



I Saw the Sign

Linguistics, Semiotics



Bradly Cusack, Polly Base, Brad Bellatti
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Grade Level	12th Grade	Time Frame	180 minutes
Subject	English/Language Arts		

Essential Question

How does language function?

Summary

In this lesson, students will be introduced to the concept of semiotics and signs. Students will engage with language games and ultimately use semiotics to analyze advertisements to determine how they make meaning.

Snapshot

Engage: Students discover and discuss the meaning of their names.

Explore: Students engage in a game of Pictionary and use the 20 Questions Mingle strategy to discover different items.

Explain: Students analyze an academic text using the Why-Lightning instructional strategy.

Extend: Students study and answer questions about a provided image.

Evaluate: Students write an analysis of an advertisement and reflect using the Two Stars and a Wish instructional strategy.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards for English Language Arts (Grade 12)

12.3.R.1: Students will analyze the extent to which historical, cultural, and/or global perspectives affect authors' stylistic and organizational choices in grade-level literary and informational genres.

12.3.R.2: Students will evaluate points of view and perspectives in more than one grade-level literary and/or informational text and explain how multiple points of view contribute to the meaning of a work.

12.3.R.6: Students will comparatively analyze the structures of texts (e.g., compare/contrast, problem/solution, cause/effect, claims/counterclaims/evidence) and content by inferring connections among multiple texts and providing textual evidence to support their conclusions.

12.3.R.7: Students will make connections (e.g., thematic links, literary analysis, authors' style) between and across multiple texts and provide textual evidence to support their inferences.

Attachments

- [Lesson Slides—I Saw the Sign.pptx](#)
- [Pictionary Handout—I Saw the Sign.pdf](#)
- [Semiotics Why-Lighting Passage—I Saw the Sign.docx](#)
- [Semiotics Why-Lighting Passage—I Saw the Sign.pdf](#)
- [Signs Chart—I Saw the Sign.pdf](#)

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Pictionary Handout (attached; one per 2 students)
- Semiotics Why-Lighting Passage (attached; one per student)
- Signs Chart Handout (attached; one per student)
- Chart Paper
- Markers

20 minutes

Engage

Display **slide 2** of the attached **Lesson Slides** as students enter the classroom.

To begin the lesson, provide students with the prompt *What does your name mean?* They can look up name origins, recount stories from family or guardians, or explain what their name means to them personally.

Students discuss what their names mean. As an optional extension, students may choose a new name and discuss why it resonates with them.

Teacher's Note

This activity encourages students to think about language and meaning in various contexts, from personal and familial to etymological. It sets the stage for understanding that words derive their significance from shared context and cultural usage.

35 minutes

Explore

Transition to **slide 3** and divide students into elbow partners to play Pictionary. Distribute the **Pictionary** handout, one per set of elbow partners. Groups will play two rounds of Pictionary, each partner taking a turn as either the drawer or the guesser. Drawers will pick a word for their partner to guess. They will have 30 seconds to draw. Ask partners to complete a description on the the handout to document the details that helped them guess each word correctly. Then have the partners fill out the bottom of the handout with "Signifier" and "Signified."

Teacher's Note

These activities introduce the concept of the "signifier" (elements that define a sign) and the "signified" (what a sign represents) in a fun, engaging way. This is the beginning skill needed to create a semiotic chart.

Move to **slide 4**. Use the [20 Questions Mingle](#) strategy to have students choose items in the room for their elbow partners to guess. Remind them to take turns asking questions until they have figured out their partners' items. Students may record their guesses on the back of the Pictionary handout.

Transition to **slide 5**, and introduce the lesson title and concept to students. Display **slide 6** and briefly go over the essential question; then, display **slide 7** to discuss the lesson objectives.

Teacher's Note

The 20 Questions exercise highlights the concept of "arbitrariness of signs," showing that word meanings are culturally and historically assigned, not inherently tied to the objects they represent.

40 minutes

Explain

Display **slide 8** and introduce students to the [Why-Lighting](#) strategy. Distribute the attached **Semiotics Why-Lighting Passage**. Tell students to highlight passages that they deem important to their understanding of semiotics as they read. Next to the highlighted portions, tell students to write notes that explain why they highlighted the passage. After providing time for students to complete the reading, have each pair of students compare what they have highlighted with another pair of students. Ask for volunteers to share what they highlighted and how it relates to the topic of semiotics.

Possible Responses

- Saussure's theory of signs...
- The signifier is...
- The signified is...

Teacher's Note

It is helpful to model the Why-Lighting activity before students begin working independently. Be sure they understand expectations, choosing descriptive rather than generic portions of the passage.

45 minutes

Extend

Display **slide 9** and ask students to consider the differences between the following two images: *How would you describe each of them? Do the images seem like they have a coherent message?* Display **slides 10** and **11**. Allow students time to analyze each image, and repeat the prompts if necessary.

Transition to **slide 12** and distribute the attached **Signs Chart** handout. Explain to students that they are now going to independently examine an image to identify signs. Display **slide 13** and explain to students that they are going to analyze three signs within the image, completing sections on their handout that break each sign down into signifier, signified, and connotations. Allow time for questions, and then set a five minute timer during which students are to analyze the image on the slide.

Transition to **slide 14** and guide the class through a discussion comparing and contrasting the differences between the family photo, the stock photo, and the advertisement.

Teacher's Note

The goal is to demonstrate the relevance of the kind of thinking that semiotics provides.

45 minutes

Evaluate

Tell students that they are going to have to find their own image to analyze, but first they will gain some practice analyzing signs as a class. Display **slide 15**. Take time to think aloud and analyze the first image yourself using the same criteria as before (signifier, signified, connotation). Gradually turn over more analytical responsibility to students as they analyze the remaining images on **slide 16** and **slide 17**.

Display **slide 18**, and allow students to use Chromebooks to find advertisements. They will add images to the **Signs Chart** handout under the *From Assignment* section.

After students have had time to complete their image analysis, transition to **slide 19**. As an exit ticket, students will use the [Two Stars and a Wish](#) instructional strategy to reflect on what they have learned about language. Explain to them that on the chart paper provided, they will list two key things they learned about how language functions and write one question they still have about the lesson.

Teacher's Note

Students will apply what they have learned in this section. They will combine their understanding of detailing significant signs and listing their signifiers as well as noting their connotations. They will then attempt to explain how those signs relate to one another to support the main idea of the image.

Resources

- K20 Center. (n.d.). 20 Questions mingle. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/3615>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Two stars and a wish. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/83>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Why-Lighting. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/128>
- YouTube. (n.d.). K20 Center 30-second timer [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9ViOMe_Wnk
- YouTube. (n.d.). K20 Center 5-minute timer [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVS_yYQoLjg