



# Visual Literacy

A resource for teachers

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Visual literacy refers to the ability to ‘read’ an image; to see, to understand, and ultimately to think, create, and communicate visual information. Images are all around us, and the ability to interpret them meaningfully is a vital skill for students to learn.

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# ELEMENTS

Elements are the building blocks or basic units in the construction of a visual image.

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# The Elements of Art

(the tools to make art)

Line		Horizontal, vertical, diagonal, straight, curved, dotted, broken thick, thin.
Shape		2D (two dimensional)/ flat Geometric (square, circle, oval, triangle) Organic (all other shapes)
Form		3D (three dimensional), Geometric (cube, sphere, cone), Organic (all other forms such as: people, animals, tables, chairs, etc).
Colour		Refers to the wavelengths of light. Refers to hue (name), value (lightness/darkness), intensity (saturation, or amount of pigment), and temperature (warm and cool). Relates to tint, tone and shade.
Value		The lightness or darkness of an image (or part of an image).
Texture		The feel, appearance, thickness, or stickiness of a surface (for example: smooth, rough, silky, furry).
Space		The area around, within, or between images or parts of an image (relates to perspective). Positive and negative space.

Line is the most basic element of design. It is fundamental in the creation of an image. There are four basic lines that can be found in an image.

Some are obvious and others are implied.

# Lines







# Vertical Lines

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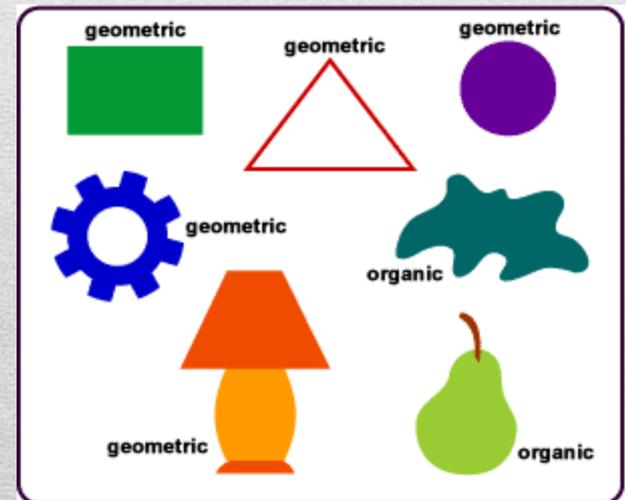
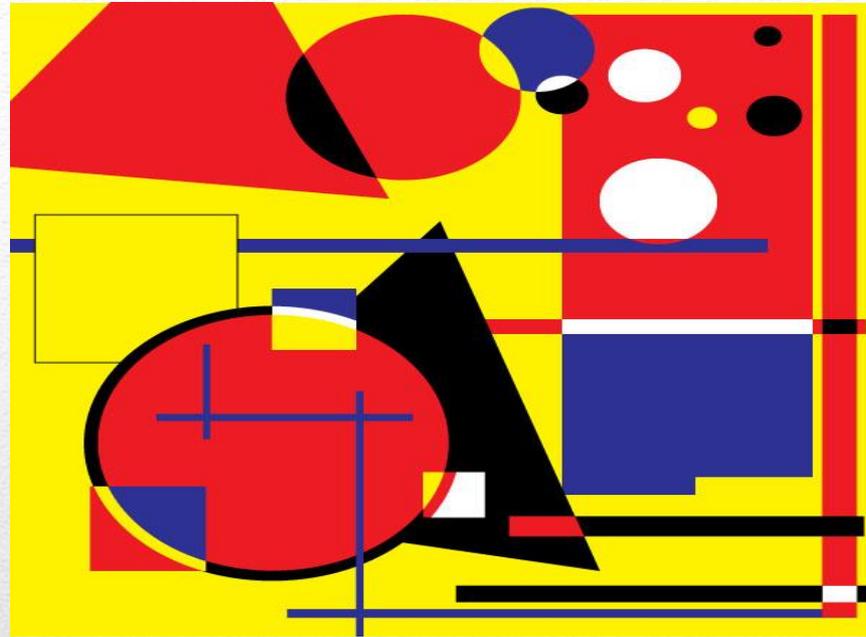
# Diagonal Lines



**Curved lines**

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They are 2 dimensional enclosed areas that create an outline. Examples are circles, triangles and squares. They can be found anywhere in the world.



# Shapes and Forms

Colour is described by three characteristics hue, value and saturation.

Hue refers to the particular spectrum of light activated.

Value is the tonal degrees of light and dark.

Saturation refers to the levels of purity with the spectrum of light activated.

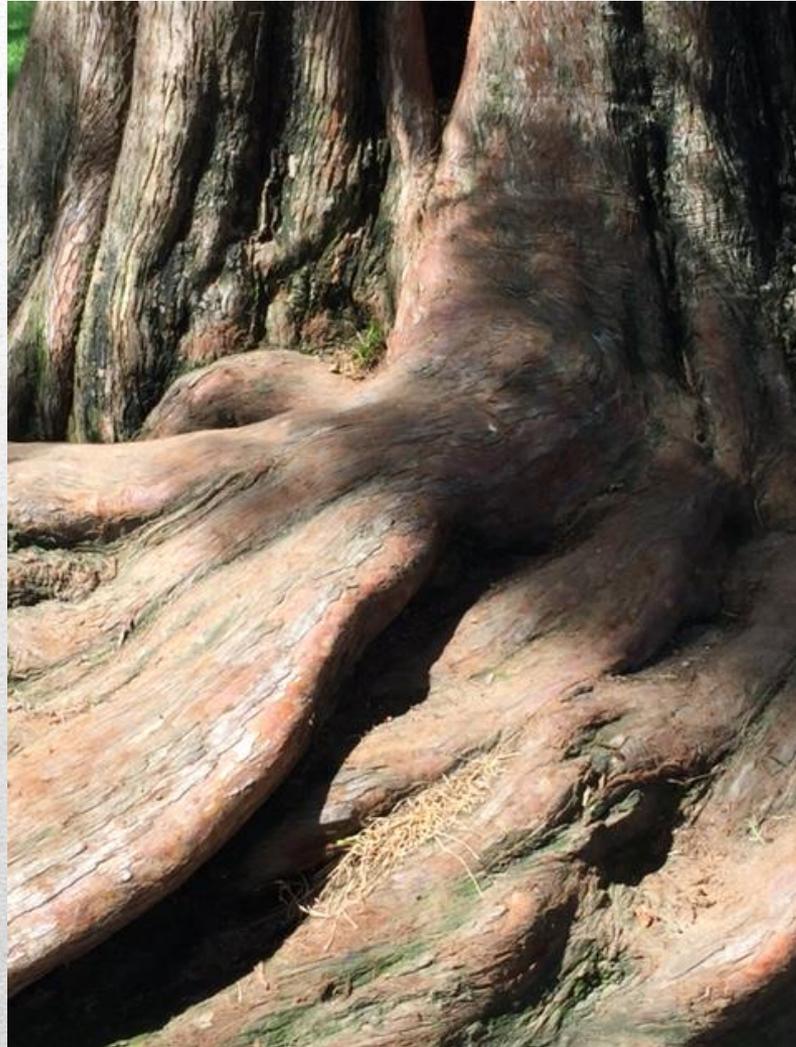
It shapes our perceptions and shapes our emotions.



# Colour

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Texture refers to the surface quality, the way it feels or the way it looks. This can be real or implied by different uses of media. It is the degree of roughness or smoothness in objects.



# Texture

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Space is either “positive” or “negative” in an image. Positive space is the main subject in the visual, and negative space is the rest of the space in the same visual. Negative space is what is outside of the positive space, or main subject.



# Space



# PRINCIPLES

Design principles are used to organize the basic elements of visual texts into pleasing and interesting images.

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Balance refers to the sense of distribution of perceived visual weights that offset one another.

We feel more comfortable—and therefore visually satisfied—when the parts of an image seem to have balance and be in harmony with each other.

Imbalance gives a sense of disharmony which is usually not the intention of the creator.

Balance and harmony can be achieved through symmetry or asymmetry, or by combining similar related elements such as color and shape. Sometimes artists deliberately disturb our sense of balance.



# Balance & Harmony

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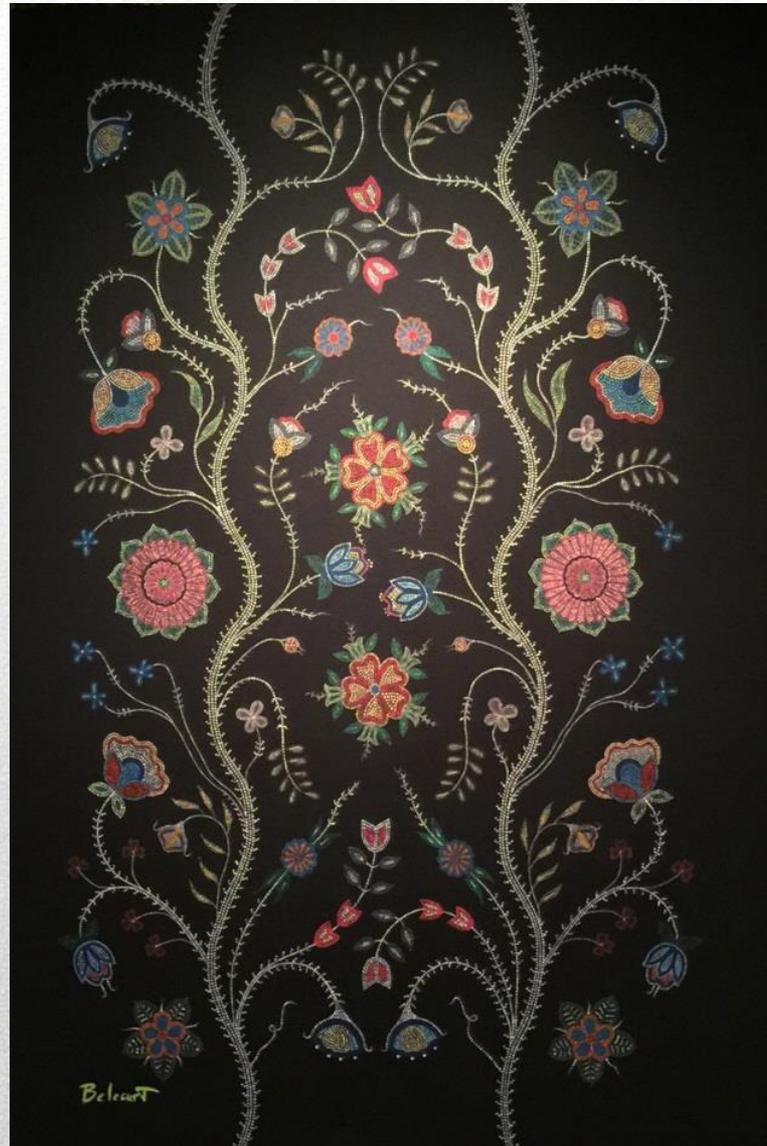
Pattern is a combination of elements or shapes repeated in a predictable, recurring and regular arrangement.

Pattern is used symbolically to represent many things: people, beliefs, the natural world, history, tradition.

Colours and shapes have specific meanings, and are passed down from generation to generation.

The predictability of pattern is important in establishing a historical tradition and cultural practice.

# Pattern



Proportion refers to the size of objects in relation to other objects in the image. Proportion can be used to draw attention to an object, be playful (make something look bigger or smaller than it is), all to make a point or cause awareness. It creates unity when all parts work together.



# Proportion

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Emphasis draws attention to a focal point. This is done by contrasting shapes or colours in the image to feature one aspect. With emphasis on a certain part, you are able to highlight what is most important in a photograph.

If everything is emphasized then nothing will stand out!



# Emphasis

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Contrast is a distinct difference between elements of a form or composition; either visually or in subject matter.

Visual contrast can be achieved through the use of intense complementary colors.

Images such as night and day create contrast in subject matter.

When both types of contrast are used in the same composition they create the most contrast.



# Contrast

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Movement in visual images comes from the kinds of shapes, forms, lines, and curves that are used.

Diagonal lines tend to create the illusion of movement or motion.

Changes in direction, darkness or lightness, or connecting or overlapping shapes can imply movement or restlessness.

A series of images shown as individual frames (like a comic strip) can provide a sense of movement through time.



# Movement

Rhythm is created when an element is repeated over and over again like many lines, or shapes or colours. It could also be specific content like many shoes, or faces, or cars. It creates a feeling of organized movement, and is like music in that it has a “beat”.



# Rhythm

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Unity is the relationship among the elements of an image that helps the elements function together.

Unity helps to organize an image and gives the image a sense of oneness.

In other words, the words and the images work together to create meaning.

Unity can be achieved through the use of similar shapes and patterns, the use of space, or a common background.

# Unity

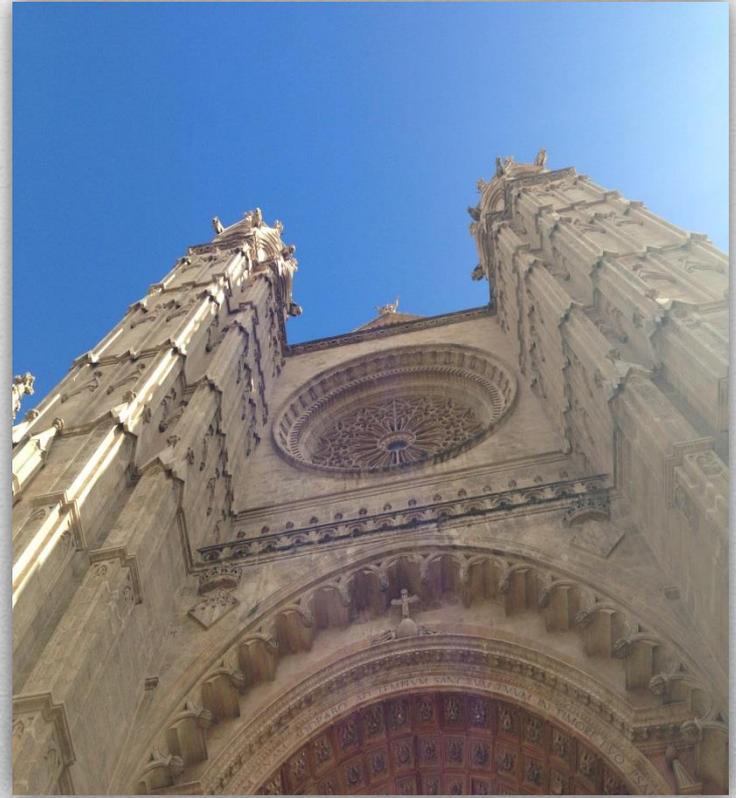


This is another way to say point of view. Depending on the perspective, you may have a new and unique way of seeing a particular sight. It's very interesting and refreshing to see an image from a perspective that we don't encounter ourselves. We are so used to seeing things from our own point of view that it stimulates our senses to see something new.

Adapted from Paul Reimer, 2015



# Perspective



- Slide 4- <https://mystudioart.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/elements-of-art.jpg>
- Slide 14- [https://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building\\_lessons/principles\\_design.pdf](https://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building_lessons/principles_design.pdf)
- Slide 16- <https://www.sophia.org/tutorials/design-in-art-repetition-pattern-and-rhythm>
- Slide 19- <http://nwrain.net/~tersiisky/design/emphasis.html>
- Slide 20- <https://www.sophia.org/tutorials/design-in-art-balance-and-contrast>
- Slide 21- <http://www.educ.kent.edu/community/VLO/Design/principles/movement/index.html>

# References

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