

WEEK 4 INSTRUCTIONS: METAPHOR ANALYSIS

Select a visual image that uses an explicit, obvious metaphor. For your first venture into metaphor criticism, look for a still image and not anything too ambiguous. Some good choices would be an advertisement, a magazine cover or illustration, an editorial cartoon, a book jacket cover, a meme, product packaging, or a movie poster or still frame.

Image Introduction: (see example on following page)

Step One: Examine the image as a whole for a general sense of its dimensions and context. Context is important as the meaning may be influenced by the setting, occasion, intended or ideal audience, and author/creator of the image.

Step Two: Identify and sort the elements of the metaphor into target (literal-primary) and source (figurative-secondary). Remember, one or the other may not be present, but only implied.

Step Three: Draw conclusions to discover an explanation for this visual image. What is the shared connotation or characteristic? Did the metaphor employ widely-known connotations and shared (often popular culture) references? What does the image want you to see, understand, or act upon? You may also consider the potential effect of the visual metaphor on its intended or ideal audience; how the metaphor might have functioned or failed to function in conveying the idea(s) intended.

Step Four: Summarize the metaphor(s).

Figure 4.13 presents the steps as a flowchart to illustrate the process:

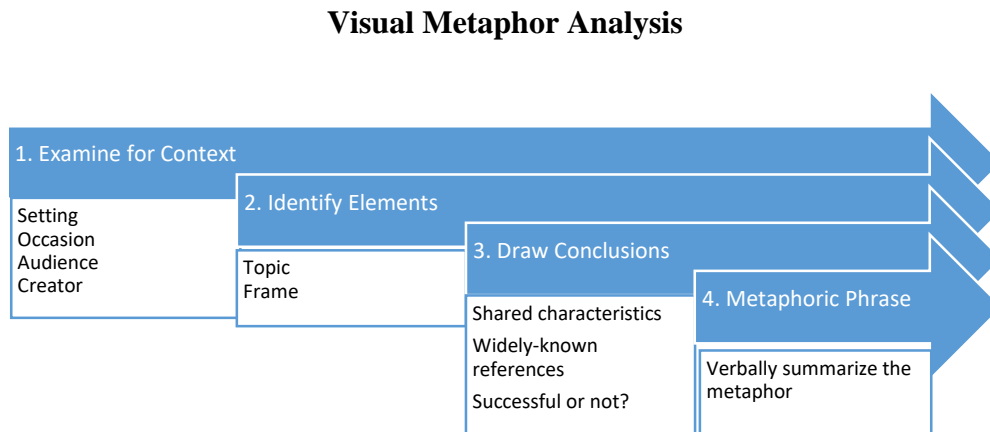


Figure 4.13

SEE EXAMPLE ANALYSIS ON FOLLOWING PAGE.

Example Analysis.

Image Introduction: During presidential campaign 2016, numerous Republican presidential debates took place throughout the fall of 2015. Many media accounts, in both the conservative and liberal press, noted the debates' vitriolic atmosphere and heated moments. This citizen-generated response to the debates is an image-macro meme that circulated online (figure 4.14).

In visual metaphor analysis the first task is to choose an image in which you observe some incongruity between the objects or elements in the composition. The incongruity in this image is the scene from Michael Jackson's "Thriller" music video and the written reference, "GOP Debate".



Figure 4.14

1. **Context:** The context is a popularly-known "Michael Jackson Popcorn Eating" meme, a scene captured from Michael Jackson's 1982 "Thriller" music video. Jackson is eating popcorn with a mesmerized expression while watching a horror movie in a darkened theater. It both appropriates popular culture ("Thriller") and is itself a piece of popular culture as a well-known meme. <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/popcorn-gifs>
2. **Elements:** The target (literal) term of the metaphor is not presented pictorially but by the words identifying and characterizing the GOP debate. The source (figurative) element is the scene from "Thriller".
3. **Conclusions:** The visual metaphor is explicit for those who recognize the image as a frame shot from "Thriller," in which Michael Jackson is enjoying a horror movie. The potential effect on the audience is likely one of amusement at the shared connotations. The horror movie genre elicits fear, alarm, and disgust in its audiences, but can also thrill and entertain viewers. The metaphor asks us to understand the Republican debates as horror shows, but with a grotesqueness the public enjoys as entertainment. The employment of a widely-used meme template reinforces the aspect of an audience watching it, accepting it, enjoying it, and sharing it.
4. **Metaphor(s):** "The Republican Presidential debates are horror shows" and "The Republican Presidential debates are entertainment".