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Visual Literacy

VOCABULARY

famine
sparse
spires

You've probably heard the expression, "A picture is worth a thousand words." An illustration, photograph, graph, or map can add information and meaning to a text that would not be as easy to understand through text alone. When you read two or more sources about the same topic, each with its own visual material, you have more tools available to answer a question or solve a problem.

Guided Practice

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

Desert Swarm

by Abbas Samhadi

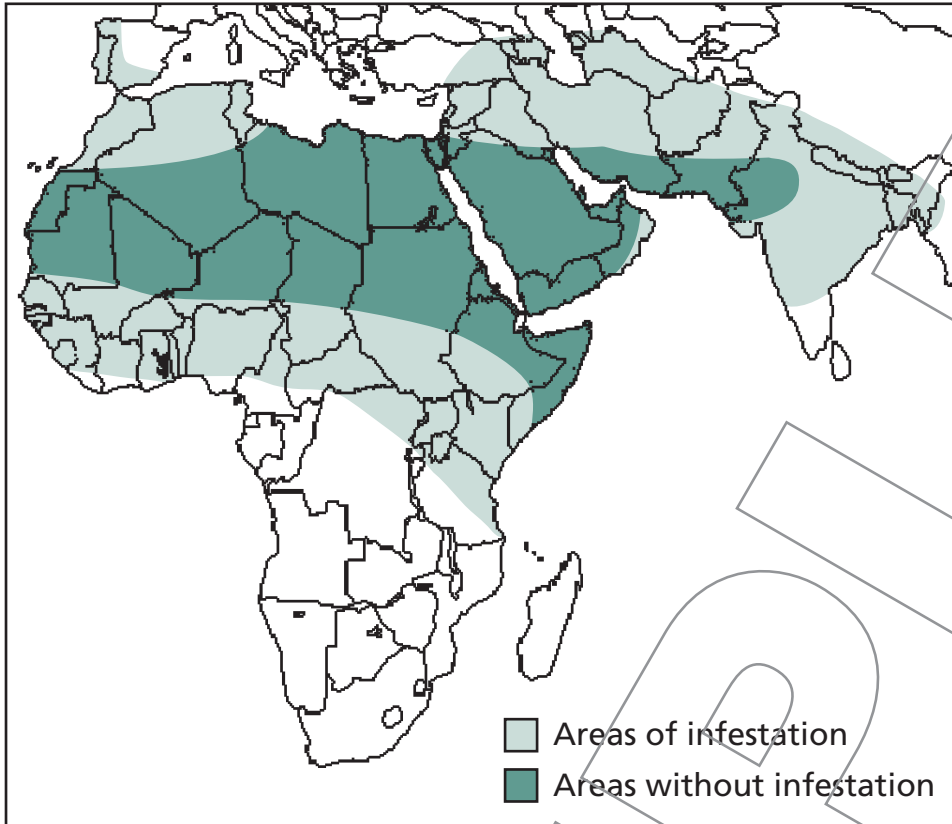
1 One of the most feared insects on Earth is the desert locust. It lives in the grasslands of northern Africa and southwest Asia. Most of the time, desert locusts don't bother anyone. They feed on the sparse grass of their homeland. When rain falls, however, the grass grows more abundantly. When that happens, the desert locust practically transforms itself into a different insect. The females lay more eggs in the sandy soil. When they hatch, the young locusts gather in large groups to feed. When their hind legs bump against each other, changes take place in their body chemistry. They change in color from green and brown to black, yellow, and pink. They give off a scent that causes them to swarm and fly off in search of food.

2 A locust swarm can be as small as a square mile or as large as several hundred square miles. A swarm that large darkens the sky. In each square mile, there may be anywhere from 60 million to 80 million locusts. One swarm is said to have had 250 *billion* locusts.

3 Locusts fly with the wind, so a swarm can travel as fast as the wind is moving. They can stay in the air for long periods of time. They can't fly much higher than 6,000 feet above sea level, so mountains can sometimes block their flight. But some swarms travel hundreds of miles. They can reach as far as Russia, Spain, and India. During the 1987–1989 outbreak, a swarm of locusts from Africa even crossed the Atlantic Ocean to the Caribbean region.

sparse
thinly scattered





Regions affected by the 2003–2005 desert locust swarms

4 Locusts do not bite people or animals, but they eat just about any kind of plant. A single desert locust can eat its weight every day. Even a small swarm can eat three tons of food in a single day. They can breed up to five times a year. Each generation may have ten to 16 times as many locusts as the last. One out of every ten people on Earth lives in danger of famine because of desert locusts. An outbreak in West Africa in 2004 led to severe food shortages in the region.

5 Locust species are found over most of the world. The Rocky Mountain locust was once as destructive as the desert locust. In the 1870s, it caused enormous crop damage in the central United States. However, by 1902, it had mysteriously gone extinct.

famine
severe food shortage

Desert Locust Plagues, 1910–2019		
Years of Outbreaks		
1926–1934	1949–1963	1987–1989
1940–1948	1967–1969	2003–2005

Which of these facts is best illustrated by the photograph on page 154?

- A** When they hatch, the young locusts gather in large groups to feed.
- B** Each generation may have ten to 16 times as many locusts as the last.
- C** They can stay in the air for long periods of time and travel hundreds of miles.
- D** One out of every ten people on Earth lives in danger of famine because of desert locusts.

Did the photograph help you understand any facts in the passage better than the text alone? It shows locusts feeding on a plant—lots of locusts. It gives you an idea of what a *swarm* means, and how they eat.

The map can help you understand ____.

- A** how fast a locust swarm can travel
- B** which countries suffered the worst famine
- C** how many locusts covered the region in 2003–2005
- D** which countries were affected by the 2003–2005 outbreak

Just as the photo gives you an idea of what a locust swarm looks like, the map shows you how large an area was affected by the most recent outbreak.

How does the chart “Desert Locust Plagues, 1910–2019” add meaning to the information in the passage?

The photo, map, and chart each give different kinds of information. Here is one possible answer:

The passage describes what happens during an outbreak of locusts, while the chart shows you how often outbreaks happen and how long they last.

Using information from the passage, how could you explain why some areas on the map experienced locust outbreaks while others did not?

The passage gives facts about locusts that can help you explain the map.



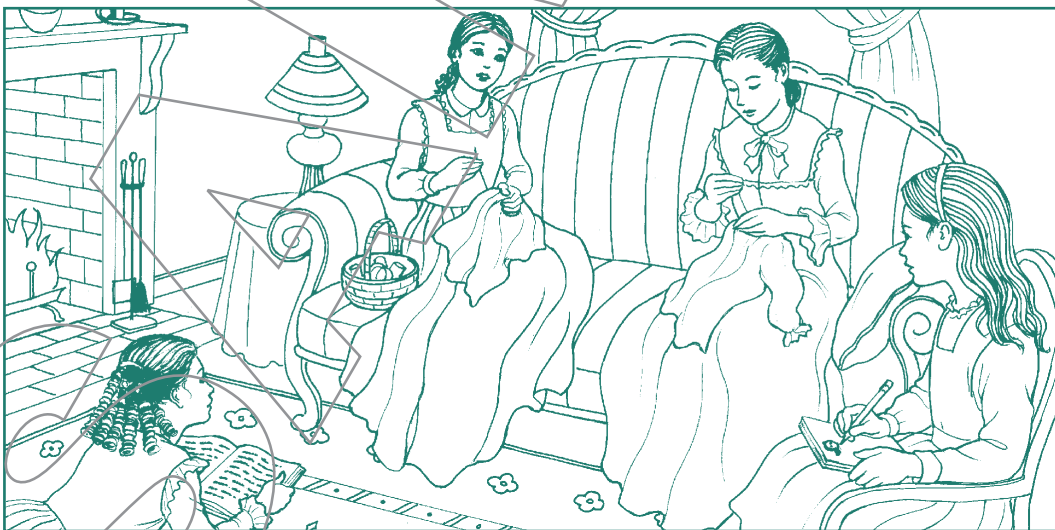
Visual elements can also add to the meaning or tone of a literary text. Illustrations can help you visualize the story. Many literary works are also adapted into dramatic productions, either on stage or on the screen. When this is done, sometimes the writer and producer may make changes to the story. They may add or remove characters. They may combine scenes or leave scenes out. Sometimes they even change the story. Have you ever seen a dramatic version of your favorite book? How was it changed? Did it meet your expectations?

Guided Practice

Read a scene from a novel. Then read the scene from a dramatic version of the novel. Then answer the questions.

from **Little Women**
by *Louisa May Alcott*

- 1 “Christmas won’t be Christmas without any presents,” grumbled Jo, lying on the rug.
- 2 “It’s so dreadful to be poor!” sighed Meg, looking down at her old dress.
- 3 “I don’t think it’s fair for some girls to have lots of pretty things and other girls nothing at all,” added little Amy, with an injured sniff.
- 4 “We’ve got Father and Mother, and each other, anyhow,” said Beth, contentedly, from her corner.
- 5 The four young faces on which the firelight shone brightened at the cheerful words, but darkened again as Jo said sadly, “We haven’t got Father, and shall not have him for a long time.” She didn’t say “perhaps never,” but each silently added it, thinking of Father far away, where the fighting was.



6 Nobody spoke for a minute. Then Meg said in an altered tone, “You know the reason Mother proposed not having any presents this Christmas. It’s going to be a hard winter for everyone. She thinks we ought not to spend money for pleasure, when our men are suffering so in the army. We can’t do much, but we can make our little sacrifices, and ought to do it gladly. But I’m afraid I don’t.” Meg shook her head, as she thought regretfully of all the pretty things she wanted.

7 “But I don’t think the little we should spend would do any good. We’ve each got a dollar, and the army wouldn’t be much helped by our giving that. I agree not to expect anything from Mother or you, but I do want to buy *Undine and Sintram* for myself. I’ve wanted it so long,” said Jo, who was a bookworm.

8 “I planned to spend mine for new music,” said Beth, with a little sigh, which no one heard but the hearth-brush and kettle-holder.

9 “I shall get a nice box of Faber’s drawing pencils. I really need them,” said Amy, decidedly.

10 “Mother didn’t say anything about our money, and she won’t wish us to give up everything. Let’s each buy what we want, and have a little fun. I’m sure we grub hard enough to earn it,” cried Jo, examining the heels of her boots in a gentlemanly manner.

11 “I know *I* do—teaching those dreadful children nearly all day, when I’m longing to enjoy myself at home,” began Meg in the complaining tone again.

12 “You don’t have half such a hard time as I do,” said Jo. “How would you like to be shut up for hours with a nervous, fussy old lady, who keeps you trotting, is never satisfied, and worries you until you’re ready to fly out the window or box her ears?”

13 “It’s naughty to fret. But I do think washing dishes and keeping things tidy is the worst work in the world. It makes me cross; and my hands get so stiff, I can’t practice a good bit.” Beth looked at her rough hands with a sigh that anyone could hear that time.

14 “I don’t believe any of you suffer as I do,” cried Amy. “You don’t have to go to school with impertinent girls, who plague you if you don’t know your lessons, and laugh at your dresses, and label your father if he isn’t rich, and insult you if your nose isn’t nice....”

15 “Don’t peck at one another, children. Don’t you wish we had the money Papa lost when we were little, Jo? Dear me, how happy and good we’d be, if we had no worries,” said Meg, who could remember better times.

16 “You said the other day you thought we were a good deal happier than the King children, for they were fighting and fretting all the time, in spite of their money.”

17 “So I did, Beth. Well, I guess we are; for though we do have to work, we make fun for ourselves, and are a pretty jolly set, as Jo would say.”

18 “Jo does use such slang words,” observed Amy, with a reproving look at the long figure stretched on the rug. Jo immediately sat up, put her hands in her apron pockets, and began to whistle.

19 “Don’t, Jo; it’s so boyish.”

20 “That’s why I do it.”

21 “I detest rude, unlady-like girls.”

22 “I hate affected, niminy piminy chits.”

23 “Birds in their little nests agree,” sang Beth, the peace-maker, with such a funny face that both sharp voices softened to a laugh, and the “pecking” ended for that time.

from **Little Women**

by Brenda Callay, adapted from the novel by Louisa May Alcott

CHARACTERS

Josephine March (Jo), age 16

Aunt Martha March

Margaret March (Meg), age 18

James Lawrence

Amy March, age 12

Theodore Lawrence (Laurie)

Elizabeth March (Beth), age 14

Mrs. Kirke

“Marmee,” mother of the four March sisters

Mr. March

Professor Bhaer

Dr. Bangs

Act 1, Scene 1

The stage is dark except for artificial firelight at rear center. A piano plays a sentimental tune of the Civil War era. Jo’s voice is heard through speakers.

JO (AS NARRATOR): That was the Christmas that almost wasn’t. It was the first year of the war. Father was far away where the fighting was. We’d had little enough money for extra things in the best of times. But I did not fully understand that we were living in distressed circumstances until Marmee proposed not having any presents that year.

Lights come on revealing the March family living room. It is 1861 in Concord, Massachusetts. The stage is set with the furniture of the period, worn but clean and well kept. An upright piano is downstage left.

Pictures on the wall include a woman’s silhouette in an oval frame, a portrait photo of Mr. March, and another of Abraham Lincoln.

The four March sisters are arrayed around the stage. Meg sits in a chair at right, doing embroidery. Beth is at the piano, half leaning over the keys. Amy sits on a sofa, drawing with a pencil on a pad held on her knees. Jo lies on a rug at center stage, reading a book. The music stops as the dialogue begins.

MEG: Distressed circumstances! What a fine and delicate way of saying we're poor! (*She looks down at her dress.*) It's so dreadful!

JO: (*in a complaining tone*) It just won't be Christmas without presents!

AMY: Other girls have lots of pretty things. It's just not fair.

BETH: (*quietly, almost to herself*) We have each other, and we have our mother and father.

JO: We haven't got Father and shall not have him for a long time.

There is a moment of meaningful silence. The girls glance at each other.

MEG: It's a hard winter for everyone. Think of our men suffering so in the army! Marmee says we must all make our little sacrifices and do it gladly. (*She fretfully lays aside her needlework.*) Well, I'm afraid I don't. Jo, do you remember when we were little, before Father lost that money? We had no worries!

JO: Mother wouldn't wish us to give up everything, Meg! We've each got a dollar to spend, and I don't think the army would miss it. Let's each buy ourselves a present. I've wanted *Undine and Sintram* for the longest time!

AMY: Yes, you are such a bookworm!

JO: Well, what would you buy for yourself? Drawing pencils? Let's each buy what we want and have a little fun. I'm sure we all work hard enough to earn it. Except you, Amy.

AMY: I don't believe any of you suffer as I do! You don't have to go to school with girls who laugh at your dresses and make fun of your father if he isn't rich and insult you if your nose isn't nice!

MEG: (*big-sisterly*) Don't peck at one another, children.

JO: I think we're a good deal happier than the King children. They fight and fret all the time in spite of their money, and even though we have to work, we're a pretty jolly set, I must say.

AMY: (*looking disapprovingly at Jo*) You do use such slang words, Jo! (*Jo's response is to stand and saunter downstage with her hands in her pockets, whistling.*) Don't whistle, Jo; it's so boyish.

JO: That's why I do it.

AMY: I detest rude, unladylike girls.

JO: I hate affected, niminy piminy chits.

BETH: (*singing softly*) Birds in their nests agree.

The other girls all stare at Beth for a moment, then laugh.

JO: Thank you, Beth, for keeping the peace!

How does the writer of the play change the story in this scene?

To make an entire novel into a play, a writer must leave some things out. Otherwise the play would be too long. In this scene, the writer chooses to make some small changes to shorten the scene and to give you information in the dialogue.

Think about what you read in the story and the play. How would the actress playing Jo act in order to show the audience more about her character?

Jo is a bookworm who likes to behave in a “boyish” fashion. The story describes some of her movements, and the play gives some stage directions.



How would watching this scene performed help you understand the story better?

In a play, the actors and actresses put their own spins on the characters. If you read the story, you might picture a character in a different way than the actor playing that character does.

SAMPLE



Test Yourself

Read two passages. Note the visual elements in each. Then answer the questions.

Passage 1

My Desert

by Devon Williams

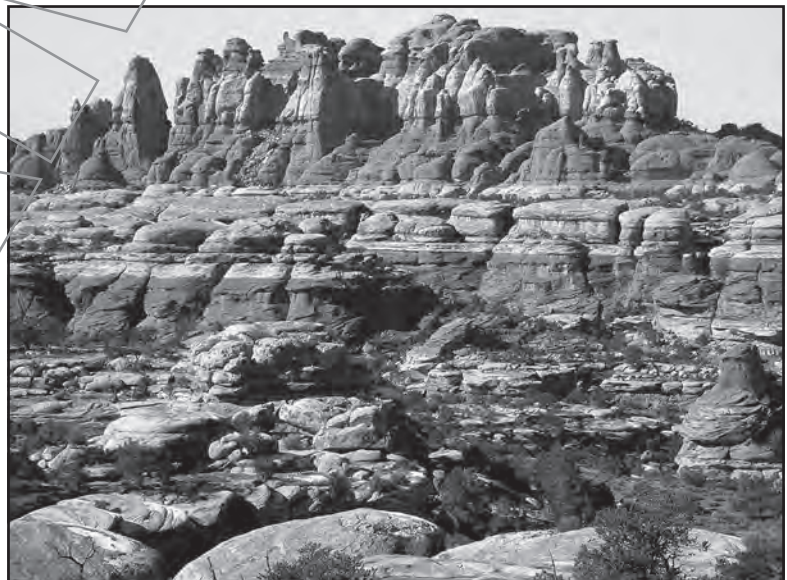
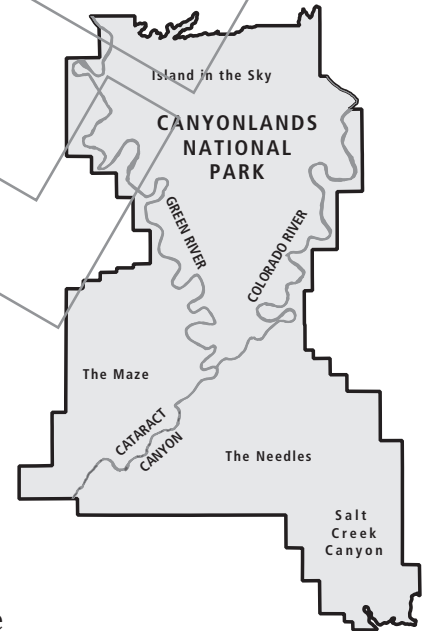
1 In the Canyonlands, the sun is the unquestioned king, and I his humble subject. Other people might choose to experience nature in dark woods, on the slopes of snowy mountains, or beside gurgling streams. I prefer the harsh majesty of the desert. Here the tallest plants are mesquite bushes, and the streams, where you can find them, don't gurgle—they roar.

2 I discovered Canyonlands National Park on a college vacation. My buddies and I made the trek to the Grand Canyon in an ill-tempered Volkswagen bus. The canyon was breathtaking, but the crowds were smothering. I decided then that a trail as noisy and congested as a shopping mall was not what you could call "nature." But the map showed another national park upstream in Utah, and that was where we headed next.

3 In the Canyonlands was where I first heard silence. It was late afternoon. As I gazed at those spires and arches shaped by wind and flood, I saw a hundred shades of red. It was so still that I could hear the rustle of a whiptail lizard and the beating wings of a horned lark. The rattlesnakes seemed as sleepy and content as house cats. There was not another human being in sight, and this was at The Needles, the most popular part of the park. To speak amid such splendor, even to whisper, would have been like shouting in church.

4 You can access most regions of the park with an all-wheel drive vehicle on dirt roads. But it's better to experience it by hiking trail, or by running Cataract Canyon on a raft. If you have the equipment and experience, the park's finest adventures are to be found on the off-trail routes. There are more of these than you can explore in a lifetime. Take it from someone who's tried.

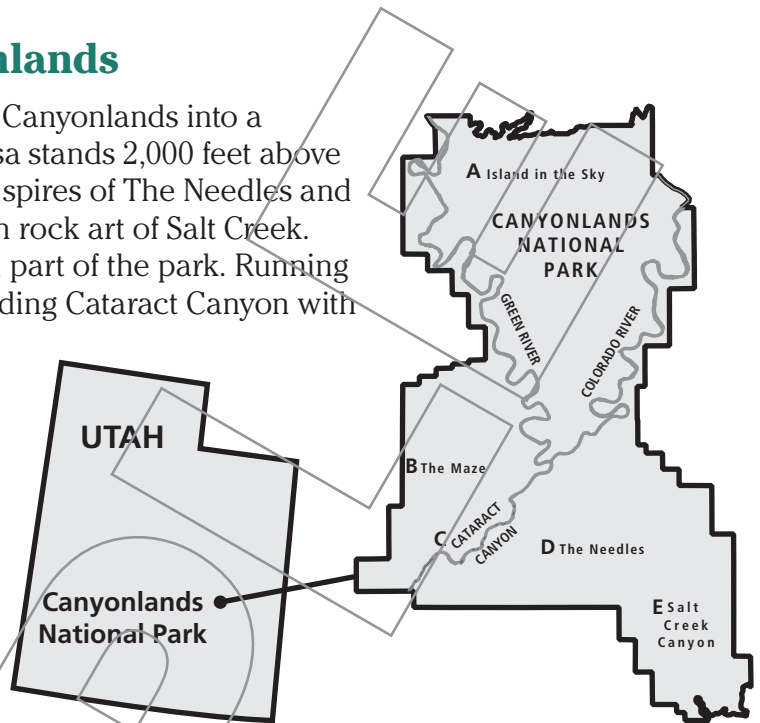
spires
tall, slender objects
that taper to a point,
like a church steeple



Passage 2

from **Visiting Canyonlands**

1 The Colorado and Green Rivers divide the Canyonlands into a gigantic Y. In the middle, Island in the Sky Mesa stands 2,000 feet above the rivers. East of the Colorado stand the rock spires of The Needles and the arches, ruins, and prehistoric Native Indian rock art of Salt Creek. West of the rivers is The Maze, the least-visited part of the park. Running between them are the rivers themselves, including Cataract Canyon with its 24 rapids.



- 1 In passage 1, which of these sentences is best illustrated by the photograph?
- A In the Canyonlands, the sun is the unquestioned king, and I his humble subject.
 - B As I gazed at those spires and arches shaped by wind and flood, I saw a hundred shades of red.
 - C Here the tallest plants are mesquite bushes, and the streams, where you can find them, don't gurgle—they roar.
 - D If you have the equipment and experience, the park's finest adventures are to be found on the off-trail routes.

2 How does the photograph help you understand the feelings the author expresses about Canyonlands National Park?

3 What is the purpose of the two maps included with passage 2?

4 Which area shown on the map of the park do you think the author of passage 1 likes best to visit? Explain why.

5 What other visual or multimedia element would help you better understand these passages?
