

Key Images

Companion Text: I Lost My Sock, by Lin Jakary & Ryan Olson

Subject Area & Grade Level: Social Studies, 5th Grade

Materials: Access to the internet, or historical library resources such as books and magazines

Objectives

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe what makes something a key image
- Identify key images associated with specific locales
- Differentiate between key images and stereotypes

Introduction

Read the story once through without stopping. Then, explain that this book is a good introduction to the idea of “key images,” which are specific images that invoke a clear understanding of a certain place for most people. Some images are actual monuments or historical buildings, but others are simply items associated with a particular place so often that people recognize them as geographically linked. Review pages 15 (The Cays), 21 (a suburban neighborhood), 25 (an all-night diner), 27 (China), 29 (Rome), and 35 (London), and have students point out the key images used to invoke specific geographical locations. Explain any unfamiliar key images such as Big Ben, a toga, or a palm tree.

Procedure

Have each student choose a location anywhere in the world (but not those already discussed above), and use the internet or library resources to research its key images. Locations can be specific, such as Paris, or general, such as a shopping mall. Each student should make a list of eight key images of their location, and rank them from most obscure to most obvious. Then, one by one, have each student share his or her list of key images in order and see if the class can guess the associated location. Discuss how some key images give away the location easily, such as the Eiffel Tower references Paris, whereas others are only informative when linked with other images, such as a central information kiosk, which is often in a shopping mall, but may be found other places as well.

Discussion

Once everyone has had a chance to introduce their location, ask students if any of the key images presented by students were stereotypes. Explain that while some stereotypes, or commonly-held beliefs about a group of people, are true, others are simply ideas used to foster discrimination, and are therefore inappropriate. If an image implies a negative judgment of a person or group of people, is oversimplified or exaggerated, or is used to poke fun at unchangeable attributes of someone, it should be avoided. If necessary, give an example to illustrate this point.

