

## More nurses are needed! Postcard Image



**Reproduction of Army Nurse Corps recruitment poster for WWII, United States, 2001.**

Produced by Dover Publications Inc.

Courtesy National Library of Medicine

## Visual Literacy: Critical Lenses

**Introduction:** Images surround us as arts, advertisements, instructions, propaganda, and more, all of which communicate information and ideas. Visual literacy applied to image analysis allows you to examine an image critically in the context of its creator, audience, purpose, time period, etc. It enables you to decode underlying historical and social influences that have shaped both explicit and implicit messages contained in the image.

There are some approaches with which you can analyze images and develop your visual literacy skills. Here are four such approaches—i.e., critical lenses—class, gender/feminism, race/ethnicity, and history. They offer different perspectives you can use to reveal how the image and its ideas have been affected by various factors—when, who, what, where, how, why.

**Instruction:** Read the descriptions about four different critical lenses on this page. Afterwards, review several guiding questions for nursing postcards listed on page 2. Note your comments and questions on the margin, and be prepared to share them during the class discussion.

### Types of Critical Lenses

**Class:** Here class refers to people with the same social, economic, or educational status. The class lens examines the differing representations and contextualization of people based on socio-economic classes. It explores the power relationships among the classes, and who benefits the most from them in society. Visual media carries images that are informed by and shape those class and power structures in a society at any given time and place.

**Gender/Feminism:** A gender lens explores how societies define ideas about masculinity and femininity, while a feminism lens sees society as supporting male power and restricting female power. The gender and feminism lenses can work together and examine female and male representations in the media that depict how defying societal expectations of gender and sexuality impacts people's lives; and gender imbalances in society where men have more societal power and their interests and preferences dictate women's opportunities, treatment, and social status.

**Race/Ethnicity:** This lens probes into the social perceptions about one's race/ethnicity. The critical lens reveals the hierarchy of societal power and how imbalances of opportunity and power among races and ethnicities color all aspects of their lives. The racial/ethnic lens can also be used to look at how the dominant culture perceives different races and ethnicities, how those perceptions are presented in the media, and how those factors affect the way society treats people and their opportunities in life.

**History:** A historical lens places information in the context of the time period in which it was created. This lens analyzes the information in visual media through examination of the circumstances that produced the media, such as cultural movements, political ideologies, and intellectual trends of the time. The history lens also explores the legacy history has left in the present, and may encompass the other three lenses when looking at the ways in which historical occurrences impacted society as a whole, and how they colored the experiences of people in various social groups.

## Visual Literacy: Critical Lenses

### Guiding Questions for the Nursing Postcards

1. What is the image's main message? Who is its creator/producer? What is its purpose? Who is the audience?
2. What time period is the postcard image from? At that time, what historical events happened, and what were the mainstream cultural and social trends? How does the image reflect them?
3. What are the symbols in the image? What do they convey and to whom?
4. Who and how are people depicted? What is their identity—gender, class, race/ethnicity?
5. From whose perspective are the people illustrated? What power relationships does the image show? How does the image foster or change the norm and the existing power structure?
6. What information or image is missing? How does that absence further support the message of the image?
7. What ideas about nurses or nursing does the image communicate? What can you conclude about social rules, norms, power, and power structure that shaped this image?



## Image Analysis Worksheet

5. From whose perspective are the people illustrated? What power relationships does the image show? How does the image foster or change the norm and the existing power structure?

6. What information or image is missing? How does that absence further support the message of the image?

7. What ideas about nurses or nursing does the image communicate? What can you conclude about social rules, norms, power, and power structure that shaped this image?

## Teacher's Image Analysis Worksheet

**Instructions:** Take a close look at your postcard image with the four critical lenses. Consider the guiding questions to help you analyze and place the image in the larger historical and social context. Then note your analysis in terms of observations, inferences and questions about the image.

**Postcard Title:** *More nurses are needed!*

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*Students' answers may vary, but need to demonstrate their applying critical lenses in responding to the questions. Teacher can use the class discussion to model articulating specific critical approaches, as well as any relevant prior knowledge and visual/textual evidence from the image being analyzed.*

**1.** What is the image's main message? Who is its creator/producer? What is its purpose? Who is the audience?

*Students ought to use text clues both on and in caption below the image to infer its message, creator/producer, purpose, and audience—help & join Army Nurse Corps, US Army and Dover Publications, recruitment during WWII, women, respectively. Students may note how the image originally was on a poster during WWII and then on a postcard in 2001. Teacher may guide students to understand that there is no information that can identify the purpose for the 2001 postcard.*

**2.** What time period is the postcard image from? At that time, what historical events happened, and what were the mainstream cultural and social trends? How does the image reflect them?

*After identifying WWII as the original production date of the image, students may offer answers based on their existing knowledge about the mainstream US society and WWII in mid-20th century. They may identify the axis countries and several allied countries fighting the war; limited career/educational opportunities for women and minorities; cultural and social trends that benefit mostly male, white, middle-class people, etc. They may mention how the war, unintentionally, catalyzed inclusion of women and minorities who became essential in war time. Students identify the portrayal of the female nurse as the reflection of the mainstream idea of an army nurse, which mirrors the qualities of an acceptable/good woman of that time—clean, conventionally attractive, light-complexioned, etc.*

**3.** What are the symbols in the image? What do they convey and to whom?

*Students may identify three visual symbols, each of which conveys the following:*

- the caduceus, the winged-staff with two snakes wrapped around it, which is a symbol of medicine;*
- the rifle behind the woman is serving as a make-shift IV-drip pole, symbolizing medical care in a battle field and/or the unseen but assumed male wounded soldier; and*
- the background colors of splash-patterned yellow beneath darker olive-toned color seem to reference the explosions in battle fields.*

**4.** Who and how are people depicted? What is their identity—gender, class, race/ethnicity?

*Students again contextualize the only female nurse on the image, whose class and ethnicity may seem unclear, in the context of the socially acceptable feminine qualities of mid-20th century in the United States. The female portrayal is absent of the nurse's skills and training.*



## Teacher's Image Analysis Worksheet

**5.** From whose perspective are the people illustrated? What power relationships does the image show? How does the image foster or change the norm and the existing power structure?

*Students consider that the image reflects military and male perspectives that foster the dominant culture during 1940s—white male perspectives. They are able to reference the ways in which the nurse is depicted as a woman with traditional femininity and clean appearance despite her work in the frontline of the battle field. They may note her gestures and facial expressions also being from the male perspective, and not from how real military nurses see themselves working in the battle field.*

**6.** What information or image is missing? How does that absence further support the message of the image?

*Students identify a lack of men, as the image may imply men are soldiers and women are nurses. They may note how the realities of war-time nursing are mostly missing, as the image seems to dramatize and glamourize the female army nurse.*

**7.** What ideas about nurses or nursing does the image communicate? What can you conclude about social rules, norms, power, and power structure that shaped this image?

*Students summarize their analysis of the image in responding to this question. They articulate that the image communicates that women are suitable only as nurses in the military during a war. They decipher that the poster image reflects the power structure and gender norms established by dominant white male culture.*





## Image Analysis Worksheet

5. From whose perspective are the people illustrated? What power relationships does the image show? How does the image foster or change the norm and the existing power structure?

6. What information or image is missing? How does that absence further support the message of the image?

7. What ideas about nurses or nursing does the image communicate? What can you conclude about social rules, norms, power, and power structure that shaped this image?

## Teacher's Image Analysis Worksheet - Postcard Images

**Instructions:** Take a close look at your postcard image with the four critical lenses. Consider the guiding questions to help you analyze and place the image in the larger historical and social context. Then note your analysis in terms of observations, inferences and questions about the image.

**Postcard Title:** *George A. Brewster Nursing Training School Postcard*

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*Students' answers may vary, but need to demonstrate their applying critical lenses in responding to the questions. Teacher can use the class discussion to model articulating specific critical approaches, as well as any relevant prior knowledge and visual/textual evidence from the image being analyzed.*

**1.** What is the image's main message? Who is its creator/producer? What is its purpose? Who is the audience?

*Students ought to use visual and text clues on the image handout, to infer its message, creator/producer, purpose, and audience. The main message seems to be that George A. Brewster Nursing School is a professional, competent institution offering career opportunities to African American women. There is no information on the creator/producer. The purpose may be promotional—trying to recruit students and raise awareness of the school in the community. The audience seems to be people in African American communities with recognition that other communities may see it, as well.*

**2.** What time period is the postcard image from? At that time, what historical events happened, and what were the mainstream cultural and social trends? How does the image reflect them?

*The postcard is from ca. 1908. Students may note that while the early 1900s were a time of progress for mainstream society, they saw African American people suffer many setbacks. Blacks were stripped of basic rights they had gained during the Civil War and legal segregation had been enacted in the previous decade. The racial homogeneity of the group reflects segregation—white and African American nurses trained in separate schools. This postcard was made before the first Great Migration of African American people north.*

**3.** What are the symbols in the image? What do they convey and to whom?

*Students identify the nurse's uniform, clean and neat-yet functional, as being symbolic of the professionalism that was developing in the field during that time.*

**4.** Who and how are people depicted? What is their identity—gender, class, race/ethnicity?

*The people depicted are African American women of unknown social class. Students may notice that the serious facial expressions, formal body language, and uniforms are displays of professionalism and respectability.*

## Teacher's Image Analysis Worksheet - Postcard Images

**5.** From whose perspective are the people illustrated? What power relationships does the image show? How does the image foster or change the norm and the existing power structure?

*Students may recognize the postcard as being from the perspective of the school, as it is meant to show off the school's good qualities. Students also notice that the women depicted are students on equal standing, which may represent their collective subordinate status. Segregation is implied by the racial homogeneity, and professional separation of genders is implied by the group being all women, so we can assume that within this power structure, societal status is based on (among other things) race and gender. The postcard image of young African American women in a para-professional setting dispels then-widely held, racist beliefs about African American people being unprofessional and unskilled; and sexist beliefs about women being unfit for professional work.*

**6.** What information or image is missing? How does that absence further support the message of the image?

*Students identify that white people and men are missing from the image. This doesn't necessarily support the messages of the postcard, which are that the school is a professional and competent institution, and that African American people and women are professional and competent, despite widely-held beliefs to the contrary. But it does highlight the conditions under which messages like those would be necessary. (Those conditions are a power structure informed by racism and sexism.)*

**7.** What ideas about nurses or nursing does the image communicate? What can you conclude about social rules, norms, power, and power structure that shaped this image?

*Students summarize their analysis of the image in responding to this question. They articulate that the image communicates that African American women's experiences were colored by both racism and sexism. They were denied access to opportunities and privileges because of race and gender. Nursing played an interesting role in this, offering African American women education, career prospects, and possibly social mobility—things women had limited access to in the past. Yet it still worked within a racist framework, where African American women were trained separately from whites, and their training institutions had to prove their worthiness to mainstream society because of racist societal beliefs.*

## Teacher's Image Analysis Worksheet - Postcard Images

**Instructions:** Take a close look at your postcard image with the four critical lenses. Consider the guiding questions to help you analyze and place the image in the larger historical and social context. Then note your analysis in terms of observations, inferences and questions about the image.

**Postcard Title:** *His First Case*

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*Students' answers may vary, but need to demonstrate their applying critical lenses in responding to the questions. Teacher can use the class discussion to model articulating specific critical approaches, as well as any relevant prior knowledge and visual/textual evidence from the image being analyzed.*

**1.** What is the image's main message? Who is its creator/producer? What is its purpose? Who is the audience?

*Students ought to use the style of illustration, the actual event depicted, and text clues in the image and the caption below the image to infer its message, creator/producer, purpose, and audience. The purpose is amusement. The creator is American illustrator, Grace Wiederseim and the producer is Alfred Schweizer Fine Art Publisher. The audience is the general public—mainstream society.*

**2.** What time period is the postcard image from? At that time, what historical events happened, and what were the mainstream cultural and social trends? How does the image reflect them?

*The students will gather from the caption that the postcard is from ca. 1910. They may offer answers based on their existing knowledge about mainstream US society in the early 20th century, citing that women at this time had very limited career opportunities, and nursing was one of them (especially for middle class, white women). They may note that the image shows the ideal traits of people during that time, the Progressive Era—hardworking and “pure” (particularly the girl). At that time, activists fought government corruption and the unethical practices of big business, so these children represent society's ideal Americans.*

**3.** What are the symbols in the image? What do they convey and to whom?

*Here are some of the visual symbols students might identify, each of which conveys the following:*

- *The armband with the red cross the girl wears denotes a healthcare worker, in this case referencing Red Cross nurses*
- *The hats are symbols, the girl's hat representing the nursing profession and the boy's hat signifying that he is playing the role of an upper middle class gentleman*
- *The medical bag the boy carries demonstrates that he is pretending to be a doctor*

**4.** Who and how are people depicted? What is their identity—gender, class, race/ethnicity?

*Students may notice that the characters are portrayed as children in a very cutesy way. They also adhere to the gender roles of their time. The girl seems passive and pleasant—traits of the ideal woman at the time, while the boy seems busy and authoritative—power and industry being traits of the ideal man. All characters depicted are white, as is the case with most mainstream imagery from this era and beyond. They seem to be middle or upper middle class, based on clothing and the fact that they have time to play, as opposed to working in factories or farms, which is what working class and poor children did at the time.*

## Teacher's Image Analysis Worksheet - Postcard Images

**5.** From whose perspective are the people illustrated? What power relationships does the image show? How does the image foster or change the norm and the existing power structure?

*Students consider that the image reflects the perspective of mainstream culture, which preferences middle class whiteness. They are able to reference the ways in which the girl (nurse) is depicted as a passive assistant or subordinate to the boy (the doctor), who is the person of action and authority. This reflects societal gender roles. They may note how gestures and facial expressions give this away.*

**6.** What information or image is missing? How does that absence further support the message of the image?

*Students may articulate that what is missing is any depiction of the less-than-cute realities of medical work and life outside the upper social classes. The invisibility of people of color may indicate that society is dominated by white people. The pleasantness of the image lends itself to the cuteness, which is meant to amuse the viewer. The representation of class shows that the middle/upper middle class is considered the ideal.*

**7.** What ideas about nurses or nursing does the image communicate? What can you conclude about social rules, norms, power, and power structure that shaped this image?

*Students summarize their analysis of the image in responding to this question. They articulate that the image communicates that only women are nurses and only men are doctors. The relationship between doctor and nurse reflects an overarching hierarchy of power based on gender: men have higher status, while women have subordinate status. They also may note that the people with the most societal power are white and middle class (or higher).*

## Teacher's Image Analysis Worksheet - Postcard Images

**Instructions:** Take a close look at your postcard image with the four critical lenses. Consider the guiding questions to help you analyze and place the image in the larger historical and social context. Then note your analysis in terms of observations, inferences and questions about the image.

**Postcard Title:** *Suburban Hospital Postcard*

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*Students' answers may vary, but need to demonstrate their applying critical lenses in responding to the questions. Teacher can use the class discussion to model articulating specific critical approaches, as well as any relevant prior knowledge and visual/textual evidence from the image being analyzed.*

**1.** What is the image's main message? Who is its creator/producer? What is its purpose? Who is the audience?

*Students ought to use text clues both on and in the caption below the image to infer its message, creator/producer, purpose, and audience—e.g., Suburban Hospital is a great workplace; Suburban Hospital; advertisement; and medical professionals or even patients who want to be cared by a hospital with well trained professional who are people with integrity.*

**2.** What time period is the postcard image from? At that time, what historical events happened, and what were the mainstream cultural and social trends? How does the image reflect them?

*Students note the year "1999" in the caption text below the image. Students may mention notables of that year, e.g., Bill Clinton as the US President, as well as various facts related to what they consider the last year of the 20th century as modern time. They can articulate that the image expresses both traditional and modern social and cultural trends, valuing integrity, respect, diversity, teamwork, innovation, etc. as spelled out on the image.*

**3.** What are the symbols in the image? What do they convey and to whom?

*Students may identify the hospital logo as a symbol of the institution. Using the logo shape to frame groups of people pictured together alludes to the view that those are the medical professionals at work in the hospital.*

**4.** Who and how are people depicted? What is their identity—gender, class, race/ethnicity?

*Students recognize the diversity among the people on the image—female and male, young and old, and different ethnicities. They also note that the people are pictured working together, smiling, confident, and engaged with others in warm and respectful ways.*

## Teacher's Image Analysis Worksheet - Postcard Images

**5.** From whose perspective are the people illustrated? What power relationships does the image show? How does the image foster or change the norm and the existing power structure?

*Students identify that the people on the postcard are 'staged' by the hospital's perspective whose intention is to promote and advertise. They point out how the photos depict real people, but may be actors/models. Students may note that the people are represented as collectives and on equal footing and power. They also identify the care-giver and patient relationship shown in lower right photo.*

**6.** What information or image is missing? How does that absence further support the message of the image?

*Students identify the lack any 'unattractive' features of hospital environment, workers, and patients. The absence of such imagery fosters the usual promotional approaches in visual media—conveying all that is happy and attractive.*

**7.** What ideas about nurses or nursing does the image communicate? What can you conclude about social rules, norms, power, and power structure that shaped this image?

*Students summarize their analysis of the image in responding to this question. They articulate that the image places nurses and nursing as an integral part and equal stakeholder in the specific hospital. Students also note that the nursing profession in medicine is open to and attracts diverse people with integrity and knowledge. Students may note that the image is shaped by today's values or political correctness.*



## Image Analysis Worksheet - Postcard Images

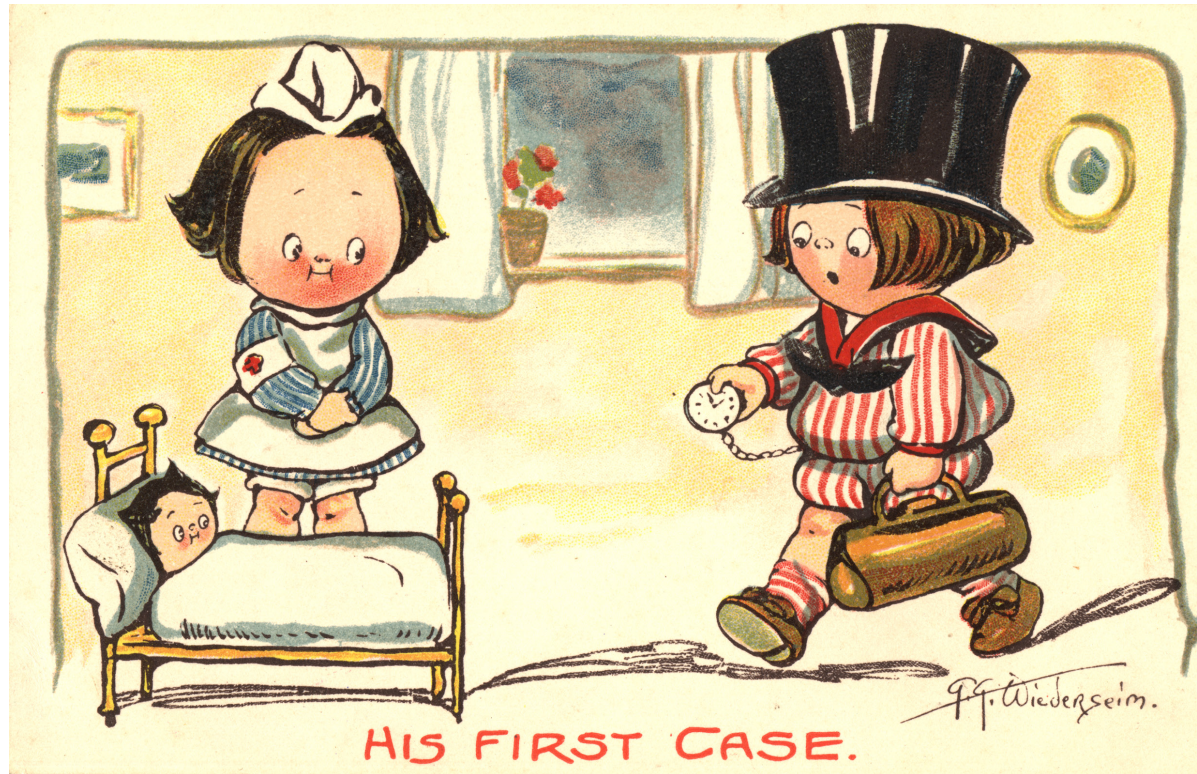
### George A. Brewster Nurse Training School Postcard



**George A. Brewster Nurse Training School**, Jacksonville, FL, ca. 1908  
Courtesy National Library of Medicine

## Image Analysis Worksheet - Postcard Images

### *His First Case Postcard*



**His First Case., United States, ca. 1910**  
Created by Grace G. Wiederseim (1877- 1936)



## Image Analysis Worksheet - Postcard Images

### Suburban Hospital Postcard



Suburban Hospital, Bethesda, MD, 1999

Courtesy National Library of Medicine