How to do a Visual Rhetorical Analysis

Visual rhetorical analysis focuses on how we are influenced by the visual cues we see every day. Sometimes these are purely visual; often they combine text with image. Together, they can create powerful messages that have an impact on us and how we see the world.

1. Arguably most importantly, note your immediate *emotional or intellectual response* to the text. Everything you do after this is based on trying to analyze why you had that reaction.
2. Note *everything you see* no matter how insignificant it seems to you.
   - What images are present?
   - How much text is there? What does the text say?
3. Analyze the *composition/compositional elements* to see how they're arranged to create a response. (Refer to the PowerPoint on Molly Bang's *Picture This* to remind yourself about the principles of composition she lays out.) Compositional elements found in visual texts include:
   - Color
   - Contrast
   - Size
   - Shape(s)
   - Spatial arrangement
   - Symmetry
   - Text: font and size, placement
4. If we're looking at **moving images (video, film)**, we need to ask other questions. Here's a link to a site that really gets into what we call the grammar of film. But these are some main points to consider:
   - Camera range: Close up means the character or element is important. Medium shot shows interactions and body language. Long shot focuses on context, surroundings, and relationship of character to location.
   - Camera angle: High angle makes subject appear vulnerable, heightens intensity. Los angle makes subject or setting more imposing or powerful. Canted angle creates disorientation.
   - Point of View: where the viewer is in relation to the subject.
   - Lighting: Backlighting where light is behind subject creates otherworldly effect. Low-key lighting produces lots of shadows, creates mystery. High-key lighting creates clarity, optimism.
   - Editing: Fast cuts create urgency or frenzy or communicates information quickly. Long takes don't use cuts, force concentration. Dissolve, wipe, fade: ways of moving from one shot/scene to the next.
5. Ask the same questions of this visual text that you do of a purely text-based one:
   - What is the *context* of this message? Does it refer to anything historical? Another text somewhere? Ideas that are floating around in the culture/society?
   - Who is the intended *audience*? How can you tell?
   - Who is the *author/creator* of the visual text, or who can we assume is the author and how can we make that assumption?
   - What is the *purpose* of the text? What does the author want us to do with the text and its message?
   - What is the *tone*? How has the author used *pathos* (emotional appeal)*, logos* (intellectual appeal) and/or *ethos* (use of an authority figure) to help create that tone?

- Finally, how do the text and the image(s) work together? What was it about the way they're put together that made you respond emotionally and/or intellectually the way you did? How do you feel about the message the text is trying to convey now that you understand how it was created?