Saul Bellow, “Graven Images,” p. 534

Tags: essay, writing to narrate, writing to describe, writing to inform, writing to analyze, writing to argue

Saul Bellow’s essay “Graven Images” can be read as a commentary about the power of photography. Bellow wrote “Graven Images” when he was 82-years old and had been photographed countless times throughout his life. The essay speculates as to the ways in which photographs represent an individual and whether that representation projects a different view of a person than the person has of himself. Ultimately, Bellow’s essay asks about how we see photographs and how we make assumptions about what they mean. He grounds his commentary—what we can label as a kind of writing to argue—in his experiences as regularly photographed celebrity. In this way, Bellow uses his narrative to serve his commentary. This essay works well to show students how synthesizing different rhetorical purposes—like writing to narrate, writing to describe, and writing to argue—can help enhance the primary rhetorical purpose of a document. When discussing “Graven Images” with students, remind them that Bellow wrote the essay before digital cameras and photo-sharing sites were a ubiquitous part of daily life.


Tags: essay, writing to narrate, writing to describe, writing to inform, writing to analyze, writing to evaluate

Tom Junod’s “Richard Drew, The Falling Man” is an in-depth consideration of the iconic photograph by Richard Drew known simply as “The Falling Man.” Drew took the photo during the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center buildings in New York City. The 9/11 attacks are often referred to as the most photographed and videotaped event in history. Junod’s essay is ultimately not just about the “Falling Man” photo specifically, but is also about the role of images in contemporary culture. In many ways, “Richard Drew, The Falling Man” is about more than the 9/11 attacks, about more than Richard Drew and his photograph, and about more than the man in the picture. The essay is really about what culture says we should and shouldn’t see and what we should and shouldn’t have images of. This is a powerful, and often emotional, essay. It asks difficult questions, but they are questions students will likely be invested in. Consider talking with students about the timing of the essay and why Junod couldn’t publish this essay until ten years after the photograph was taken. Consider teaching this essay in conjunction with Michelle Goldberg’s “Debate Grows over Use of Sexual Assault Photo” which follows Junod’s in the chapter.
Michelle Goldberg’s essay “Debate Grows over Use of Sexual Assault Photo” was first published in 2002 in Women’s eNews, a nonprofit news service that covers “issues of particular concern to women and providing women's perspectives on public policy.” The essay describes the situation surrounding a photograph taken of a sexual assault during Seattle’s 2001 Mardi Gras celebration. Editors at the Seattle Post-Intelligencer newspaper opted not to publish photographer Mike Urban’s photograph because of what it depicted. That same year, however, the unpublished photograph was named Best Photograph in Domestic News by the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA). The NPPA then published the photograph on their Web page and on a CD-ROM to be included in a book. Goldberg’s article asks as to the ethics of what kinds of photographs should and shouldn’t be published and the ethics of media representation. The essay asks some difficult questions about the ethics of publication and images which should provoke good class discussions. Because the piece was initially written as a news article, students should examine how the piece succeeds as writing to describe and writing to inform. However, you may want to encourage students to consider in what ways does this informative news article also verge into writing to argue as part of its rhetorical purpose.

Frederic Brenner’s photograph “Citizens Protesting Anti-Semitic Acts, Billings Montana” was originally published in the Billings Gazette in Billings Montana in response to a local act of anti-Semitism. Along with the photograph, the newspaper printed this caption: “On December 2, 1993, someone twisted by hate threw a brick through the window of the home of one of our neighbors: a Jewish family who chose to celebrate the holiday season by displaying a symbol of faith—a menorah—for all to see. Today, members of religious faiths throughout Billings are joining together to ask residents to display the menorah as a symbol of something else: our determination to live together in harmony, and our dedication to the principle of religious liberty embodied in the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America. We urge all citizens to share in this message by displaying this menorah on a door or a window from now until Christmas. Let all the World know that the national hatred of a few cannot destroy what all of us in Billings, and in America, have worked together so long to build.” The photo depicts the broken window with local religious and civic leaders standing outside holding menorahs as symbols of their community’s commitment to religious freedom. The Billings Gazette estimated that by the end of the week when the photo was published between six and ten thousand families decorated their homes with menorahs. The photograph is
included in this chapter to encourage students to think about the rhetorical power of images and to consider how images function in our culture as descriptive, informative, analytical, argumentative, responsive, narrative, and evaluative.