

Deconstructing an 'unseen' text



1. Focus your reading:

Read the question first and identify the key words. This will be a guide as to what to look for as you read.

2. Start on the surface:

Read the passage to understand it on a literal level. Determine what is going on, and to whom. In written texts, resolutions and conclusions are often key in revealing what ideas, attitudes etc the writer is promoting. In still images, what is foregrounded is often key. Use any contextual info you are given about the text and its composer – does this give you a clue as to time, place, issues etc?

3. Dig deeper:

Identify the broad themes and ideas in the text, by considering:

- What events does it explore?
- Who are the people involved?
- Where is it set?
- If you get stuck – think of some of the common themes that you should be able to identify: identity, power, gender, race, class, social issues, human nature etc.

Consider the specific ideas in the text, by considering:

- What specific aspects of these themes and ideas are addressed here?
- What comments does the text make about these themes and ideas?

4. Pull it apart:

Consider how these themes and ideas are constructed:

- Consider generic conventions used, such as character, setting, conflict, dialogue, point of view in narratives, or framing, proximity, gaze, subjects, setting, costume etc in still images...
- Consider the role of language devices, such as visual language, descriptive language, figurative language, diction, syntax, punctuation, imagery, symbols, rhetoric...
- Consider the role of structure, such as the composition, patterns, beginnings (introductions and expositions), climaxes, endings (conclusions and resolutions), lack of endings, calls to action etc...

5. Identify positioning:

Consider the perspectives, values, attitudes or ideologies evident in the way the text has been constructed:

- Whose perspective are we invited to inhabit?
- Who / what are we encouraged to support or endorse? What do they stand for?
- Who / what are we encouraged to reject or criticise? What do they stand for?

6. Go broad:

Connect to the real world:

- What might these events, characters, settings represent in the real world or your context?
- How do the composer's attitudes (evident within the construction of the text) translate to the real world? What's going on in the world that this might be relevant to?

7. Get personal:

Consider your response:

- What do you think about the ideas, attitudes, construction of the text?
- What do you feel as a result of this text?
- What reading strategies (reading practices, intertextuality etc) influence your understanding?
- What contextual influences (history, background, values etc) influence your understanding?
- Does your response align with that of the target audience, or how the text positions you to respond?

8. Bring it together:

Synthesise your ideas:

- Revisit the question to frame your response.
- Identify three – four clear points to argue.
- Choose 2-3 pieces of evidence for each one.
- Order these points logically.

A strategy you may wish to consider

	Within the text	Outside the text
Who	Who are the figures within the text and how are they characterised?	Who do they represent in the wider world and how accurate is this representation?
What	What event / action / interaction / conflict is captured in the text?	What ideas/issues does this relate to in the wider world?
When / where	When and where is the setting within the text?	When/where is the context of the publication of this text and what does this imply about audience and ideology?
How	How is this text constructed?	How am I positioned to respond as a result?
Why	Why was this text constructed – what is its purpose?	Why is this text important – what does it reveal about the world? Consider both the intended and unintended ideas.