

READING THE PICTURE

Look closely at this picture by Patrick Nagatani and Andrée Tracy. What do you think it means? On the next page there's a guide to help unlock its clues.



Patrick Nagatani and Andrée Tracy, *Radioactive Reds*, 1986. Dye diffusion transfer print (Polaroid), 26 1/4 x 21 in. Collection of the New Mexico Museum of Art. Gift of Ray Graham III and Patrick Nagatani, 1990 (1990.51.1) Photo by Cameron Gay © Patrick Nagatani Estate.

HOW TO READ THE PICTURE

Characters. The characters in this story are two women, a child, and a man (Patrick Nagatani himself!). What do their gestures or expressions tell us about what is happening around them?

Action. Is this a peaceful picnic scene? Probably not, as the food and one woman's braid appear to be moving. How does the artist accomplish that in a still photograph? How does that help tell a story?

Light. All the figures in the picture have light on their faces and all are looking outside the picture, which suggests they are looking at something very bright. What do you think they see?

Color. Colors can have different symbolic meanings depending on culture. Red is the dominant color in this picture and it's in the title. In Western culture, red often stands for danger or heat. In China and Japan, red is often considered the color of good luck. Which things in the picture are red? Does that help you decide which interpretation the artist intended?

What's in the picture? There's a lot going on in this picture! Sometimes it helps to look carefully and identify each element of the composition. Start with the front and work your way to the background. Notice things from different countries, the United States and Japan. What clues do you see to help make sense of the picture?

Title. Sometimes the title of a work of art is simply descriptive, naming the subject of place being shown. Other times it's a clue to the meaning of the picture. What do you think the artist is telling us with the title *Radioactive Reds*?

Context. Sometimes it helps to compare our interpretations of a picture against other work by the artist or about what we know about the artist's life. What other photographs in the show help clarify your thinking about what this picture may mean?

Nonlinear storytelling. Linear storytelling goes in a straight line, with a beginning, middle, and end. Nonlinear storytelling leaves room for different interpretations and can't always be resolved. What are the advantages of these approaches? Why do you think the artist chose to tell the story the way he did?

WRITE A HAIKU

Haiku is a centuries-old Japanese verse form most often composed, in English versions, of three unrhymed lines of five, seven, and five syllables.

Here's an example of a haiku, written by a poetry student:

*The last winter leaves
Clinging to the black branches
Explode into birds.*

Like a photograph, a haiku can evoke an image, or a pair of images, meant to depict the essence of a specific moment in time.

Find a photograph by Patrick Nagatani that interests you and write a haiku in the space below. To see photographs by Nagatani, go to the **Invented Realities section of our Searchable Art Museum and choose a photograph.**

WRITE A COLOR POEM

Patrick Nagatani used color in his photographs to show how he felt about different things. Sometimes he used color to show that he was thinking about healing or to show that he thought something was wrong or scary.

Choose a color that Nagatani used in one of his photographs and make a color poem for it using each of your five senses to describe it. To see photographs by Nagatani, go to the **Invented Realities** section of our Searchable Art Museum and choose a photograph.

_____ *tastes like* _____

_____ *sounds like* _____

_____ *looks like* _____

_____ *smells like* _____

_____ *feels like* _____

Try again with a different color, or use two colors mixed together.

_____ *tastes like* _____

_____ *sounds like* _____

_____ *looks like* _____

_____ *smells like* _____

_____ *feels like* _____

Patrick Nagatani used color to say many different things about the world he saw around him.

Choose a color and describe it with a color poem.

What are three things that are your color?

What would your color say?

What three things does your color sound like?

What three feelings does your color have?

What can your color do? _____
