Visual Rhetoric Lesson

1. As students enter classroom, I greet them and tell them to turn to page 122 in their textbooks (most will be online).
2. I will instruct students to read the text on visual texts until the photograph (Dorothea Lange’s *Migrant Mother*), and *to not read any farther*.
3. I will continually remind students about this last point.
4. Once students reach the photograph, they will be instructed to answer the pre-written questions about it on the board.
5. The questions on the board will be: “What do you notice about this image? What emotions do you feel?”
6. Students view the image and respond while the class filters in and I take attendance and walk around the room to make sure everyone is working.
7. This should take approximately 5-7 minutes depending on reading speed, and a key part of my walking around will be assessing when everyone is done.
8. At this point, I will move to the front of the class for the lesson to begin.

Break

1. “Good morning, class. Today we’re going to talk visual texts and the arguments they make.”
2. “Before we do that, let’s briefly review what we know about written arguments: what’s their purpose? What do they consist of?”
3. The students, for whom argumentation is a key aspect of this course, answer that arguments make claims, provide evidence, use assumptions, and use ethos, pathos and logos.
4. If necessary, I will guide student answers to make sure the correct items are mentioned.
5. Under a heading on the board of “Argument,” I will write the students’ criteria of an argument so it can be referred to throughout the class.
6. “Okay, these are all great. And the same aspects apply to visual texts, which can make arguments as well. What are some examples of visual texts? The textbook gives some, but let’s hear it from you.”
7. Students provide examples such as: advertisements, videos, cartoons, photographs, etc.
8. For each example, I write it on the board under a heading of visual texts and ask the student one possible argument a visual text could be making (e.g., an advertisement is arguing you should buy a particular product).
9. I will write down about five of these, making sure different students respond in order to assess class-wide understanding.
10. “Very good. Earlier in the year, you all did an analysis of an advertisement, correct?”
11. Students respond affirmatively.
12. “Great! Let’s get back into that mindset and look at the photo in the textbook.”
13. “This is a very famous photograph, it’s by a woman named Dorothea Lange, and it’s called *Migrant Mother*. There’s a lot going on in this photograph. Before we start analyzing, let’s just describe it. What do you see in this picture?”
14. As students answer, I will write down their responses on the board under a heading of “Description: What do we see?”
15. A key element here is to have students initially not apply emotional context to the photograph, but instead physically describe it, such as: in black and white, a woman holding two children (probably a mother), their clothes are tattered, etc.
16. Where necessary, I will guide students to answering in this area.
17. The lesson then shifts to a focus on evocation—what does the image make you feel?
18. I ask the students, “What feelings do you get looking at this picture? Try and be specific.” This is to try and have students advance beyond, “It makes me sad.”
19. As the students answer, I write their responses down under a heading on the board marked, “How do we feel?”
20. As necessary, I call on students or prompt their responses.
21. During this time, I ask each student who answers why they feel the way they do, and note that on the board as well.
22. “We’re moving toward analysis now. We’ve talked about the emotions the picture evoked, but we haven’t talked about the argument it’s making, and this is really important.”
23. “Before we can talk about an argument, we need to know the context an image occurs in.”
24. “Let’s give an example, talking about fashion, and why context is important.”
25. I should note here that there is a dress code at Father McGivney Catholic High School, so this is a relevant argument.
26. “If I see Frank on the weekend at Dunkin’ Donuts, and he’s wearing a hoodie and sweatpants, is he making an argument with his clothes?”
27. The students answer no, he’s just comfortable.
28. “What if I walk in here on Thursday, and it’s Mass Day, and Frank is dressed in a hoodie and sweatpants. Is Frank making an argument now?”
29. The students (hopefully) answer yes, Frank is making some sort of statement against the dress code.
30. “So context is really, really important with visual texts. Their arguments speak to specific needs, desires, and times.”
31. “Look now at the text right underneath the photograph. When was this photo taken?”
32. Students answer, “1936, or The Great Depression.”
33. “Okay! Now we’ve got some context. Tell me what you know about the Great Depression.”
34. Students answer, and I provide background information where needed.
35. I will now make a new heading on the board, “Argument.”
36. “So now, knowing what we know about the historical context, looking at the photograph, and thinking about how it makes us feel and why it makes us feel that way, what argument might this photograph be making?”
37. Students answer.
38. For each answer, I write it down on the board and ask them for their evidence based on the image.
39. Where needed and appropriate, I guide students, but I really believe this is an area where it’s important to get them to talk/think out loud.
40. As the students answer, the class discusses the arguments as a whole until we come to some sort of broad consensus about the arguments the text is making.
41. I probably ask more questions here, such as, “Who agrees with this? Why or why not?”
42. Once the argument has been established, I ask, “Which of the three appeals is this picture using the most?”
43. Students answer, “Pathos.”
44. “Great. Last question: why did Lange choose to make this argument via photograph?”
45. Students answer that the photograph is more immediate and heartrending than any text could be.
46. I do a quick spot check for comprehension. “How do you all feel about analyzing visual texts? Thumbs-up, thumbs-sideways, thumbs-down?”
47. Students respond. I will a note of students whose thumbs go sideways, or especially down, so I can speak with them individually during the next portion of class.
48. “What I want to do now is have you work on this without me guiding you. I’m going to break you into groups.”
49. I break the class into 5 groups of 4-5 people.
50. I then assign each group one of the selected (and attached) images: Justin Sullivan, *Season’s Greetings*; Rosie the Riveter; John Filo, *Kent State Shootings*; Charles Moore, *Birmingham, Alabama*; Brent Sirton, *Gorilla in the Congo*.
51. I will then give the students instructions.
52. “For all of your pictures, if you Google Image search the photo and the photographer, it will be the first photo to come up.”
53. “Your job as a group is to analyze this visual text. What argument is it making? How is it making that argument? What evidence does it use?”
54. “This does not have to be an ironclad presentation, I just want a general summary to present to the class at the end.”
55. “I want you to first look at your assigned image.”
56. “Like we did, address what’s in the text. Then: how does it make you feel?”
57. “Finally, look up the historical context and decide the text’s argument.”
58. The students then discuss their texts in small groups.
59. During this time, I am constantly moving around the classroom, first to listen in on what the students are saying, and then to ask for their group’s analysis and evidence.
60. This process should take 10-15 minutes, and is adjustable based on how easily the class got the initial visual text analysis, or how the group work appears to be going.
61. I will take care to monitor the time because 7-10 minutes is likely necessary at the end of class for the mini-presentations.
62. Once it appears student groups have an argument in mind, I will call the class’s attention back to order.
63. “Okay folks, let’s practice this again together.”
64. I will now call upon individual groups to briefly present on their visual text.
65. For each group, I will instruct the entire class to Google the specific visual text to have in front of them.
66. The group will then from their desks present on their image, communicating what they believe the text’s argument is, and their evidence for thinking so.
67. As much as possible, I want the students to talk and drive the conversation here, but if I feel they are missing obvious things, or not providing evidence, I will ask questions.
68. After each group, I ask briefly if the class agrees with the argument the group believes the text is making.
69. If the class agrees, we move on; if there is disagreement, we discuss.
70. This repeats for the other four groups.
71. I now move back to the front of the class.
72. “Good job everybody, this was really great analysis.”
73. “You’re writing a research paper right now, correct?”
74. Students answer yes.
75. “How could you use a visual text and the analysis we just did to aid you in writing your research paper?”
76. I guide student answering toward: it can provide an additional, different source; it can offer a unique and supplemental perspective; and other ways students might think of.
77. “That’s all really great. Let’s make this a reality.”
78. “Your homework for tonight is to find one visual text you believe you can use in your research paper.”
79. “I want you to answer four things about this visual text: 1) What argument is it making? 2) What evidence it uses to make that argument? 3) How does it relate to your chosen topic? 4) Name one way you might use this in your research paper?”
80. “None of these answers have to be particularly long, but I want you to turn that and the visual text itself into Classroom for tomorrow.”
81. I answer questions and allow the students to conduct research until the class ends.

Please attach your visual text

1. What argument is your visual text making?
2. What evidence does it use to make that argument?
3. How does this visual text relate to your chosen topic
4. Name one way you might use this visual text in your research paper.