

## Visual Literacy: Basic Tools for Analysis

As a place to start to help students develop visual literacy skills (comprehending visual media), we will introduce them to the art of analyzing photographs. Just as it is important to understand and synthesize the components of fiction — character, setting, plot, conflict, structure, theme — so too is it important to recognize and understand the basic (visually arresting, but non-technical) components of photographs: *setting* (where and when the photograph was taken), *people* (who, if anyone, is in the photograph), *objects* (which objects are important and why), *actions* (what action is being portrayed), *emotions and ideas* (which emotions and/or ideas are being communicated), and *purpose* (why the photographer took the photograph).

The following activities are designed to guide students to examine and comprehend photographs by using the basic tools for visual analysis. (These questions can be used with any photograph. You may want to use your own photographs including those of your school and community.)

**A.** Take a look at the following photograph. You will notice that most of it is hidden. Based on what you can see, can you use analysis skills to determine the content of the entire photograph?

## Analysis Questions

Think about these questions as you look at the partially hidden photograph:

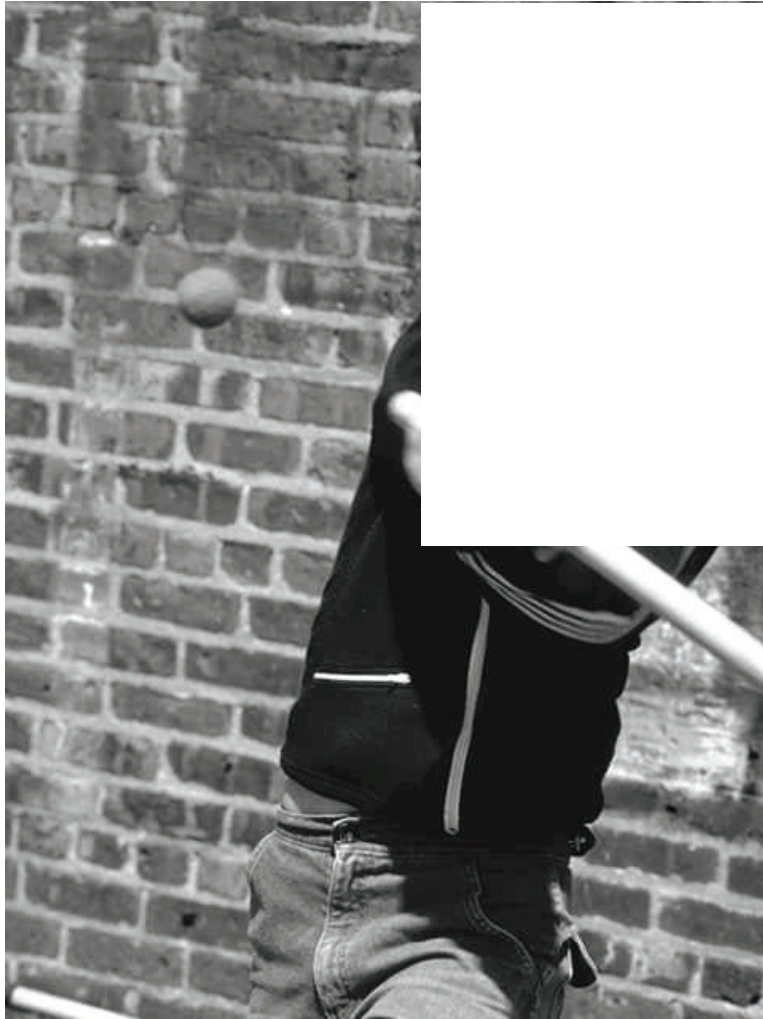
- Does anything in what you can see suggest where the photograph was taken?
- Do you think that a person or that people will be in the photograph?
- Can you tell when the photograph was taken?
- Do you notice any objects in the photograph? If so, what are they?
- Is there action in the photograph?
- What emotions or ideas are being presented? (*See the Appendix.*)
- Does anything in the photograph suggest why the photograph was taken (what the photographer wants you to see and to think about)?



One of the panels has been removed, revealing more of the photograph. Can you guess the content of the entire photograph? Is your guess the same as the previous one? What new details have you discovered?



One more of the panels has been removed, revealing more of the photograph. Can you guess the content of the entire photograph? Is your guess the same as the previous ones? What new details have you discovered?



Here is the photograph. Is the content what you guessed it would be? Why or why not?



- Can you tell where the photograph was taken?
- Who is in the photograph?
- Can you tell when the photograph was taken?
- What objects do you notice? Why are they important?
- What is happening in the photograph? Why?
- Are any emotions or ideas being displayed in the photograph?
- Why was the photograph taken (what does the photographer want you to see and to think about)?