

ABOUT THE CREATORS/AUTHORS

- Who created this visual text?
- What can you find out about this person(s), and what other work they have done?
- What does the creator's attitude seem to be toward the visual image?
- What do the creators intend its effects to be?

ABOUT THE MEDIUM

- Which media are used for this visual text? Images only? Words and images? Sound, video, graphs, charts?
- What effect does the choice of medium have on the message of the visual text? How would the message be altered if different media were used?
- What is the role of words that may accompany the visual text? How do they clarify or reinforce (or blur or contradict) the message?

ABOUT VIEWERS/READERS

- What does the visual text assume about its viewers—and about what they know and agree with?
- What overall impression does the visual text create in you?
- Does the visual evoke positive—or negative—feelings about individuals, scenes, or ideas?

ABOUT CONTENT AND PURPOSE

- What argumentative purpose does the visual text convey? What is it designed to convey?
- What cultural values or ideals does the visual evoke or suggest? The good life? Love and harmony? Sex appeal? Youth? Adventure? Economic power or dominance? Freedom? Does the visual reinforce these values or question them? What does the visual do to strengthen the argument?
- What emotions does the visual evoke? Which ones do you think it intends to evoke? Desire? Envy? Empathy? Shame or guilt? Pride? Nostalgia? Something else?

ABOUT DESIGN

- How is the visual text composed? What is your eye drawn to first? Why?
- What is in the foreground? In the background? What is in or out of focus? What is moving? What is placed high, and what is placed low?

What is to the left, in the center, and to the right? What effect do these placements have on the message?

- Is any particular information (such as a name, face, or scene) highlighted or stressed in some way to attract your attention?
- How are light and color used? What effect(s) are they intended to have on you? What about video? Sound?
- What details are included or emphasized? What details are omitted or deemphasized? To what effect? Is anything downplayed, ambiguous, confusing, distracting, or obviously omitted? To what ends?
- What, if anything, is surprising about the design of the visual text? What do you think is the purpose of that surprise?
- Is anything in the visual repeated, intensified, or exaggerated? Is anything presented as “supernormal” or idealistic? What effects are intended by these strategies, and what effects do they have on you as a viewer? How do they clarify or reinforce (or blur or contradict) the message?
- How are you directed to move within the argument? Are you encouraged to read further? Click on a link? Scroll down? Fill out a form? Provide your email address? Place an order?

Take a look at the home page of United Colors of Benetton, a company that sells sportswear, handbags, shoes, and more. You might expect a company that sells eighty million items of clothing and accessories annually to feature garments on its home page or to make a pitch to sell you something. And you would find many of those items if you probed the Benetton site more deeply. But on the company's main page (see Figure 15.9) you see the torso of a man, his right arm ending not in a hand but in a prosthetic device attached to a spoon and what looks like a makeshift knife. To the left of this arresting image is the simple heading Food for Life. Clicking on that area takes you to a second page that announces “Food for Life: United Colors of Benetton and World Food Programme Communication Campaign 2003.” This campaign is presented on the World Food Programme's Web site, as well (see Figure 15.10). Taken together, these pages make a powerful argument that we should all be concerned about world hunger—and take action to address it.

Even this brief investigation of the Benetton site reveals that this manufacturer of clothing and accessories promotes its wares through an involvement in social activism. So its images challenge viewers to join in—or at least to consider doing so. What effect do these pages have on you?