beginning of Chapter 2 (p. 69), the bottle of Coke in the bottom half of the frame and the word *America* in the top half are roughly equal in drawing our attention. Our eye goes only secondarily to the rest of the print on the page. Thus, the association of Coca-Cola with America is made visually.

**How much of the advertisement's message is delivered through words and how much through images? What is the proportion of one to the other?**

In the ad for The Body Shop in Chapter 4 (p. 242), the entire weight of the message is carried by the image of the doll-woman. In fact, the viewer might not be sure what product is being advertised. In this case, 100 percent of the ad is visual. The eye might be drawn first to the breasts, or to the face, or to the hair. The eye is only secondarily drawn to the red background. This advertisement depends on our knowledge of our culture to carry its message. The image *is* a woman's body; the advertisement is *about* a woman's body; hence, The Body Shop.

**Are the connotations of the language congruent with the connotations of the images?**

The image of RuPaul dominates the advertisement on page 295 of Chapter 5; the Rockport trademark takes a background position in the upper righthand corner of the frame. The central printed assertion, "I'm comfortable being a MAN," draws our eye. In this case the small print "drag superstar"at the bottom and the larger print "I'm comfortable . . ." at the top create a tension between the image of the well-dressed, masculine man and the implied questioning of his gender identity.

**In what ways does the advertisement appeal to a specific type of viewer?**

The purpose of advertisements is to market something to a particular audience. The Benetton advertisement in Chapter 6 (pp. 360–61), with three children of varying races sticking out their tongues, clearly has a multicultural, youthful appeal.

**What is the underlying logic of the advertisement? What does it suggest?**

This logic is created by the pairing of the image and the product. In the Army advertisement from 1990 in Chapter 5 (p. 293), for example, the underlying logic is that women are competent soldiers and that joining the Army will not lessen their heterosexual appeal but may actually enhance it.

## Reading a Poem

Poetry is one of the oldest and most complicated forms of verbal texts. Generally it can be defined as any rhythmical or metrical composition distinguished by a creative use of verbal tools. Historically governed by strict rules of form, style, diction, and meter, poets have created memorable texts within the poetic tradition by carefully deploying such tools as words, phrases, sounds, sentence structures, figurative lan-

guage, imagery, and ideas. The rules governing poetry today are much more loose, but readers generally know a poem when they see it: a short text with set line breaks. Because poets' language has to be more economical than that of prose writers, every word in a poem can be packed with multiple meanings. Many people argue that poetry is meant to be experienced as much as it is meant to be read. The questions that follow will help readers who are unfamiliar with this complicated and sometimes difficult genre.

**How does the poem look on the page?**

A reader doesn't need a detailed knowledge of poetics to make careful observations about a poem's shape—its length, the arrangement of lines, or any other visual detail. In *The Great Figure* by William Carlos Williams, for example (p. 9), line length is key to the rhythm and reading of the poem. The lines are insistent in their rhythm, as is the sound of the fire truck as it speeds through the city.

**Who is the speaker of the poem?**

Although readers often feel mystified by poems, if they imagine the speaker they may get some clues. In Marge Piercy's *Imaging,* for example (p. 232), it is a woman speaking for her body. Her language attempts to heal the split between her body and her mind.

**What kinds of images are present in the poem?**

The poem *Imaging* by Marge Piercy (p. 232) starts with many images that tell the reader what her body is not: "a dress," "a coat," "a house," "a suit of armor," "a lump of meat in which I nuzzle like a worm." By listing these diverse inanimate things the speaker's body is not, the poet evokes in the reader a sense of what her body might be: something active, something alive. In the final stanza, Piercy uses metaphor again, this time to suggest what her body *is*: "this angel I meet on my back . . . dark as the inside of the moon," an image that is very different from those in the opening stanza, powerful precisely because it is difficult to categorize and impossible to visualize.

**What does the poem sound like?**

Poems are made for breath and air, and often reading them aloud aids in understanding. This can be a way to investigate the tone of a poem as a means to discovering its meanings. Reading aloud Naomi Shihab Nye's poem *Defining White* (p. 374) may illustrate, for example, just how impossible it is to define white. The repetition of the word itself in the poem begins to emphasize the meaninglessness of this distinction.

**What is the world of the poem like? Does it have a setting? Is it in a landscape? Does it have characters?**

Different poems foreground different elements. Lucille Clifton's poem *When I Go Home,* for example (p. 131), takes place in the memory of the speaker's "home." Elements of this home include her mother ("alive again and humming"), the smell of bread dough, the feel of linoleum, and the way her mother held the house "together with her song." In short, the memory of the home her mother created *is* her home.

## Reading a Painting

Each painting in *Seeing & Writing* is part of a visual genre that shares certain conventions and goals. Painting, along with sculpture, has historically been associated with high art and the individual style and vision of the artist; one of the oldest visual genres, it has developed through many schools of representative and abstract styles of expression. The following questions will help viewers read paintings in a meaningful way even if they have no previous experience in studying the genre conventions of painting.

**What is the style of painting?**

A viewer doesn't need to be well versed in art history to determine whether a painting is more or less realistic. To begin reading a painting, he or she must understand what the painter wants to convey: a realistic depiction of a person, place, or thing; a purely personal impression of it; or something in between. For example, Edward Hopper's *House by the Railroad* (p. 72) is clearly recognizable as a house by a railroad even though Hopper imbues the painting with a haunting feeling and a strong sense of isolation.

**What is the tone of the painting?**

Just as a writer uses words, a painter uses color and light. Thus a painting might be airy and inviting, with little shading and bright colors. An example is Carmen Lomas Garza's *Tamalada* (p. 130), which conveys a sense of family togetherness with little complication. Alternatively a painting might be dark and foreboding, with lots of shadow and dark shades. An example is Andy Warhol's *Large Triple Elvis, 1963* (p. 408).

**What is the size of the painting?**

In an illustrated textbook, the size of an original painting is quite difficult to discern. However, an image's size makes a significant impression on a viewer. Consider the

images of women by Chuck Close and William H. Johnson that are included in the textbook (pp. 62, 265). Seen in a museum, Close's painting is nearly five times as large as Johnson's—although in Close's work we see only a head and in Johnson's we see an entire person. An artist often uses size to convey a message. For example, during the Renaissance loved ones gave each other small miniature portraits to wear on garments to indicate intimate relationships. The size permitted this message to be shared. In contrast, the sheer size of Andy Warhol's large paintings of Coke bottles and Campbell's Soup cans in this text (p. 410) adds a weight to these cultural icons that a much smaller work could not.

**How does the subject of the painting relate to the manner in which the artist depicts it?**

Like all art, paintings can affect the way their viewers see the world. For example, through his depiction of the American West, Albert Bierstadt shaped the world's view of this part of America—as both reality and myth. In *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California, 1868* (pp. 86–87) Bierstadt's approach to his subject is reverential, and he expects his audience to share this feeling because the grandeur of nature is worthy of their respect. In contrast, Jasper Johns and David Hammons depict their subject, the American flag, in a less reverential fashion. Johns (p. 446) emphasizes the graphic elements of the flag as a subject of composition. Hammons (p. 447) re-envisions the flag for a political statement.

**What perspective is used in the painting?**

The perspective situates the viewer and can be used to convey or negate depth. For example, in *The Figure 5 in Gold* (p. 8) Charles Demuth relies on perspective to move the figure forward at the viewer. Without perspective, the painting could not relate the same urgent immediacy that its pair in the text, William Carlos Williams's poem, does. In contrast, many primitive or folk art styles of painting, such as those used by Carmen Lomas Garza and William H. Johnson, eschew perspective and offer simple, flat images. These underscore a sense of primitive purity and honesty. Readers should also be alert to paintings that add depth where one might not expect it (e.g., the layered flags in Jasper Johns's painting) or deny depth where one does expect it (e.g., the flat soup cans or soda bottles in Warhol's paintings). Often, these works use perspective to add an extra layer of meaning.

## Reading a Photograph

Like the paintings, the photographs in *Seeing & Writing* are part of a visual genre that shares certain conventions and goals. This genre has existed for a little over a century and is commonly recognized as setting the standard for realistic representation, replacing painting as the most accurate means of recording an image. Generally, photographs can be divided into one of two broad categories: documentary photographs, such as those that accompany a news story, that seek to accurately show what a person, place, or event actually looks like; and creative photographs, such as advertising or artistic photos, in which the person, place, event, or photograph has been staged to some degree in order to achieve a certain effect. The Looking Closer section for Chapter 8, "The Ethics of Representation" (pp. 499–509), examines the blurring of the lines between these two types of photographs. The following questions will help viewers interpret photographs even if they are unfamiliar with the genre conventions of photography. As an instructor, you might want to point out that the moving image has its genesis in this genre; most students are very familiar with the medium even if they have never thought about it.

**Is the photo a news, commercial, or art image?**

The distinctions are becoming increasingly blurred, but a reader should still understand the initial purpose of the photo if only to get a sense of its context. For example, viewers may be expected to spend only a few seconds scanning a newspaper photo but minutes or hours studying an art photo in a gallery. A photographer's beliefs about how the image will be received by an audience affect the way in which he or she composes the image. Viewers might consider how the shot of Michael Jordan on the *Sports Illustrated* cover (p. 170) differs dramatically from Annie Leibovitz's shots of Olympic athletes (pp. 217–20) largely because of their contexts and purposes: One must sell a magazine, the other must sustain contemplation.

**Is the photo in black and white or color?**

Black and white photos, such as Nick Ut's "Children Fleeing a Napalm Strike, Vietnam, 1972" (pp. 162–63), hold a documantary connotation. Often these may be news photos, and the simplicity of black and white (initially a limitation of the printing press) conveys a sense of straightforward truth. Other photos may not be news images but are associated with the same connotations, such as Guillermo Gómez-Peña's "Authentic Cuban Santera" (p. 385). Color photos may more accurately reflect the images we associate with real life, but often they are regarded as commercial.

**Does the image in the photo seem to have been altered in any way?**

Photography seems like an art that captures exactly what the photographer sees: a moment in time. However, it is easy to airbrush out cosmetic defects, rearrange subjects, enhance colors and shading, or add digital effects. Often these changes are difficult to discern. Viewers should consider the purpose of a photo when asking whether effects might have been added and how to interpret their use. For example, a model in an ad or fashion editorial is unlikely to appear "as is," and most readers understand that the model's image will be modified before it is published. However, fewer readers expect that news images, such as that of the McCaughey family (p. 504), will be altered.

**How is the image framed in the photo?**

Just like text on a page, an image in a photo might be centered, offset to the left, or offset to the right. Traditionally a straight, centered shot has been used for portraits. Offset shots are often used to suggest motion by drawing the viewer's eye along a horizontal or diagonal line, as in Charles Moore's "Jets of Water Blast Civil Rights Demonstrators, Birmingham, 1963" (p. 332). Sometimes these images also suggest entrapment by crowding the subject against one of the photo's edges. In addition, photos have a vertical axis that can either open up or close down an image. If a photographer heavily shades the top of an image it can appear to be pressing down on the photo subject, whereas if the image is bright, the effect can be the opposite. For example, William Eggleston's "Untitled" (pp. 18–19) offers an imposing top element that crowds the composition.

**How is the photo cropped?**

Often what is left out of a photo is as important as what is included in it. A photo may have been cropped (or cut) to eliminate elements that would distract from the subject or to refocus the subject. For example, Consuelo Kanaga in "Hands" (p. 379) has refocused the viewer's attention on the hands as a symbol of friendship by eliminating anything distracting.

## Reading a Short Story

The short story spans works such as biblical narratives and Chaucer's tales, and it has gained ground especially in the twentieth century as a dominant literary genre. Gen-

erally a short story can be defined as a brief fictional prose narrative; the term is often applied to any work of narrative prose fiction that is shorter than a novel. A short story is usually a connected narrative that has an identifiable plot, structure, characters, setting, and point of view. Short stories are usually easier to read than other verbal texts. The following questions will help readers think critically about the formal elements of the story.

**What is the point of view of the story? Who is the narrator, and from what perspective is he or she speaking?**

In "Shoelaces" (p. 31), Nicholson Baker is telling the story from the first person point of view. He speaks of his childhood and of the lesson that tying his shoelaces presented to him. The perspective shifts back and forth throughout the story from the child's to the adult's point of view.

**What is the setting of the story? Where does it take place? What are the characteristics of that place?**

Eudora Welty's "The Little Store" (p. 78) takes place in Jackson, Mississippi, and as the title suggests, the store is the setting. This location becomes emblematic of the lives that play out in the small community during the narrator's childhood. As Welty states, "We weren't being sent to the neighborhood grocery for facts of life, or death. But of course those are what we were on the track of, anyway" (para. 30)

**Who are the characters in the story? To whom is the story happening? How are the characters affected?**

The very short story "Viewfinder" by Ethan Canin (p. 187) has few characters—primarily the narrator and his wife. However, it is about characters that are not present—his mother and grandmother. The story is about the narrator's realization that a photograph he has always treasured is not of his mother but of his grandmother. What he thought was his very clear memory of the day and place in the photograph turns out to be faulty. He questions, "My God, you're right. How could that have happened?" (para. 4). Indeed, the family history embodied in family snapshots may not be "true" as we remember.

**What happens in the story? What is the main action?**

What happens in "Wrong Channel" by Roberto Fernandez (p. 362) is simple and profound. A woman named Barbarita goes for a doctor's visit to get approved for her green card. Her friend Mima takes her. When the doctor listens to Barbarita's lungs

and asks the "translator," Mima, to "ask her if she had TB," her friend instead inquires if she has a television. Because of this misunderstanding the doctor believes that both Barbarita and her daughter have had tuberculois.

**What are the significant images in the story? How do things look?**

Mavis Hara's "Carnival Queen" (p. 268) is itself about how girls look—the way they look at each other and the way they look to others. The images that describe the character Leilani throughout the story give the reader a sense of her perfect "beauty contest" beauty: "Leilani is so beautiful it doesn't matter what she is wearing. She is smooth, and gracefully quiet. Her smile is soft and shiny. It's like looking at pearl. Lani is not only beautiful, when you look at her all you hear is silence, like the air around her is stunned" (para. 9). What the narrator ultimately learns about is a different kind of beauty—that of her noncontestant friend Terry's smile of friendship (para. 114).

**What changes or transformations occur (or fail to occur) during the course of the narrative?**

In Gish Jen's "What Means Switch" (p. 339), the title gives clues about possible transformations. What kind of switching is central to the story? In a narrative about changing ethnic identity, the Chinese American character Mona asserts that her Japanese friend, Sherman, "doesn't get what means switch" (para. 111) when she tries to tell him he can become an American, too. Mona has already "switched"; Sherman does not. Instead, he returns to Japan.

## Reading Mixed Media

*Mixed media* is generally used to describe the work of contemporary artists who employ unusual combinations of material to achieve a desired effect (sometimes appealing to senses of smell, taste, and touch as well as sight). Materials used in the texts in *Seeing & Writing* that are labeled as mixed media include wood, "found" ordinary objects, photographs, newspapers, videos, and other unusual or unexpected building blocks combined and presented in extraordinary ways. (*Mixed media* is often used when a piece doesn't fall into a "pure" category such as painting or photography.)

**What material has been used in the creation of the work?**

Why might the artist have used this particular combination of materials? Often the original source of some part of the artwork—text from a newspaper, for example—has been deliberately chosen to make a particular point and must be considered in read-

ing the work as a whole. The artist Sally Mankus (not represented in *Seeing & Writing*), for example, lifts rust, carbon, and marking from charred surfaces (mainly bakeware). She writes that "objects (pans, pot lids, napkins, etc.) and materials (rust, carbon) used are so common they become symbols in a universal language."

**Is any part of the work a "found" object?**

Mixed media works often include "found" objects, that is, things that have been incorporated into an original piece or simply appropriated for art. When artists use found objects, they are commenting on the role of these products within our culture. For example, Jeff Koons's *New Hoover Convertible* (p. 49) includes an actual Hoover vacuum cleaner and serves as a commentary on middle-class values of industry and cleanliness. Steve Wolfe's "Untitled (Unread Books #1), 1990" (p. 476) re-creates copies of classics that might be assigned in a typical college class. Viewers might recognize their own cultural failings in this collection: "Oh, I skipped class and never read *Moby-Dick* for American Lit!"

**Is the work realistic, or is it abstract and impressionistic?**

Any work of art falls along this spectrum. For example, Duane Hanson's *Tourists* (p. 185) is so realistic that many museum visitors may fail to understand it is a sculpture. In part, this realism is the message: We know these people and immediately recognize their qualities. In contrast, Kiki Smith's *Lilith* (p. 207) is not as realistic. Instead, the roughed-out nature of the sculpture may comment on the legendary Lilith's role in culture: She is and is not real.

**If the work is three dimensional, what does the third dimension add to the piece?**

Unless otherwise enhanced, photography and painting are primarily two-dimensional media. Most mixed media offers viewers a third dimension, which might make the work tactile or might add realism. For example, Duane Hanson's *Tourists* would not have the same impact of automatic recognition ("I've seen that couple!") if it were just a photo of tourists. Similarly, displaying a photo of a Hoover vacuum in a museum would not have the same visual or physical impact as putting an actual Hoover on display as a sculpture. When Koons created *New Hoover Convertible,* he made a piece that could stand right next to a sculpture by Auguste Rodin or Henry Moore—and thus raise questions about art.

**If the work includes text, what is the relationship between the text and the image/body of the piece?**

Mixed media pieces sometimes take the form of a collage of image and text. The text comments on the work, helping to frame the viewer's reading. For example, Barbara

Kruger's "Untitled" (p. 453) foregrounds the word *picture*—which describes both the work itself and the subject of the work. Yet because the viewer's eye is probably first drawn to the word, not the image, "Untitled" may be offering another interpretation to the viewer: A word can supersede an image.