Semiotics in Education

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Semiotics in Education

by

Charles Duncan Arney
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Approved by:

[Signatures and Dates]
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Historiography of Semiotics

JULIET¹: What's in a name? that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet...

The subject of semiotics has had a long and sporadic history that began with the ancient Greek philosopher Hippocrates (ca. 460-370 BC). His understanding of semiotics is defined and put into context along with other Greek philosophers. We go on to examine the opposing Epicurean view of semiotics. The subject fell into obscurity until the Roman period where it was again taken up by philosophers and poets. St. Augustine (ca. 354-430 AD) took up the subject, re-defining semiotics again. His philosophy and context are explained in more detail. After the fall of the Roman Empire in Europe and with the dawn of the Islamic Empire, much of the previous knowledge was lost to obscurity, including works on semiotics. Many works were translated during the height of the Islamic Empire (ca 1000 – 1400 AD) but were not rediscovered until after the Reconquista (ca. 700-1492). Even then, the study of semiotics was largely ignored by the West. During the Enlightenment period philosophers began the study anew. The renewed interest spawned two new schools of thought; the Port-Royal school and the British school. Again, the field faded into obscurity until the mid-19th century. Two philosophers, Charles Sanders Peirce and Ferdinand De Saussure independently re-defined the structure of semiotics. They are both considered the “fathers” of modern semiotics, yet even their works teetered on the brink of oblivion. Their works were not published until the early and mid-twentieth century. From then on, many philosophers, linguists and anthropologists took up the subject with gusto. An explosion of subfields spurred more and varied interest in semiotics.

Next, we take a turn from the wide history of semiotics to focus on its relationship with education. This includes James Gardner's explanation of “multiple intelligences” and the trend of visual literacy in education. Finally, we include some articles that address the uses of semiotics in the modern classroom. Though the study of semiotics has had a long and sporadic history, it has many modern applications. Today we define semiotics as the relationship between signs, signals, and signifiers, or simply the relationship between a thing and another thing.

**Ancient Semiotics**

Semiotics began far back in history with the Greek philosophers Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Quintilian between ca. 460 BC and 100 AD. These early philosophers focused on natural signs which did not include human communication. They belong to the Stoic school of philosophy that had a dyadic model of signs. This meant that a sign had a specific meaning, like smoke meant fire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sign</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smoke</td>
<td>Fire</td>
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</table>

Hippocrates concerned himself with the signs of sickness in his patients. He compared the look of his patient when they were healthy to the way the patient looked while sick. He determined that the greater difference between the two meant the closer his patient was to death. He clearly linked the sign(s) of sickness with the meaning of death. It can be expressed; if A

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2Natural signs are signs that are unintentional but predictable indicators of some condition or state, or event. Umberto Eco. *A theory of semiotics*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976.) 16.

then B is true. This dyad model referred only to the sign and its meaning. Using this method Hippocrates wrote the first instructions for visual diagnosis.

Aristotle expanded Hippocrates’ definition only slightly. Aristotle agreed that a sign had a meaning, but he added that the two were not directly proportional⁴. He explained that even if a person looked very sick, he might not necessarily be that close to death. Also a person might look fine but be very close to death. Aristotle’s ideas can be expressed; if A then B +/- is possible.

Quintilian again took the dyad⁵ view of signs. He indicated that signs had a meaning but used them as predictors of an event or condition. This deviated from Aristotle and Hippocrates who used signs to indicate a present event in a person. The difference was a perspective on time. Quintilian’s ideas can be expressed as; if A then B +/- may happen. All of these expressions of signs and meanings were focused on natural signs.

The early Stoics (300 BC-529 AD) defined semiotics as a sign is a physical object while the meaning of said sign was a non-physical object or concept. Therefore a physical object was linked to a non-corporeal object. They then classified two different subjects of signs; commemorative signs and indicative signs. Commemorative signs referred to things that happened in the past. For example a black eye means that I was in a fight. Indicative signs were signs that implied things that were about to happen or are in a state of happening. For example my sore throat means that I am about to get sick. For many years this was the only definition of semiotics.

⁵Dyad means that there is a pair or factor of two. In this case, dyad is sign and meaning.
The Epicurean school developed its own definition of semiotics. Some of the notable Epicureans were the philosopher Democritus (ca 470-370 BC) and the Roman poets Horace and Lucretius (ca 99-55 BC). The Epicureans expanded semiotics to include language. They also denied that there were any other meanings in communication other than that which was intended. They instead suggested that objects made impressions on the soul resulting in human sensations of the object. Epicureans suggest that language began with naturalistic and signs of utility rather than intellectual convention.

The Epicurean view of semiotics dominated the topic for centuries. The Roman Empire threw some areas into disarray but unified much of the Mediterranean and European world. Little philosophy on semiotics came from the Roman Empire until St Augustine (ca. 354-430 AD).

St. Augustine explained semiotics contained two different types of signs; conventional signs and natural signs. Conventional signs were signs that humans arbitrarily chose and agreed on their meaning. Writing in English uses conventional signs. The arbitrary nature of the signs means that the signs will be different from culture to culture, but the meaning of the concept is the same. Natural signs were not deliberately used to communicate information but were naturally linked to a specific meaning. This meant that smoke as a sign naturally occurred to indicate fire. No social convention was necessary to make this connection.

The Western world was thrown into disarray after the fall of the Roman Empire. The decline of major cities and scholarship meant that semiotics as a field of contemplation had to

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pause. Europe experienced a dark age of intellectual stagnation. The rise of the Islamic Empire brought much Greek scholarship to Spain. These translations from early Greek philosophers were not wide spread until after the Reconquista (700-1492). In spite of the wide spread religious iconography of Islam and Christianity, there were few who took up the philosophy of semiotics. Most of the theories that emerged from this time were independently discovered or reinvented. They were not based on the previous philosophical works.

The supposition theory of semiotics came to prominence between 1200 and 1400 AD. Supposition was the sign's meaning in context. The sign held a specific meaning within the context of the situation. If removed from that context a different meaning was revealed. The Modist grammarians rose from the supposition theory.

Modist grammarians examined the structure and the origins of language. They wrote several treatises on the relationship between icons and the structure of language. Their hypothesis was that language was an iconic representation of nature. They believed that icons were dependent on nature; therefore, all language had a natural underlying universal structure. Modists described three components in semiotics: object, noise, and understanding. The object was something like the written word that represents the sounds we make for communication. The noise was a sound we make for communication that evokes a meaning that we understand. The understanding was the end goal of the communication process. The Modist grammarian quest was to discover a universally understood structure of language.

Again, the study of semiotics hid in obscurity from most of the world. The Renaissance period experienced a renewed interest in semiotics based on the re-discovered philosophical works.

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10 Winfried Noth, *Handbook of semiotics*. Bloomington (Iu.a.: Indiana Univ. Pr., 1990.) 18
works of Aristotle. They broke with the Modist grammarians to return to the Ancient Greek Stoics. Around the beginning of the 1600, William Shakespeare wrote the iconic phrase “a rose by any other name would smell as sweet” without realizing that it was one of the more brilliant works of semiotics.

John of St. Thomas (John Poinsot) represents one of the few innovative Renaissance philosophers on semiotics. He applied logic to the classifications of signs in a metaphysical way. He also introduced a causal element to the relationships of signs and meaning; if B then it was caused by A. Few other philosophers contributed significantly to the field of semiotics during this time. Again, the study fell into obscurity only to re-emerge during the Age of Enlightenment (1650-1800) with Rationalism.

The Enlightenment began with a renewed interest in the nature of signs. Many of the Medieval and Renaissance works on semiotics had fallen into oblivion so that the Enlightenment philosophies appeared entirely new. Two movements generally characterized this time. The British movement emphasized the human intellect in association with sign, focusing on knowledge, sense, and object. The Port-Royal school studied the rational universal grammar, which led to the universal language project.

The British school of Empiricism was focused on experimental practices with a model of induction, rather than deduction, as their philosophical approach. This experimental approach

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was based on the discovery of natural science as their foundation. John Locke and George Berkley were two key contributors to the British Empiricism School.

Locke defined two types of ways to gain knowledge; ideas and spoken words. Ideas came from external senses or from internal reflection and were themselves signs in our own mind. Spoken words, on the other hand, were representations that could only be fully understood by the person that used them. They were also markers to other men conceding a sort of convention for the sake of communication. He largely ignored the classical theories of signs as that included images and writing.

George Berkley's view of semiotics was characterized by nominalism and existence based in theology. His theory abandoned any connection between objects and cognition. He went on to reject any assumption of a referent as meaningless. He also discarded the idea of generalism by stating that all experiences were individual, not abstract or general. The foundations of all signs, according to Berkley, were the manifestations, or tokens, of God. This view of signs was reminiscent of the Doctrine of Signatures.

The Port-Royal school studied universal grammar using a semiotic dyad. The dyad was defined as the sign and the conceptual meaning. Here the sign is not an object but an idea.

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20 Nominalism is the belief that there are no universal or abstract objects. Each situation, object, or sign is an individual with individual and specific meaning. For example there is no such thing as chair-ness there is only a specific chair.


22 Generalism here means that here are underlying structures and signs that are common to all language. For example, there is something called chair-ness that all chairs need to have in order to be a chair. This is diametrically opposed to Nominalism.

23 The doctrine of signatures was a practice used by herbalists going back to the first century AD. The Doctrine states that a plant has a sign that looks like an object, part of the body that the herb is useful to.


25 Dyad is a grouping of two, pair
There are also four types of signs to the Port-Royal school; 1) conventional sign such as words of language, 2) motivated symbols such as icons of Christianity, 3) indexical natural signs such as medical symptoms, and 4) natural icons such as a reflection in water. The Port-Royal school argued that language was subject to universal laws of the human mind, not influenced by other language structures.

During the 18th century much of the discussion of semiotics concerned itself with signs and ideas in reference to natural or conventional distinctions. During this time, the philosophical interest in semiotics reached its height in France around the nature of signs. A group of scholars coalesced around the “study of the origin of ideas” giving rise to the school of thought known as The Ideologues. The Ideologues added a new dimension to the study of signs. They argued the sensations were not signs unless connected to a specific function. The sign becomes a sign based on the association of that sign with something other than itself. This view finally included the person observing and interpreting the sign into the definition of sign. At the same time some philosophers applied semiotics to aesthetics, art, music, animals, and other subjects not previously included in the discussion of semiotics.

Also during the eighteenth century, many French and German philosophers wrote about the origins of ideas. They questioned whether ideas were generated through specifically experienced senses or whether ideas were generated by divine influence. The German perspective that grew from this tradition during the Enlightenment became known as the Semiotic Aesthetics. These philosophers wrote about iconography of the arts and the appreciation of art for art’s sake. They also reconciled the iconic images of art with the non-iconic qualities. Some philosophers examined poetry for its semiotic qualities. Some argued

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that they were no more relevant than the words they represent. Others argued that the signs in poetry connected to the soul without the necessity of discrete identification.

Again, the study of semiotics took a back seat to the politics of the time. Wars between France and England frequently broke out. Colonial wars of independence occurred throughout the New World. The French revolution split the people of France isolating it from other countries. General strife and uncertainty punctuated much of the eighteenth century. Most of the philosophers prior to the nineteenth century were considered great thinkers from many different disciplines. At this time it was possible for a person to be well regarded in many different fields. Several of the writings on semiotics prior to the nineteenth century were works by poets, playwrights, and theologians. Some of the philosophers had formal schooling but many did not. All of the previous works were just as valid as the next when regarding semiotics. Most, if not all, of the people starting in the nineteenth century had formal schooling in philosophy, linguistics or other recognized discipline.

Modern Semiotics

Modern semiotics in the nineteenth century came from two philosophers, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) and Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). Modern philosophers tend to trace their study of semiotics to either Peirce or Saussure as the fathers of semiotics. Many books begin the study of semiotics with these two philosophers with little recognition of their predecessors. Neither Saussure nor Peirce was recognized for their works until after their deaths and much of their work was only published recently. Each represent different origins of semiotics, but both had a lasting impact on the study.

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Peirce (1839-1914) was a mathematician, logician, linguist, and philosopher from America that developed semiotic theory independently of linguistics. Instead, he focused on the epistemological and metaphysical universalities of semiotics\(^{30}\). His focus on the universality of language was reminiscent of the Modist grammarians. His definition of a sign was something that represents something else\(^{31}\). His classification of signs incorporated many elements referred to previously like the Greek natural signs and the medieval conventional sign\(^{32}\). He also developed new sets of classifications based on the mode of representation\(^{33}\). There were three sets of Tracheotomies\(^{34}\) that formed the basis of his classification system\(^{35}\). His three Tricotomies were “firstness”, “secondness”, and “thirdness”. These were based on the sign itself, the relationship to an object, and the relationship to the observer respectively\(^{36}\). This formed the basis of Peircean theory of sign. His work on semiotics was not published or recognized until well after he died\(^{37}\). Most of the rest of his work remains unpublished today even though he was considered one of the greatest American philosophers\(^{38}\).

Saussure (1857-1913) was a Swiss linguist that had a profound impact on semiotics. He was considered the founder of modern linguistics and coined the term semiology\(^{39}\). He was a


\(^{34}\)Trichotomy is a grouping of three. Peirce described semiotics in terms of sets of three. Each grouping of three was called a trichotomy. His three Trichotomies form the basis for most of modern semiotics. Winfried Noth, *Handbook of semiotics*. Bloomington ([u.a.: Indiana Univ. Pr., 1990.) 44-45.


contemporary of Peirce, but his work was unknown to the United States until 1959 with the first English translation of his *Course of General Linguistics*. The term semiotics replaced the term semiology in the 1970s to mean the science of signs. According to Saussure, the sign is comprised of two parts; the signifier and the signified. These two parts are like two sides of a coin, different but inseparable. The signified referred the concept for which the sign represented, while the signifier referred to the memory of the object in the mind of the observer. This omission of the "thirdness" (relationship to the observer) identified by Peirce was explained by Saussure as outside of semiotics. Since Saussure was concerned only with the sign system, it was a static philosophy of language. His contributions to the analysis of the structure of language rather than the history of language marked a new paradigm in linguistics. Saussure was also considered the father of modern linguistics.

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) developed a phenomenological study of signs. This rejected the empiricist assumption that sensory data are the foundation of understanding. Husserl proposed that semiotics began at the intuitive level between the immediate appearance of the object and the observer. This could only be grasped by the phenomenon of the sense impression. The difference between the semiotic experience and the non-semiotic experience was a matter of cognitive difference. Husserl focused on the experience of semiotics rather than the relationship that signs had to their meaning.

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41Semiology – the study of the sign-meaning relationship
Charles William Morris (1901-1979) had great influence on the study of semiotics during the 1930s and 1940s\textsuperscript{49}. He followed in the general footsteps of Peirce with a three dimensional explanation of semiotics, but came closer to the medieval system of syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics\textsuperscript{50}. While Peirce and Saussure were concerned with the signs of man, Morris examined the signs in a biological basis. He proposed semiotics as interdisciplinary to many different fields of science\textsuperscript{51}. Morris postulated that the root of communications came from biological need rather than cognitive intent. His departure from human communication widened the science of signs to zoosemiotics\textsuperscript{52}. This development demonstrated new traditions in semiotics that encompassed a wider scope than previously assumed.

Zoosemiotics examines the language or communication of creatures other than man. This includes the language of the honeybee, primate vocalizations, bird songs, and whale songs. Many of the communications are vocal or aural but some are kinesthetic or behavioral. The language studied is always in a specific context for the full meaning of the communication to be complete. These researches that study early human language development study the biological origins and semiogenesis\textsuperscript{53}. Several other prominent thinkers followed Morris by expanding the field of semiotics.

Notable anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss (1908 – 2009) related signs and labels to kinship and familial relationships for Culture Codes. This semiotic approach examined the behavior of people based on their defined kinship or relationship structures within the culture.

\textsuperscript{50} Winfried Noth,. *Handbook of semiotics.* Bloomington ([u.a.: Indiana Univ. Pr., 1990.) 49.
\textsuperscript{53} Winfried Noth,. *Handbook of semiotics.* Bloomington ([u.a.: Indiana Univ. Pr., 1990.) 155., Semiogenisis is the study of the origins of human language through biological necessity.
As the people's kinship changes, so do their behavior patterns. These behavior changes are defined and predicted based on the signs of kinship. For example, an old person may not be regarded with respect but a grandfather may. These kinship signs were culturally defined and, like language, they were signs by convention. Levi-Strauss used structural semiotics as a tool in anthropology to make sense of the culture. This trend was adopted by other structural anthropologists to examine other aspects of human culture like music.\(^{54}\)

The traditions of musical semiotics went back to the aesthetic movements of Germany but it was well established that music has meaning. However, the "language" of music began with an interdisciplinary discussion between musicologists and linguistics by Roman Jacobson (1896-1982). Jacobson, more notably, studied the meaning in poetry but the application to music was no great leap.\(^{55}\) He examined the relation to sound and symbol as well as the multiple meanings of words, layers of senses of sound, and both context with other words and sounds.\(^{56}\) It is easy to state that songs always had meaning, just as language always had meaning, but Jacobson began the discussion of musical semiotics which peaked in the 1970s. These discussions of musical semiotics probe the limits of music, sound communication, and the boundaries between spoken language and music.\(^ {57}\)

A new field of concern to semiotics was the aspect of mass communication.\(^ {58}\) The semiotics of mass communication incorporates many relevant disparate fields. Semiotic techniques are useful in deciphering the industrial messages targeted to specific groups.\(^ {59}\) This is only relevant to cultures that adopt mass communication as a method of message making.

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includes advertising, newspapers, television, radio and even the handbills of the eighteenth century. All of these genres have common characteristics that are described through semiotic analysis. This semiotic analysis from the 1960s and 1970s blended perspectives from aesthetics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and pedagogy to understand the event of mass communication. During this time, Umberto Eco (b. 1932) studied mass communications and visual semiotics in more detail using the works of Peirce and Saussure.

Visual semiotics blurs many of the discretely identified fields mentioned previously. Visual semiotics encompasses varying degrees of formalization including highly formal written languages to ideograms with a low degree of formalization. A highly formalized written language is English while an ideogram with a low degree of formalization like cave paintings. This also includes iconic representations and cultural color systems. An iconic representation is something like a crucifix while an example of a cultural color is where red in India means purity.

Visual semiotics, in short, includes anything visual. Most of the philosophers associated with semiotics contributed to the explanation of visual semiotics. Interestingly, during the 1960s and 1970s this trend in education incorporated visual literacy into the classroom. Later we discuss the implications of visual communication in education in more detail.

Edward T. Hall (1914–2009) wrote The Silent Language that explained the relevance and importance of nonverbal communication to humans. This key work highlighted the fact that communication was not only done with words, but many different signs. He explained that the signs associated with the tone of voice, body language, gestures, and social status, communicate as much meaning as a word. He also emphasized that the degree of context of the communication was one of the more important factors. His explained that words were only one

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part of communication and not the most important factor. His study of cultural communication was seminal to the study of semiotics, linguistics, and anthropologists.

Since the early twentieth century there has been relatively little redefinition of semiotics. Many of the works presented by notable authors use Peirce or Saussure's methods and descriptions directly. Most of that work did not greatly challenge Peirce or Saussure but did expand the field to encompass a different perspective of semiotics. Morris explained sign relations of animals that led to Zoosemiotics. Notable anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss related signs and labels to kinship and familial relationships for Culture Codes. Umberto Eco studied semiotics in mass communication\(^6\) in 1959. Many early contributors helped to defined visual literacy for the 1960s. Many of the concepts of human communication and cultural relativism were exemplified in Edward T Hall's work *The Silent Language*\(^2\) in 1959. There were many more aspects to semiotics than listed here, but these are some of the most important fields for the purpose of this paper. The important point is that the modern form of semiotics referenced Peirce and Saussure for the purpose of expanding the scope of the field to include aspects not previously considered. Many of the semiotic categories were based on the senses like Visual Communication.

**Semiotics and education**

Visual Literacy\(^3\) is a term used frequently in education since 1969 but it is also reinforced by Gardner's *Multiple Intelligences*, in 1983, without any regard to semiotics\(^4\). Visual Literacy gained influence in education especially in terms of technological icons and


\(^{62}\) Edward T. Hall. *The silent language.* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959.)

\(^{63}\) [http://www.ivla.org/org what vis lit.htm](http://www.ivla.org/org what vis lit.htm)

video information. Visual literacy is a small part of what modern semiotics has become. Many of Gardner’s theories of “intelligence” could be described in terms of semiotics. There is a strong correlation between each of Gardner’s identified “intelligences” and many of the categories of semiotics; visual semiotics, musical semiotics, interpersonal semiotics, verbal semiotics, etc. Regardless of the disconnect between semiotics and education, there was an increasing trend to incorporate visual literacy into the classroom. Visual Literacy is a small part of the wider field, but has allowed at least that small part of semiotics to masquerade under the more widely used name visual literacy. The trend continued when the practice of multimodal learning entered education. Multimodal education incorporates several overlapping forms of literacy to cater to those Multiple Intelligences described by Gardner. This movement widened the opening for semiotics in education. In the early twenty-first century, researchers from many different countries tested the practice of teaching semiotics to young learners. Some of the researches taught semiotics under the name multimodal learning while others used the term semiotics.

The field of education recognized semiotics late and in the long history of semiotics, education was rarely mentioned. With the advent of multimodal learning and visual literacy, it

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is evident that the field of education can benefit from a fuller exploration of semiotics. The several different studies that follow exemplify semiotics, or visual literacy, in education. These recent studies illustrate the teaching of content through semiotics or teaching the techniques of semiotics to students. The age groups and conditions of studies vary, but all show positive strides in learning.

**Research**

Several of the studies focused on students with language deficiencies in the dominant cultural language. Some of the students were selected based on their specific cultural language difference\(^{69}\) while others subjects were selected for their special education needs\(^{70}\). This suggested that semiotic techniques were more effective as a remediation tool rather than the dominant teaching technique. The trends of semiotics in education are, teaching content through the use of semiotics, or teaching the techniques of semiotics to students to expand their critical analysis ability. Both trends demonstrated the capacity of teachers to use semiotics effectively in class and the student’s ability to learn through semiotics\(^{71}\). The following sections detail the research in each of the trends previously mentioned.

**Teaching Content through Semiotics**

Several studies demonstrated the effectiveness of teaching semiotics to students with

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limited language abilities. One study by Verhallen and Bus taught young students of Arabic
descent both receptive and expressive language through still and moving images.\textsuperscript{72} The students
increased their Dutch language abilities for integration into the Netherlands second grade school. These students were young, severely language deficient, and from low income families. The authors questioned the effectiveness of the technique for students that were not as severely language impaired. Lu used a similar technique for students in a similar age group that were not severely language impaired.

Lu used visual images that students drew and explained to increase language skills reinforced by visual literacy.\textsuperscript{73} She then asked them to write about their images and explain something about it. This technique was called the "Authoring Cycle". Natural discussion among the students also increased their vocabulary. This small group instruction, as well as self-direction, added to the effectiveness of the semiotic techniques used. The technique was so effective that the program ended early. Some people may wonder if these techniques can also apply to older students. Another study researched middle school students in an ESL class.

Ajayi researched the effectiveness of teaching students of limited English proficiency by using semiotics in print advertisements.\textsuperscript{74} The students were asked to analyze the advertisements for different elements and generate their own interpretation. They used both words and images to convey their meaning in their self-generated advertisement. The agenda was still to teach language through semiotic images, not to teach the techniques of semiotics. This method of combining written literacy and visual literacy proved to be an effective method of teaching.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} Marian J. A. J. Verhallen, and Adriana G. Bus. "Low-Income Immigrant Pupils Learning Vocabulary through Digital Picture Storybooks." \textit{Journal Of Educational Psychology} 102, no. 1 (February 1, 2010): 54-61.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Lasisi Ajayi. "English as a Second Language Learners' Exploration of Multimodal Texts in a Junior High School." \textit{Journal Of Adolescent & Adult Literacy} 52, no. 7 (April 1, 2009): 585-595.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
English in this context.

All of the studies demonstrate effective uses for teaching content through semiotics. Different grades and different cultures were involved in each of the studies further demonstrating that teaching through semiotics is a viable cross cultural technique. When teachers use semiotics to teach content they are more effective than when they do not. It is also possible to teach several students of multiple cultures and learning levels through semiotics. It was rare for teachers to teach the techniques of semiotics to students below the college grades. What follows are some studies that break the trend by explicitly teaching semiotics to young students.

**Teaching Semiotic Techniques**

Babalioutas & Papadopoulou taught sixth grade students in Greece techniques of semiotics specifically to combat rampant consumerism in the society\(^75\). This study specifically addressed mass communication semiotics of advertising. The skills were specifically designed as critical semiotic techniques to reveal the hidden emotional connection advertisers use to get people to buy their product. The students were asked to identify and dissect the advertisement so they could evaluate the product on its merits alone. Unlike the other studies, this study was specifically teaching a skill. This critical semiotic skill was then applied to advertisements outside the classroom in daily life. Some reaction to this study is based on the idea that students already know how to distinguish the semiotic clues in advertising\(^76\).

Semiotics came full circle from its origin with the study *Formal Art Observation*


Training Improves Medical Students' Visual Diagnostic Skills. This study taught medical students semiotic techniques of formal art observation. Then the students were asked to use those techniques for visual medical diagnosis. The results demonstrated that Hippocrates was on the right track. The observed natural signs were signs that are unintentional predictors of some medical condition, state, or event. The study suggested that teaching the skill of semiotics had multiple applications, from aesthetic art appreciation to medical diagnosis. However, some researchers believe that teaching semiotics to young students is not useful because they know how to analyze images from an early age.

Semiotics has had a long and sporadic history known to few and studied by less. It often teetered on the brink of oblivion and even now exists on the fringes of linguistics. Several times the most important writings on semiotics were lost only to be rediscovered many years later. It has gone by other names and in education it has taken prominence as visual literacy. The most ironic thing is that even though it is an obscure field, every person throughout history has used semiotics in some way and everyone continues to use it today to code and decode the meaning of the world and all the communications therein.


Bibliography


Semiotic of Race: Drawing the line between us and them, 1870-1880

Introduction

This is a process-oriented paper designed to test whether semiotic analysis of political cartoons can give us a more complete or accurate insight to the changing race relations of the 1870-1880s. Harpers weekly is used heavily along with a few other magazines that reflected the national racial and identity struggle of the post war years. Political cartoons had a great influence during the late 1800s for a number of reasons, not least of which was the forming of race rankings and ideologies. Political cartoons were also used in a similar way as newspaper articles, but were not necessarily bound to one culture or language as the visual content crossed language barriers. This paper uses several political cartoons from a variety of sources to track the changing view of racial and social ranking between 1868 and 1882. These cartoons both reflected and shaped national identity for years to come. Some of the questions addressed are: How is race ranking depicted in political cartoons? How did that depiction affect the inclusion/exclusion of races from American society? How did those depictions change over time? Using semiotics to decode the meanings of political cartoons, we will try to answer those questions to describe the cultural shifts of the late 1800’s.

Historical background

The time between the 1870s and 1880s was a time of extreme social, economic, and political change. There remained the business of integrating the Southern states back into the

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1 “Race” is a term that I loathe but will apply in this paper as a shorthand to ethnicity. I only use it because many of the cartoons refer to race. Race was a concept that was socially defined by observable physiological traits and persists today.

2 As a shorthand I use the dates 1870s and 1880s but the earliest sources was 1868 and the cutoff was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.
Union. Thanks to the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, a new tension tried to redefine "citizenship" with limited success. Even though the legal definition of citizenship had changed, the prerequisite to full societal participation remained white Anglo-Saxon protestant. In spite of this white prerequisite, there was also a deep distrust of England. Social distrust, exclusionism, and racism ran rampant with little contrasting definition as to what it was to be American. The default definition became, 'White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, but not them'. The magazines Puck and WASP embraced the image of a cowboy as the western representative of America while others, like Harper's Weekly, used Uncle Sam as their representation of America. The reality of American nationalism was far more complex. American nationalism was created from a combination of shared history, shared ideology and national discourse. Political cartoons were a major part of that national discourse.

This period was also referred to as "The Gilded Age" for its boom in industry, specifically in New York City, Chicago, and Boston. There was also a push for western expansion, which brought renewed tensions with Native Americans. It was a time of rampant urbanization with some cities growing tenfold between 1870 and 1900. Great migrations of newly freedmen and immigrants began to flock to northern cities. Income disparities and living experiences were vastly different between the established whites, new immigrants and arriving blacks. The income gap between the poorest and richest grew at startling rates. Integration,
segregation, voting rights, and citizenship were thrown into confusion which produced a race based hierarchical system. Some of which revealed itself through relative occupational level or occupational segregation in northern cities. The Gilded Age of industry took advantage of this system using competition and predatory wages to get the most from workers at the least expense. For the most part, the State and Federal governments backed industries over workers and worker rights were a new concept. Unions were growing in response to these practices but were often race based institutions. Immigrant national identities conflicted with the otherwise established color based race system to form new hierarchical race systems. One way of justifying the emerging racial hierarchy was Social Darwinism, especially by the ruling elite. It explained income disparities based on solidifying an ideology of classism. In this time, the US had to adjust to the new boom of economic growth, redefine citizenship, reintegrate rebellious states, and recover from a war that left hundreds of thousands dead. It is an understatement to say that it was a time of great change for America.

Procedure background

The procedures for analyzing the cartoons are based on semiotics. One of the most important term that comes up in is paper is Semiotics. Semiotics is defined as the study of signs, symbols, and signifiers as it relates to communication. For the purposes of this paper, all signs symbols and signifiers are visual representations, in one form or another, that convey meaning. The study of semiotics goes back to Hippocrates’ attempts to determine the meaning of

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sickness\textsuperscript{12}. Its long history has had fits and starts with many redefinitions. The fathers of modern semiotics were Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) and Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) whose papers were not published until long after their deaths.\textsuperscript{13} Their general definition of semiotics is summarized above. Halliday, a later semiotician, built on his predecessors by creating a 3-part system to categorize semiotic information.\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ideational}, referred to how language was used in general. In this case, it is interpreted to the describe symbols that were used as communication devices. \textit{Interpersonal} is defined as the relationship between communicators. In this context, it is interpreted to describe the objects in the drawing’s relationship to one another within the artwork. \textit{Textual} is meant to describe the situational nature of the communication in context with other events preceding and following the communication. As applied to the cartoons it means that the entire drawing had a relationship with other drawings, events, or cultural shifts surrounding the artwork. We turn to this 3-part system for the method of describing semiotics of the cartoons, their relations, and their cultural context and their role for describing racial and cultural shifts in America between 1870 and 1880.

\textbf{Methodology}

The procedures used were broken into three parts. First, the major images within the cartoon are listed. Some of the questions asked if they were specific people or representations of an ethnic group. If they were specific people then who are they, if general which ethnic group? Were they active or passive and what are they doing? What symbols indicate adherence to the ethnic group? These symbols were the \textit{ideational} component identifying them generally,

\textsuperscript{12} Hippocrates
without specific context. For example, Native Americans were often depicted with a feathered headdress.

Second, the relationships within the cartoon among the characters, objects, and actions are described. For each of the cartoons I briefly describe the interactions of the people/object in the illustration. What are they doing to each other or themselves? Are they together or separate? Are they in conflict or collusion? For example, a cowboy was in conflict with (killing) Chinese immigrants.

Third, the cartoon is placed in context with the other cartoons, time lines, and other historical events. What does this represent in a larger context of the time/place? What does this have to do with other events shaping Americans at the time? How does this relate to cartoons that came before? The goal was to demonstrate that the cartoons accurately represented the attitudes of race and ethnicity that America struggled with at the time.

Sources

Symbols and images are used in all cultures throughout the world to communicate allegiance, hierarchy, dominance, sacredness or some other message.15 Political cartoons during the 1800s were often as important as the main articles written by journalists. They were especially important to immigrant working class populations with low English literacy rates because of their visual accessibility. As William M. Tweed said, “I don't care a straw for your newspaper articles, my constituents don't know how to read, but they can't help seeing them

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damned pictures.\textsuperscript{16} This indicated that the visual semiotics were multicultural, and accessible to a wider audience. It is also important to note that during the 1870s and 1880s political cartoons were often as lengthy as newspaper articles, spanning multiple pages with complex themes. This was especially true for the \textit{Harper's Weekly} spread "Something that will not 'Blow Over'.\textsuperscript{17} Cartoons and caricatures were used to instruct as well as inform with messages of moral and social messages.\textsuperscript{18} Political cartoons were/are intended to be full of memorable, condensed, complex, and relevant imagery that conveys a message on multiple levels.\textsuperscript{19} Often the subtlety is lost to the overt communication of the major themes. The layered nature of the political cartoons meant that a person could analyze the cartoon further to discover more complex meanings.

The cartoons selected reflect racial attitudes and injustices held by many people between 1870-1880. Though the characters are portrayed in satirical and exaggerated ways, the cartoons reveal differences in culture that often are more subtle in real life. The cartoons were selected on the basis of racial comparison rather than political subject, even if the major theme of the cartoon was more social, political, or economic in nature. The cartoons, if classified today, would be considered racist, exclusionary, and offensive by most standards. During the 1870s and 1880s, the ideas of race and racial equity were new concepts. \textit{Harper's Weekly} was used heavily because of its influence in the case of William M. Tweed and the Tammany Hall corruption scandal. The cartoonist Thomas Nast created the iconic Santa Claus that has endured as the model for Santa Clauses since that time. Other sources include \textit{The Wasp} magazine, influential in the frontier territories of the mid west and \textit{Puck Magazine}, based in San Francisco, was


\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Harper's Weekly}, July 29, 1871: Thomas Nast, "Something That Will Not 'Blow Over'"


influential on the west coast. All of these magazines contained political cartoons, often two page spreads that depicted some perceived threat to the American way of life. Even in areas of the country that have low literacy rates, cartoons like these were easily interpreted for their major themes of anti-immigrant, racism, or exclusion. Arguably, *Harper's Weekly* was the most influential magazine because of its publication location in New York City. New York was one of the major immigration destinations and an important trade hub of the United States.

**Data Analysis**

Some general trends of association throughout the series of cartoons were that of extreme exclusion. The cartoons equated each race other than white, at one time or another, as similar to primates. Primates were the default icon to indicate that a race was savage, uncivilized, or otherwise "not us". Over time, each of the races excluded were dealt with legally and culturally in vastly different ways. During the 1870s and 1880s, the major races that were in the public consciousness were Irish, Chinese, African American, and Native American. Each race took a different path to citizenship, exclusion, and race ranking within American society. Taken together, the cartoons depict that path, but give very little clue as to why that was the path. It was only in the context of the major events surrounding the cartoons at the time that we gain some insight as to the individual relations each race developed to the United States.

The major judgment for each of the images was the depiction of a white male. For *Puck* and *WASP*, the image of America was an image of a cowboy. *Harper's Weekly* used the image of Uncle Sam or a bearded, middle-aged, white, man. Usually the white men were holding their head up as if to express pride or resolution. They were often in positions of confrontation or aggression with people of other races. Lady Liberty was an iconic image of the Romanesque
woman, usually with wings and laurels, wearing a striped and stared gown. Her image was used to indicate the frailty or maternity of America. She was also used divisively as a frail protector of American people or the victim of immigrant chaos. In most of the cartoons surveyed, the default icon of America was male.

The cartoons contained a racial comparison of some sort with stereotypes depicted with reinforcing associations. Each set of stereotypical semiotic icons added to, and reinforced, the caricature of the racial group. These stereotypes were used as points of comparison and contrast among the non-white races. Through these comparisons, a system of racial ranking emerged with some races ranking higher than others and some left intentionally and legally excluded from society. According to the public discourse and social consciousness, the top of the ranking, was the white male Anglo-Saxon protestant.

The Irish man was often associated with more than one of the following; shamrock, clay pipe, stovepipe hat, shillelagh, whiskey, harp, pistol, and tailcoat. He was also depicted with a stereotypically animalistic face with a heavy jaw, always frowning or angry. The Irish was seen as a threat to society with their ‘Catholic invasion’ and persistent requests for Catholic schools. The perception was that they were drunkards, violent, animalistic, savages, that revered the Pope as the highest authority, not the government. They were used as cheap immigrant labor for the Erie Canal in the early 19th century and later settled in large groups in Boston and New York City. In spite of this rather violent savage stereotype that had been equated to the blacks of the south, the Irish became an acceptable race compared to the others. Even though they organized on Catholic lines and banded together as a distinctly Irish community, they were eventually
accepted as American. The cartoons often depicted the stereotypical ‘fighting Irish’ that persists as an icon today in the logos of Notre Dame and Boston Celtics.

The African American was depicted with one of more of the following; bare feet, patched or worn trousers, associated with cotton. Most strikingly, the African American man was the darkest colored and therefore the most noticeably different. He had a grin or neutral expression in most of the pictures. The African Americans as newly freed slaves were in a peculiar position in American society. They became lower than the Irish socially in spite of having lived in America longer. They were depicted as lazy, and even well dressed they did not fit into society because of the color of their skin. In the picture, “Holy Horror of Mrs. McCaffraty,” the African American woman was pictured with all of the upper class trappings, and seemed to rank higher than the meager trappings of the Irish woman. The comment that, “Mr. McCaffraty voted against Negro Suffrage” ranks Mrs. McCaffraty, by legal status, above the well dressed African American woman. Legally, African Americans were ranked the same as everyone else, but the reality of society ranked them below the Irish. The 13th 14th and 15th amendment should have guaranteed the rights of all people born in America citizenship and constitutional rights but this was not the reality.

The Chinese man was always depicted with more than one of the following; queue, baggy tunic, wide straw hat, sandals, fan and firecrackers. He was also depicted with an exaggeratedly pointed eyes and face. In 1869 the cartoon, “The Last Addition to the Family” the Chinese baby had typically accentuated, apelike features. This cartoon seemed to accept the Chinese as a new addition but it is important to note that the cartoon was originally very small.

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Though the Chinese were used, like the Irish, as cheap labor on large scale projects like the Transcontinental Railroad, they were less desirable to have in society. They looked very different than the Irish and had very different cultural ways. Even African Americans knew their place. Many saw the Chinese as a threat to the job security of “real Americans.” The cartoon “The Martyrdom of St Crispin,” illustrated the threat to the American work force and the American working man. This is in spite of the fact that Chinese labor was more desirable for business than Irish labor. The Chinese drank tea where the Irish typically drank whiskey, making the handling of explosive especially dangerous when blasting for the Transcontinental Railroad. In one cartoon, “Difficult Problems Solving Themselves,” the problems were freedmen and Chinese. The implication of the solution was to have them migrate away from the major population centers to the center of the country. The Chinese would go east and the African Americans would go west. In this race comparison, both were seen as equally problematic races. Almost a decade of anti-Chinese cartoons and propaganda came out before the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was signed into law.

The Native American was depicted with one or more of the following; feathered head dress, tomahawk, gun, bow and arrows, peace pipe, moccasins, fringed leather clothes or few clothes. He had a darker tone than the Chinese, Irish or White man but lighter than the African American. His features were frowning or bewilderment and often passive in the face of a greater strength. The Native Americans were depicted as having things done to them, not as independent actors. In most of the cartoons selected, the Native Americans were having their culture changed or beaten out of them by a white man. In the 1869 cartoon, “A School for Savages,” the white man, General Sheridan, was beating a Native American boy. The Native American boy pleaded for talks but Sheridan wanted to beat the boy and then talk. All of the
passive teaching tools in the classroom were to indoctrinate the student into being more Christian and adhere to the white ways. In the 1870 cartoon “Robinson Crusoe Making a Man of his Friday,” the Native American is being dressed in white American clothes and the caption indicated that the “Indian Territories” should become states of the US. The implication of this is that the Native Americans need to give up their culture and become more like Whites. The Native Americans and the government have had a unique relationship based on mutual distrust and hostility. It is clear from the cartoons that Native Americans can only be accepted in the society if they give up their culture. This makes them ranked as low as the Chinese, possibly lower. Though they were technically made citizens by the reconstruction amendments, socially they would need to live like whites and remove themselves from their traditional culture. Considering the Indian Wars west of the Mississippi that coincided with western expansion, it was unlikely that Native Americans were seen as human at all.

Conclusion

Semiotic analysis of historical cartoons are a good window into the culture of the time. With the semiotic analysis of the cartoons in the appendix, it is easy to see the shifts in social order, racial hierarchy and socio-economic dominance. America today sees itself as a melting pot or a place of cultural fusion when the reality is that White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture has always been dominant. Other races and cultures may be accepted, but only if they are willing to give up their culture, or at least modify their ways, in order to fit in. Using semiotics to analyze the messages of the cartoons we get an iconic view of the real situations that immigrants have faced and the consequences of those situations. Semiotic and iconic messages are accessible to students of varied backgrounds and ability levels to convey messages because they are not based purely on language. People of all cultures, creeds, and religions can recognize
the universal messages of emotions, aggression towards other people. Friendliness, indifference, and all the other messages that can be sent by facial expression, proximity, body language, the size variance of one actor to another, creates a visual context. This knowledge is hard wired into our brains and, if used properly, can help every human understand historical themes and how very much alike we all are, despite our outward differences.
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Semiotics for Teachers

Introduction

This project works best if divided into several phases. First, you should learn functional semiotics as it applies to teaching. Many people have written and made videos about semiotics as it applies to advertising, sales, subliminal messaging, and culture. This thesis will reference those but will not try to replicate their work because it is sufficient as it stands. Instead, this will focus on how these same techniques can be applied to the classroom and teaching. I describe this as the functional side of semiotics because it is less about the history and theory of semiotics and more about the application of semiotics in the real world.

This “Semiotics” hereafter is defined as, any sign, symbol, or signifier that communicates meaning. More simply put, “this is the relationship between a thing and another thing”. This definition is intended to be broad but the subject in question will narrow the focus. For example, if we are teaching Social Studies then the semiotic information may be primarily political cartoons, maps, or text. On the other hand, if we are teaching Biology then some of the semiotic information may be tactile, animal body language, or coloration. The limitations are what we as teachers put onto the subject matter. If we can teach students the art of reading semiotic information, then it is a tool our students can use to unlock more of the world.

I refrain from picking apart the differences between sign, symbol, and signifier but lump them all together for simplicity’s sake. The actual differences may be important but are overly theoretical for our purposes. For our purposes, any sign, symbol, or signifier is a “this is the relationship between a thing and another thing” (see figure 1).
The second part of this section applies semiotics to Social Studies. This focuses on using the Social Studies class as a case study for the effectiveness of teaching semiotics and teaching *using* semiotics. Like English, it is possible to teach the language as well as to teach *using* the language. Social Studies teachers teach not just the names and dates of history, but also anthropology, sociology, economics, government, and psychology. All of these subjects can be enhanced with the use of semiotics. I use Social Studies as the case study, but I encourage all teachers to use these techniques with their own subjects.

Some may argue that we already know how to read semiotics because we encounter it all the time in every aspect of daily life, and that is true¹. However, it is a tool. Like reading and language, it helps us understand the world better. It is true that we do understand semiotics without being explicitly taught but, just like any language system, it becomes more effective with guidance. In the American School system, students are taught their English for at least 12 years but are not explicitly taught semiotics. It is also a diverse tool that can be applied to any subject, math, ELA, science, social studies, art etc. Advertisers already use this in many ways to subtly

¹ Already know semiotics
alter out mindset or make their products more attractive to us. When we become more aware of
the semiotic components then we can better evaluate the merits of the product in question.

The Rosetta Stone Inc is the perfect example of how a company has made millions by
using semiotics to teach languages internationally. They use commonly recognizable symbols to
communicate meaning and then offer the proper pronunciation in the language of choice. The
system has received countless awards from 2002 to 2012 for teaching languages by using
semiotics. Now imagine if we could use the same techniques to teach other subjects. This, by
no means removes the need to teach language, but simply enhances the learning experience.

Part 1: Basic Semiotics.

Step 1

The first step to semiotics is observation. Often overlooked, observation is one of the
hardest to grasp because people often jump to conclusions based on a mere scrap of information.
For this exercise look at Figure 2 and really examine what you see. Then carefully describe in as
much detail what you actually see literally. This is not a trick question but it does require that
you be honest and literal.

Figure 2
If you said “an apple” or something to that affect, you would be entirely wrong. In fact, it is a construct of ink and paper created to represent an apple. It is a black and white, two dimensional, image entirely un-apple-like save for the outline. If seen on a computer screen, it is not even ink and paper but pixilated representations of lines flickering at 60+cycles per second. Images on a computer are even more deceptive since the things on the screen are even more illusionary than ones on paper. Therefore, if we are honest about what the Figure 2 is we cannot say “apple”. This is why the first step to semiotics is observation. It needs to be detailed, descriptive, and honest observation.

If we insist that Figure 2 is an apple then I challenge anyone to eat it. Also, consider that an Asian pear has a similar outline. We have made an iconic leap to ‘apple’ that children with autism may not be able to make. Temple Grandin explained that she sees literal and specific objects the way they exist, unconnected to icons the way others see them. This should be a lesson to us to keep the literal, specific, physical, or visual descriptions in mind when we observe objects. When we do that, we come closer to seeing things for what they are, which is the first step to semiotics.

Step 2

The second step to semiotics is context. Usually we jump straight to this step without processing the first step and don’t dwell on it long. We need to take some time here to process what it is that we observe. This part also holds a trap, like the second figure. Observe Figure 3 and describe what you see. Like before, describe the object and its context.
I expect that you are now wary of my tricks and said something like “it is a two dimensional bar of green ink on paper so long by so wide with an equal bar in white next to it and another equal bar in red to the right of that.” If that is what you said then you would be both right and wrong. It is all of that but it also has the background of white for contrast and each described image has context with the others. “Context is practically everything when determining meaning.” This means that the green bar has some relationship with the white and the red. In Figure 3 the green is on the left farther away from the red and the white bar is in the middle. These relationships spark meaning outside the individual symbol to create another meaning or symbol. The same bars may be turned around, but a different meaning would be produced because of the specific context each bar of color has to the others.

Why didn’t I say the “Italian flag”? That jumps ahead into meaning and we will get there soon enough. This subtlety of implication and illusion is often used to follow the “letter of the law” in advertising but imply meaning subconsciously. This flag idea also has some meaning in our culture and a different meaning in the Italian culture. Each bar represents ideas, events,

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2 Ivan Brady, Lecture; *Semiotics.* 1997
3 By that I mean that advertisers can use tricky, subtle images imbedded within images that do not comply with the original definition of “subliminal” when the application is actually subliminal.
values or landscapes but they are tied together within the specifically constructed context. For example, Figure 4 is an entirely different symbol that holds the exact same symbols with in it, but in a slightly different context.

- Each color as individual representation g, w, r
- Each color with relationship to next color g-w, g-r, w-r
- Each color with relations to entire image g-w-r specific
- All colors together as one icon in culture

**Figure 4**

![Italian Flag](image)

**Step 3**

Step 3 takes the symbol as a whole and goes from association to meaning. Meaning is the most elusive part of semiotics for a number of reasons. In Figure 3, we may have immediately jumped to meaning and been none the worse by saying "Italian Flag" but that wasn't the point. We need to see each element of an image and each relationship before we can fully understand the complexity of meaning in the Italian Flag.

Now let us dive into meaning since we have done a lot of description and observation. Beginning with Figure 3, some meanings have been ascribed to each color as we take it to mean
the “Italian Flag”. However, each color has some meaning on its own. Think about what meanings you know green to represent and list them. Then do the same to white and then to red. Finally put some of the individual words or descriptions together to develop what you think the flag may represent as a whole. Keep in mind that American associations of color are often different from other cultural associations of color. Green can represent fertility, fields, growth, agriculture, movement, planes, and many other things. Red can represent danger, blood, warning, heat, vitality, etc.

The common interpretation of the Italian flag describes the green as a representation of the fertile foothills and plains. The white represents the snow-capped Alps and the red represents the blood spilled during their wars of independence. Therefore, if you listed fertility, snow, and blood among your description then you were just about right. This is not to say the others are wrong but other green-white-red tricolored flags may have used your choices.

Step 4

We have first observed and described an object honestly. Then we went on to observe and describe an object in context. Then we moved quickly on to describe the relationships of the objects and their implications in context. Step 4 is semiosis. Semiosis is a term that means re-evaluating the symbolic implication of something. Simply put, this means that we examine each element of the symbol in and out of context and recombine them to explore different associations, meanings and references. With this step, it is best to refer back to Figure 2. We have already observed the object as, “a black and white line drawing resembling the shape of an apple.” If we ask, “What does that represent?” then we come up with a list of things that it represents. For example, we may list: apple, red, smooth, fruit, green. Then semiosis comes in
when we take those words or associations and ask what they represent separately. Semiosis continues when we take those words and ask that same question again. It becomes a cycle of re-interpretation of the next layer of implication. It may be best described in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>apple</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>smooth</td>
<td>fruit</td>
<td>green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>passion</td>
<td>texture</td>
<td>food</td>
<td>fertile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>knowledge</td>
<td>blood</td>
<td>crisp</td>
<td>hunger</td>
<td>agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>learning</td>
<td>love</td>
<td>sweet</td>
<td>starve</td>
<td>growth</td>
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In the 4 steps of semiosis, we have moved away from the apple icon and glimpsed many of the associations surrounding an apple. We can take it further by asking why these associations exist. In column 1 the steps progress along a conceptual path reaching back to a historically Christian concept of the apple representing knowledge. This refers obliquely to the Garden of Eden story where Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge. Though Christianity is no longer directly a part of American education, it is maintained in these cultural references. Column 2 refers to the American associations with red. If we were in India, red refers to purity or in China red refers to luck. These associations are imbedded in the culture as much as column 1 is associated with religion. Columns 3 and 4 are more literal or physical representations of the object rather than cultural. The benefits to literal associations are that they tend to be more multicultural. These are the types of symbols that the Rosetta Stone™ system uses to teach languages.
Semiosis can be taken to an extreme and to the point of absurdity. In a Daily Show Episode July 19 2012, John Stewart detailed a list of associations that Michele Bachmann claimed linked Huma Abedin to Islamic Terrorists. This semiosis of Mrs. Abedine’s associations and their implications by pundits resulted in death threats to Mrs. Abedine. This is an example of associations that have gone too far.

Figure 5

On the other hand John Stewart’s associations (figure 6) are equally incorrect, though more direct, in their implication of Michele Bachmann’s association with Islamic terrorists.

Figure 6

These two examples show how continual semiosis can lead to unintended or erroneous associations with the original sign or symbol. In column 1, the path was on one of historical or

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4 Daily Show Season 17, Episode 126, July 19 2012

5 Another example of semiosis is pg 80 of Classroom instruction that works: research-based strategies for increasing student achievement
religious cultural background for the United States. Each stage connected to the stage before but also connected to the symbol of the apple directly again. These multiple connections or overlapping connections give a more solid and predictable association. In columns 4 and 5 agriculture, food and fertile can be associated with either Fruit or green so there are clearly overlapping meanings.

Many of the most powerful symbols in society have overlapping meanings. Road signs have overlapping meanings that reinforce and communicate meaning quickly. This ensures that even if some of the meanings are misinterpreted, the others are likely to communicate the intended meaning. A stop sign (Figure 7) can convey meaning with two of the three elements present.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 7</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sign</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elements</strong></td>
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</table>
Even if the language is changed, the other symbols remain to convey the message (figure 8). These overlapping meanings reinforce the message of the overall symbol.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 8</th>
<th>Persian</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
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<td></td>
<td>ایست</td>
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My greater point is that we have these symbols all around us every day and in every culture. Many of them are constructed and culturally defined. Some are more multicultural or natural representations like leaves on a tree. We do not actively teach them in schools and I argue that we should. We teach English as the dominant language for 12 years in just about every school system in the United States. Why then should we ignore semiotics as a tool for teaching languages and as a framework for communication?

The one industry at the forefront of semiotics is advertising. In the 1948 film “Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House” (16:35-16:45) the youngest child says that “...advertising is a basically parasitic profession,” that “…makes people that can’t afford it, buy things they don’t want, with money they haven’t got.” This astute observation neatly summarizes an industry that continually justifies itself by communicating an essentially one-sided message for monetary gain. Some may go so far as to call it propaganda or brainwashing. Others may defend it by saying that each person can judge the merits of products on their own. Either way, if we truly do value
individual choice then we should prepare students for interpreting these commercial semiotic communications so they truly can make choices for themselves.

**Teacher’s Challenge**

It is easier to analyze meaning in symbols or objects that exist around us, but it is considerably more difficult to construct those symbols. This is a challenge to anyone that is willing. Take a concept and construct a symbol that encompasses that concept. It is best if it is a simple concept and use overlapping symbols to create the meaning. Find relationships that already exist to make it attractive, impactful, and concise. Advertisers do this as a career so don’t be too demanding on yourself but try to be imaginative. As an example, a simple red circle around an object with a line through it creates an immediately understandable icon. Try to create some icons on your own. Negative icons are easy to create but try to create the much more difficult positive icons.
Part 2: Semiotics in a Social Studies Class

Part 1 was intended to give a little background about semiotics and how it affects us every day. In Part 2 we use Social Studies as the example for integrating semiotics into the classroom as a teaching tool. Semiotics lends itself to Social Studies nicely because symbols are often socially defined. Here I will use several examples of how the interpretation and generation of signs, symbols, and signifiers can enhance the learning experience in a Social Studies class. It would be just as easy to use Science, English, Math, or any other class as the example. I also use Social Studies because my background is anthropology and history. I encourage and challenge teachers to be imaginative with how they use semiotics in their own classes.

There are several way in which semiotics can be used in classes. First, we can teach with images that address specific subjects, times or events. Second, we can use iconic devices that help reinforce, store and trigger memory about subjects. Third, we can help students develop observational skills, visual analysis, and critical thinking skills by practicing semiotics. Each of these areas can be used to enhance traditional teaching techniques. The following are some examples of how these techniques can be put into practice.

Teaching Subjects

Political cartoons lend themselves beautifully to teaching the attitudes, social forces, or important events of specific times. Figure 9 is a political cartoon taken from a popular weekly journal that exemplifies some of the attitudes during the 1880s. This racially charged cartoon effectively shows the lines of inclusion and exclusion in American culture. Even without the caption, the overlapping cultural associations around the Irish figure forms a stereotype that remains to this day. The same can be said for the Chinese figure. Both groups worked
extensively on the Transcontinental Railroad but supervisors preferred Chinese workers because they drank tea instead of whiskey. However, two years after this cartoon the *Chinese Exclusion Act* denied Chinese people citizenship. This cartoon also demonstrates the racial stratification of American society in the 1880s. Modern examples of the stratification of American society can be found to reinforce this ongoing issue. This cartoon touches the subjects of immigration, social stratification, stereotypes, multicultural society, and historical attitudes. With the context of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, we can also explore the changing attitudes of Americans regarding race, culture, and exclusion.

Figure 9

Harper's Weekly, March 20, 1880, page 183 (Thomas Nast Cartoon)
Using semiotics to understand this cartoon, we can begin by breaking down each symbol and symbol group. First, we examine the Irish man noting that he is on the left facing right. This will be relevant later. There are at least seven elements that tell you that he is Irish; clover in the hat, slouch hat, frowning stubble jaw, clay pipe, gun in belt, shillelagh, whiskey bottle in the pocket. Individually these elements tell us little about the person but together they create the stereotype of an Irish man. Next, we move to the Chinese character on the right and identify the elements that make up the Chinese character; almond eyes, hair in Que, little facial hair, different colored skin, a light tunic. Now we examine the relationship of the two figures and it becomes clear that there is some racial stratification going on. The Irish is the first in reading order, larger, and with a gesture of superiority. The Chinese is second in reading order, smaller stature, with a submissive posture. This relationship suggests that the Irish man is more important and more accepted than the Chinese. This is also echoed in the Irish man’s statements. We also must consider the temporal context of the cartoon; “AT FRISCO” Harper’s Weekly, March 20, 1880, page 183 (Thomas Nast Cartoon). Harper’s Weekly was a widely read periodical whose main audience was white, European, English literate, males. Many of whom were involved with or touched in some way by post war reconstruction or threatened by immigration.

No one element of the cartoon, or even one set of elements, creates the message but the cartoon as a whole creates the narrative. The entire cartoon suggests a racial stratification for 1880 where the Irish stereotype was more accepted than the Chinese stereotype. The Irish also sought legitimacy through association with a national committee and the founding fathers. This cartoon is just one of many examples that a teacher can bring into a classroom to quickly and effectively convey a theme, topic, and/or attitude of a time and place.
Another way semiotics can be used to enhance the classroom is by generating icons for organizing units. These are like mnemonic devices but in an image or icon. I would use a bow and arrow with a pilgrim hat to represent a unit on early colonial North America. It incorporates the idea of a clash of cultures, Native American and European cultures without necessarily demonizing one or the other. It is important to use established icons and use them consistently to convey the information effectively. The more exposed we are to specific icons in context, the more conditioned we are to that context. In the United States, Pilgrim hats, turkeys, and pumpkins are associated with Thanksgiving and colonial America. Despite historical facts, the Pilgrims have taken over as the icon for early America. The Bow and Arrow is a well-established symbol of Native Americans. The National Park Service uses the flint arrowhead to represent nature, Native Americans, and natural history. For each subject, unit, or topic, it is best to use established images to convey meaning rather than inventing new images that are unfamiliar. The icon then becomes a trigger for the information contained in that unit and allows students to organize information visually as well as verbally.

Advertisers have been using this technique to boost sales for many years. They use established symbols, generally sex, in association with their products to imply that their product has a heightened appeal. Political advertisers use the red, white, and blue color schemes to associate the candidate with America, American values, and patriotism. They will often show an eagle to symbolize strength and independence. Even people with political messages that have never been elected to an official position use these visual icons to gain or imply political

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legitimacy. A satirical example is the introduction sequence to the Colbert Report. They all use established symbols to add to a message they are creating. This can be a powerful tool for learning if used in the classroom as well as a good organizational technique.

**Conclusion**

Some articles teach using semiotics and call it multimodal learning. Multimodal learning has become a buzz-word that often means increasing the use of video, pictures, and music in the classroom.\(^8\) What they are actually advocating goes some way to learning but it needs the rigorous background in semiotics to teach the observational skills, interpretation, and critical analysis or icons, and semiosis to makes those multimodal methods useful.\(^9\) Many teachers use graphic organizers to demonstrate the associated people and events to a subject, but they often lack the semiotic background to make them meaningful.\(^10\) Many studies have demonstrated the benefits of this type of complete semiotic training for a number of different subjects and age groups.\(^11\) A plethora of rigorous academic study has demonstrated a clear link between teaching semiotics and increased learning to the point that it cannot be ignored. I am not suggesting that multimodal learning is bad or that graphic organizers are not useful but I suggest that we teach

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the students the semiotics behind them to give the technique more meaning. Multimodal teaching should go hand in hand with teaching semiotics.

It is common knowledge that in today’s society we have traded our ability to identify plants and animals with the identification of logos and symbols. We index these symbols mentally and organize them into categories the way hunter-gatherers do with eatable, medicinal, and toxic plants. We index our symbols into categories like political icons, traffic signs, and commercial logos. Each of these symbols has its own linked system of information behind it. Advertisers are well versed in adopting common, multicultural, established symbols into their business to convey a specific message. Teachers should do the same in teaching. It works best if the images are already established and not overly complex. This iconic indexing technique assists with organization for the teacher as well as the student. It can be used for mental organization as well as physical organization of materials for a unit.

One of the greatest challenges and criticisms of modern teaching in the United States is critical thinking. It is a challenge because the evaluations we use to determine student “success” are often not based on critical thinking skills, but rote memorization. The criticism is that teachers need to teach more “critical thinking” skills. In the process of learning semiotics, students gain information about, and how to use, critical thinking skills. Using the techniques described above, we will be teaching students some amount of semiotics. In that process they will become more aware of the symbols that we are teaching as well as the symbols that are used in advertising, politics, and communication. Studies have demonstrated that using semiotics

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increases student’s ability to make rational decisions. Students with learning difficulties can catch up to their peers using semiotics. Students in an ESL classroom can more quickly and easily learn the dominant language by using semiotics. By teaching you semiotics, it forced you to think literally, critically, and describe context. These are exactly the skills that students need to understand the world better. These techniques are also applicable to everyday life outside the classroom. It becomes a framework for analysis and a tool for understanding the multimedia world in which we live. It is also the same tool that can be applied in any and every human culture around the earth. Semiotics is truly a multicultural tool.

Resources

The World Digital Library (http://www.wdl.org/en/) for images around the world

Modern Political Cartoons (http://www.politicalcartoons.com/Default.aspx) commercial source for political cartoons

Historical Political Cartoons (http://www.harpweek.com/) Thomas Nast political cartoons late 1800s-early 1900s

National Archive (http://www.archives.gov/) for teaching resources, original documents, images, photographs, video files, and audio files

Clothing (“20,000 Years of Fashion; The History of Costume and Personal Adornment” by Francois Boucher) for how people dress and semiotics of clothing

Basic Semiotics (“Semiotics: The Basics” by Daniel Chandler) for a good introduction to semiotics

Basic Semiotics Video (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEgxTKUP_WI) excellent explanation of semiotics

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Appendix 1

Cartoons
Appendix 1 Cartoons

"The Ignorant Vote—Honors Are Easy," Harper's Weekly, December 9, 1876, cover

Blacks represent the "Ignorant Vote" of the South

Typical Black features used in cartoons:
- Large lips
- Monkey/ape-like facial features
- Second-hand clothes
- Black field workers hat
- "Happy freed Black" facial expression
- Bare feet

Irish represent the "Ignorant Vote" of the North

Typical Irish immigrant features used in cartoons:
- Irish "stove pipe" hat
- Mutton chops
- Large jaw
- Square hob nail boots
- Scowling expression
- Irish notched coat tail jacket

- Stereo typical Black from the south stares smiling at a stereo typical Irish immigrant from the North.
- Composition implies that the "black" voting problems of the South are the same as the "Irish" voting problem of the North.
- The scales are in absolute balance which emphasizes the problem visually

By 1876 Reconstruction-era Republican idealism was largely exhausted. Republican state governments in the South, supported primarily by African American votes, were charged with massive corruption, similar to that charged against the Irish Catholic-backed Tammany Hall machine. The charges were exaggerated, but Republican reformers, among them Harper's Weekly, blasted traditional Republican leaders for sustaining corrupt governments and engaging in dishonest practices themselves. To offset waning support for Reconstruction, Republicans resorted to anti-Catholic, anti-Irish posturing, prejudices that were widely shared at the time. This cartoon was published in the wake of the disputed election of 1876, in which both sides charged fraud. Nast compares the African American Republican vote of the South to the Irish Catholic Democratic vote of the North. Under such circumstances, winning elections is hardly an honor, and neither Democrat nor Republican should claim special virtue. Nast's changing attitude toward former slaves paralleled that of many Republicans as they shifted from the idealistic politics of the Reconstruction era to the cynical politics of the Gilded Age. http://cartoons.osu.edu/nast/ignorant_vote.htm The Ohio State University Libraries 2002.
During this time period in America, the Greek and Roman cultures were highly praised as the height of civilization, which may have influenced the artist's rendition of Lady Liberty/America.

The artist is signed "Hunk E. Dore" which plays as a pun on hunky dory.

Businesses may have thought it was just fine for us to welcome these immigrants at first because they were willing to work such long hours for very little pay.
Our Modern Falstaff Reviewing his Army

FALSTAFF — My whole charge consists of slaves as ragged as Lazarus, and such as indeed were never soldiers, but discarded serving-men and revolted tapsters. No eye hath seen such scarecrows. Nay and the villains march wide between the legs, as if they had fetters on; for, indeed, I had the most of them out of prison. — Shakespeare, slightly varied.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Army</th>
<th>Boss Tweed is dressed as Falstaff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A group of very rough looking men for the most part</td>
<td>His “court” is made up of his known business associates of the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One still wears the striped outfit of those who are in jail</td>
<td>He reviews his troops and notes how he got most of them from prison.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most portray typical Irish features: Huge frowning jaw, stove pipe hats, clover, guns, whiskey bottles, pipes, mutton chops, great coats</td>
<td>He ignores a group of men in the background who have not been chosen and are being pushed away from the “King”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some portray other ethnic groups Scottish, Polish, orphans, Dutch, even a man who appears wealthy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They all seem to have been chosen by their lack of ethics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Boss Tweed is portrayed as Falstaff dressed in Shakespearian costume of court with various political people associated with Boss Tweed make up his retinue. They look upon a group of men of ill repute to be used as Tweed’s army.

Many of them have Irish characteristics, who were thought to be lawless henchmen for Tweed.
"Move On!"

Has the Native American No Rights that the Naturalized American is Bound to Respect?

**Inside Polling Booth:**
- Black, Irish, Dutch, Scottish, White, rich and poor men are gathered around voting bowl.
- They appear happy.
- They take no notice of the Native American outside.
- They appear to be talking to one another.

**Outside Polling Booth:**
- Native American stands alone.
- He wears feathers, animal skin clothing and a blanket.
- His face is downcast.
- A man threatens him with a club and points for him to go away from the polling booth.

Native Americans are not allowed to vote.

No other groups protest the exclusion of the Native American here.

Native American is met with aggression from authority figure for trying to vote.

Native American looks despondent and angry.
January 16, 1869
Frank Bellew

General Sheridan

He is shown as a large, strong, and powerful man.
Holding a twig whip.
Military dress.
Military tall riding boots

School room
Book on floor
School desk
Passive teaching aids include map and reminders for behavior.

Native Americans

They are portrayed as small, weak looking men with exaggerated facial features.
Onlooker shocked to see the treatment of the other Native American.
Victim submitting pleading for mercy
An ax and a gun on the floor.
Both Native Americans are dressed in deer skin clothing and have feathers in their hair.
They are depicted as having darker skin

The white man in center is beating aggressively the smaller Native American

The other Native American looks on in horror.

White man is in position of power to dictate terms of discussion with the Native Americans.

Native Americans were to become educated and Christians.

Implied- School was a way to teach the Native Americans not to turn on whites. Indoctrination, acculturation, assimilation. A way to take the culture of the Native Americans away and to replace it with “white” culture.
Irish man who is part of a “Committee of National Security” tells a Chinese immigrant “Ye must go!" 

Chinese man is in powerless situation.

Irish man is in control and is armed to enforce action.

In his speech, the Irishman has turned George Washington and Daniel Webster to George O‘Washington and Dan’IO’Webster so these political figures are now Irish in nature and have raised his authority in society by association.
Chinese Immigrants

Two Chinese men with swords approach “St. Crispin.”
Que braids
Chinese dress and hat
Slanted eyes
Swords are labeled “Cheap Labor”
One is labeled “chop sticks” as a pun.
They look malicious and ready to murder St. Crispin (the common man)
They are there to take his job

St. Crispin
Halo
European facial features
Apron of labor class
Boot maker
Hair is “tonsured” like a monk’s.
Icon for typical American worker.
Saint that does an “honest day’s labor for an honest day’s wage.”
He is unaware of the two Chinese men behind him.
He is focused on his work
He is a middle aged man
He is a craftsman

Cheaper labor kills the typical American worker

St. Crispin is passively working and not aware of the violent threat

Chinese out number St. Crispin and actively martyr St. Crispin- sneaky?

Perspective: This image is meant to highlight the plight of American workers who are fired from their jobs and replaced with cheap laborers (the Chinese). It does not reflect the perspective of business owners who make larger profits by having cheaper labor forces.
Ladder of immigration that all other groups had used to become successful

Chinese not allowed same chance as other ethnic groups to succeed in America.

Other “typical” immigrants have already climbed up the ladder.

Chinese look to immigration as a path to prosperity.

The “US” on top of wall and “Them” on the ground and separated by large wall implies a hieratical ranking of people.

Great “Chinese wall around America” is meant to mimic The Great Wall of China.
PROTECTING WHITE LABOR
Harper's Weekly, March 22, 1879, page 216 (Nast Cartoon)

Skilled Laborer
- Civil in demeanor
- “Typical” American white laborer
- Tradesman’s hat
- Long sleeves
- Tools in apron
- Work boots
- Neat hair and clothes
- Neckerchief
- White skinned, Romanesque features,
- Laborer is proud of his skills and quality of his work
- Expression is one of respectfully presenting his position

From “Hoodlum Alley”
- Radical Laborer
- White male immigrant
- Cowboy hat/ mustache
- Gun in belt
- Stick in hand
- Demanding Anti-Chinese legislation

Businessman
- Drawn larger than the laborer
- He is in the center of the picture
- He has ripped up and trod on the Chinese legislation paper
- Three piece suit with a great coat and shiny shoes
- Expression is not overly friendly

Business and Labor come to some kind of agreement to exclude Chinese

This agreement is supposed to reduce Labor Riots and allow Businesses to compete on the foreign markets

Businessman is taller than all other men portrayed and at the center of the issue

Businessmen’s position represents his stature and social position

Skilled laborer is shorter than businessman but does stand as his “right hand”

Radical workers in the back are not as civilized as those in foreground, and are not given any attention by the businessman
Black Freedman

Raising his hat to the West
Escaping residual racial and political issues of the Southern States
Taking his family with him into the West
There is a welcome sign for him and his family towards the West
Blacks were seen as better than Chinese in the West as workers
Southern style hat
Man is wearing nice clothes and shoes
He looks affluent
Carpetbag
The children are clinging to their mother

Chinese Immigrant

San Francisco newspaper is telling the "MAN" immigrant to head East.
"MAN" indicates not really considered a true, equal man
There are other Chinese people heading East
There is a welcome sign to the East
Que braid
Chinese clothing, bundled belongings on stick
Paper is called "San Francisco Hoodlum"
They are not traveling as families

It is interesting to think of just trading the East’s “ethnic problem” for the West’s, and vice versa.

The Chinese would be more welcome in the East
The Black family would be more welcome in the West.

The backgrounds on either side of the sign post look equal in welcome, but it is only for the group told to head that way. West welcomes the freed Black man and his family and the East is welcoming to the Chinese man.

As blacks recognized the welcome they could have in the West and the Chinese saw the same by going East, it was two social/racial issues solving themselves by relocating the people who represented the problems.
"The Balance of Trade with Great Britain Seems to be Still Against Us"
April 28, 1883 William A. Rogers Published in Harpers Weekly

Small Boat/America
Ship named "The Dynamite" from New York
Mast flag has a simple shamrock on it
White man piloting the ship
Top hat
Clay pipe
Checked suit
He is sitting on a barrel of dynamite
The man seems calm and determined

Poor House/Britain
Labeled Poor House from Galway
Large ship heavily overloaded with Irish paupers to the point where some have to ride on the roof
Ship is topped by the British flag
Ship is headed for Boston Harbor
Britain is dumping its unwanted Irish poor onto America
People on the ship are cheering the small boat.
It does not appear that they see the actual dynamite carried towards them
The ship is traveling rough seas

Small ship from New York carries real dynamite.
Britain is dumping hundreds of poor Irish paupers upon America’s ports.
America is visually threatening to blow up the ship if it attempts to bring these poor people to the U.S.
Trade between the two countries should not consist of the USA sending over goods and Britain sending back the unwanted Irish poor that Britain wanted to get rid of.
The rough sea and stormy sky represents the emotions surrounding the situation.
Native American
Carrying bow and arrows
Dark skin complexion
Loin cloth clothing
Facial features are ape/monkey like
Speech is very primitive English

Chinese man
Holds fire crackers and a fan
Clothing is typical of Chinese culture
Que hair braid
He is very well balanced on the shoulders of the Black man
His facial features are also exaggerated and monkey/ape like, but not as much as the Black or Native American’s features.
His speech patterns are those of an immigrant.

Gorham stands in the center with various ethnic groups standing on his back supporting their right to vote as real citizens of the US.
Cuffy, dressed as Uncle Sam, represents the opposition Gorham is facing in getting all men treated as equals and is being threatened with damnation for his efforts to help out immigrants, freed slaves and Native Americans to take their place in American culture.

Another white man mocks Gorham’s efforts by telling him to let an ape take a place on Gorham’s back as a “Brother” as well as all the other men who are obviously not seen as equals to whites by this man and are only to be seen as kindred to wild apes at best.
Irish immigrants were often seen as a troublesome ethnic group that only caused trouble.

They are portrayed here as both a people who are careless enough to get themselves blown up, and as a metaphorical keg of gunpowder within the USA ready to explode at any moment because they are drunkards and are disorderly.

They are often portrayed as unthinking thugs who will carry every slight or insult to a fight, if not a war.

They do not seem to want to integrate into “American” society, rather they want to retain their own identity.

Because of so many of them were being forced to come to this country by Britain because they were poor, they felt like they had been stolen away from their homeland and were desperate to maintain their Irish culture.
"Holy Horror of Mrs. McCaffraty..."

February 24, 1866  artist unknown
http://www.harpweek.com/09cartoon/BrowseByDateCartoon.asp?Month=February&Date=24

Mrs. McCaffraty

Poor Irish Immigrant

Clothes are of poor quality

Face is distorted and ape like with large lips and wide nose

She is a heavy set woman

She carries a large basket of food, fish, and bottles of some kind of liquor or wine

She is not happy to see a Black woman looking like a fine "Lady".

It appears that she may be making unkind remarks to the Black lady.

Black Lady

Clothes are very fine and stylish.

Her facial features are refined and pretty.

Her skin tone is still that of a black person.

She carries a small parasol and gloves

She looks downward with her face set a little tightly.

She may be refraining from saying anything that might instigate a fight if Mrs. McCafferty is saying unpleasant things to her.

While the Irish were happy to see their own kind get ahead, seeing the Blacks doing better than any of them, made many immigrants, not just the Irish, very angry.

Even in the North, Freed men still had to deal with every bit of prejudice as they had had to deal with before they were emancipated in most areas of the country.

All people hold prejudices, but this cartoon has chosen to make the Irish look like they in particular were against Black people and were ugly socially to Black people.

The Black woman is displayed as figure of beauty and wealth bearing up with good grace in a situation where she can still be dismissed as less than human just because of her skin color.
EVERY DOG (NO DISTINCTION OF COLOR) HAS HIS DAY

Harper’s Weekly, February 8, 1879, page 101 (Nast Cartoon)

Black Man
Sits relaxed on a wall with legs crossed
Clothes are of decent quality, but are not of the upper class.
Wears workers boots, is not barefoot.
Wall behind him says, “My day is coming.”

Native American
Wearing traditional Native American clothing
Peace pipe, Tomahawk, Feathered headdress
Skin is dark colored
Facial features are slightly exaggerated with large nose, frown lines, and pronounced brow ridge.
He is reading postings on the wall with the Chinese man.
He has a contemplative look on his face

Chinese man
Dressed in traditional Chinese clothing, shoes, hat, and with Que hair tail.
Skin color is lighter than the Native American’s is
His arms are crossed and his facial expression is one of anger as he reads the wall postings.
Facial features include slanted eyes and round face, but they are not made to look ape/monkey like.

“The Notice Wall
Pictogram for illiterate Chinese and Native Americans depicting which way they should go- Chinese are to go East after the train, Native Americans are to go west as they are chased by the train
K.K.K. has posted “Down on the nigger, with skull and crossbones underneath
The Chinese must GO! – Kearney
The Chinese Problem poster lists laws providing for their banishment.
Foreigners not wanted –posted by “Pat Irish Esq.”
Logia diem Governance we must have. Social Faitz by order!
Know-nothing-isms of the Past- Down with the Irish. Down with the Dutch.

“Red gentleman to yellow gentleman, “Pale Face ‘fraid you crowd him out as he did me.” Cartoon caption.

Wall posters follow a timeline of social prejudices against various groups from the past at the bottom to the current time beginning in the middle and rising to the top of the wall with oppressed groups of the past now oppressing other groups such as the Irish, and the emerging of the K.K.K.

Three prominent minorities are represented here with the Chinese being the most aggressively portrayed as unwanted in America.

The progression of the Irish and Dutch from oppressed to the oppressors shows that “Every dog (No distinction of color) has his day.

The Black man is close to “having his day”. 
A DISTINCTION WITHOUT A DIFFERENCE
Harper's Weekly, August 19, 1882, page 527 (Nast Cartoon)

Military man
- Carries sword, military uniform, waxed moustache, high riding boots
- Monocle to inspect immigrants
- Has book to distinguish between Chinese and Koreans

Koreans
- Allowed to immigrate, but not Chinese people
- The Military man must carefully inspect each one to see if they are Korean or not
- His book does not seem to be helping him

Because it was very hard for immigration officers to tell the difference between Korean and Chinese people, it may explain why there is a book on the shelves outlining "Bribes".

The other two books that have labels that can be read are "Duties" and the other is "Duties and Antiques". Immigrants may have either been able to be recognized as one group or another by the items they carried, or these items may have been used as bribes to get into the country.

Coreans had been given full rights to travel and live throughout America, whereas the Chinese were actively being kept out.

The Corean man expresses how "alleesammeeMelican man" meaning there may be many differences that the Chinese and Koreans can see between themselves, but this "Melican man" won't be able to see them.

The very last Asian man at the back looks to be hiding behind all the rest of the Koreans in front of him, he may be a Chinese man passing himself off as a Korean.

"Melican man" may imply man, all Asians have trouble pronouncing "American" and it plays in the accent stereotype. It also implies that America can't tell the difference between Chinese and Koreans.
The President

White man smoking a cigar, dressed very well

Beard, Mustache, and hair all trimmed and styled.

Is dressing a Native American Chief in White culture clothes

In one pocket of the coat he is putting on the Chief is a document entitled “Vote” and in the other pocket is a document entitled “Taxes”

He is trying to acculturize the Chief into becoming a part of the US as a state and not a separate people.

He is making the Chief dress as a well dressed white man would dress.

In the caption, the President says..."...that all the civilized Indian nations should become their own Wards and Good Fathers. I am of the opinion that they should become Citizens, and be entitled to all the rights of Citizens—cease to be Nations and become States.

The Implications of the Vote and Taxes documents placed in the Chief’s coat are that if they become a US state, then the US will not have to take care of them and they will have to start paying taxes to the government.

The Chief had wanted to be a Ward of the US and to be looked after by the President as a good father would look after his children.

The Chief is now being stripped of his heritage and told to integrate into American society as an upstanding citizen with the right to vote and pay taxes, however the Chief and his people may not understand all the rules or have the political knowledge to understand all the implications of this request from the President.

Native American Chief

His bow, arrows, tomahawk, and fire water bottle are sitting on a dusty shelf

A Bible passage on the wall has helped to dissolve his cultural heritage by turning him into a farmer.

On the floor is a plough, ABC books, a Harpers Weekly newspaper, and various farming tools

He has been taught to read and write

He has been taught to farm.

His face has a look of surprise and awe.

He is not wearing any traditional Native American clothing or other icons besides some feathers in his hair.

There is a Top hat waiting on a chair to put on his head

Will he have to remove the head feathers to wear the Top hat?

Will he loose his culture because of this transformation?
MURDER of LOUISIANA SACRIFICED ON THE ALTAR OF RADICALISM.

http://loc.harpweek.com/LCPoliticalCartoons/DisplayCartoonMedium.asp?SearchText=&UniqueID=l&Year=1871

Radical North

U.S. Grant sits on a throne
Williams is portrayed as a small demon whispering in his ear
Rich Northern Businessmen look on with glee.
William Kellogg holds up the heart of Louisiana
Two freedmen hold Louisiana down as she is murdered.
The freedmen have no shirts or shoes
The freedmen have ape/monkey facial features

The States

The Southern states are represented by young women.
Louisiana is the first to be sacrificed to radicalism
South Carolina kneels in chains
She looks downward and is fearful that she will be next.
The other women representing states are not trying to help South Carolina escape, nor are they running away.

When Kellogg was elected under suspicious circumstances to lead Louisiana, many people felt betrayed because he supported the Northern principals of Reconstruction.

Freed Blacks were greatly feared because they had always been seen as barely controlled animals who would rape white women and behave like savages were it not for the stern governance of their masters.

U.S. Grant was seen as the Devil incarnate for his part in the Civil War and for his influence over what happened in the Southern states afterward.

Southern states, having lost the war, were highly suspicious of any proposals made by the US government to change their way of life and saw these changes as the destruction of their culture, prosperity, independence, and as a punishment for the Civil War.
Alligators invading the shores

Wearing Papal hat's with teeth

Body is covered with scales but underneath is the body of a man face down

They are climbing the shores towards children of all faiths and races.

All the children are frightened by the alligators

Some are being rescued by me at the cliff's edge

The US Public School is under attack and the flag is flown in the sign of distress.

One woman being lead to the gallows in the background

Young man (schoolmaster?) defending children against the papal alligators

American's feared the invasion of Catholic schools and the ideals that they might impart on their children

Catholic schools represented a drastic shift in the religious ideals of a predominantly Protestant country.

Protestants feared the Catholics would take away the freedoms and Liberty they had fought so hard to preserve.

Americans were also fearful of the Catholics adage of “Give me a child until the age of 7, and I will give you a Catholic for life.” Which was a threat to Protestant as well as other religious groups, because Catholic schools would take children of almost any denomination, provided their parents could pay the fees.
"A certain man had the good fortune to possess a Goose that laid him a Golden Egg every day. But dissatisfied with so slow an income, and thinking to seize the whole treasury at once, he killed the Goose; and cutting her open, found her—just what any other goose would be." —Æsor.

The Irish Catholic man has killed the golden goose at the behest of the priest.

There are lots of labeled golden eggs in a cupboard behind the Irishman.

It appears that the Irishman is angry for having killed the goose when it had so much more to give it had been alive.

The picture is accompanied by the fable story of killing the golden goose.
Nast, Thomas. September 5, 1868.
THIS IS A WHITE MAN’S GOVERNMENT. Harper’s Weekly

Irishman
He wears battered and tatty clothes. Has a pipe and cross on hat with S. Points printed on hat ribbon
Holding a truncheon that reads "A Vote"
Whiskey bottle in pocket
One foot on the head of the Black man all three have knocked down to stop him from voting
Face is drawn with ape like features, a huge brow, few teeth, large square jaw, tiny nose, and wide wild eyes.
He has joined in a pact with a Politician and a member of the Confederate States of America.

Southern Man
He is a white man in military clothing and riding boots and a white hat that has NB F written on the hat band
His belt buckle has CSA on it representing the Confederate States of America
He carries a bull whip in his back pocket, a gun at his hip, and a knife in his left hand aiming down toward the Black man says "The Lost Cause".
He has a military medal on his jacket for Fort Sill? with a skull on it.
He looks sideways at the viewer with a cruel look on his face.
His right foot rests on a box.

Black Soldier
He is on the ground and held down by the Irishman and the Politician.
His hat has fallen off his head.
He appears afraid, but is still trying to reach the ballot box.
He holds the American flag in his right arm
He has typical Black features, but they are handsome and not ape like.
His clothes look like Northern Military issue.
He looks young.

The Politician
Very wealthy white man.
His hair and mutton chops are perfect.
Three piece suit with tails and a white bow tie. He wears the “Chains of Office” around his waist.
In his left hand he has raised up a wallet bulging with “Capitol (for votes)” written on it.
On his lapel is a button for 5th Ave.
He stares ahead, while he stands on the back of the Black soldier

Caption: “We regard the Reconstruction Acts (so called) of Congress as usurpations and unconstitutional, revolutionary and void.” –Democratic Party

In the background, an orphanage for black children and a school are in flames.
It is presumed that these three men have set the fires in order to keep the Black population small, ignorant, and terrified
Even after the war was over and Amendments granting freedom to Black people had been ratified and they were allowed to vote, there were still people in the world ready to make sure their dreams of equality were never going to be realized.

Great Wall of China in Background

Chinese are ripping down the wall and getting on boats to come to America

As they pull down blocks from the wall, the blocks are loaded onto an American ship to bring to America

Chinese laborers are working very hard with pick axes to get the Great Wall down

You can see a port city in China behind the Great Wall

The Anti-Chinese sentiment portrayed in this cartoon seems to cross all ethnic groups

The arguments against Chinese immigrants written on the stones are: Jealousy, Law against Race, Against Low Wages, Un-American, Fear, Un-Reciprocity, Competition, etc

Perhaps law makers thought they could unite the USA against this one group as a scape-goat and avoid other diversity issues.
Chinese Immigrants

Those to the right of Oregon are running away and off cliffs.

They are running for their lives.

They are threatened with death if they cross Oregon/Hobson.

They have no weapons.

They have no one to protect them.

In order to preserve the social norm, Hobson decided to ignore the treaty with China and decided to kill any Chinese immigrant who crossed the Oregon border.

There were no repercussions for Hobson.

The Chinese had no one to help them get across without being harassed or killed.

It was very much a martial law kind of situation.
Uncle Sam
Largest figure in image
He is clasping his hands over his ears
He is surrounded by all the different ethnic groups that make up his country
All the groups are demanding that a certain other group “must go”.
Not only groups of people are targeted, things (like alcohol) and different gods must go.

The Melting Pot of America
Almost every ethnic group in existence is represented
Almost all groups have another group they would like to see leave America
They all complain to Uncle Sam
Uncle Sam refuses to hear any of their pleas.

In a country made up of immigrants, there are bound to be cultural clashes
People need to learn how to work out their differences without needing to make the other group disappear.
Government can never successfully regulate happiness, fear, or the interactions, and sometimes clashes, between different groups of people.
"Immigration East and West":
From The Wasp: v. 7, July - Dec. 1881

Caption: "Westward, the course of empire takes its way. Eastward, the march of national decay."

In the East:
Lady Liberty greets new immigrants streaming off the boat.
There is a grave to Puritanism
There are a large diversity of people getting off the boat looking for labor, prosperity, opportunity, capitol, etc
The immigrants smile and wave at Lady Liberty as they pass her on their way to a new life in America
Uncle Sam is a figure in the background also greeting new arrivals
The sky is clear and people look healthy and happy.

In the West:
Lady Liberty is in armor with her back to a black sea and storm riddled sky.
A bear stands just behind her
The bear is looking towards the ocean and sees the hideous sea monster coming out of the ocean
The sea monster is reminiscent of dragons in the Chinese culture
Scales with the names of diseases are falling off the sea monster
The scales of disease are infecting the West coast
In the sky, Asia is spelled out in stringy clouds
Appendix 2

Altered Education: Understanding Semiotics
Definition

- Functional Semiotics
- "The relationship between a thing that represents another thing"

History of Semiotics

- Hippocrates
- Compare how people look normally to how they look during their illness
  - Severity of symptoms = degree of sickness
Modern Semiotics

- Charles Sanders Peirce

Things that give meaning - word / image.

Sign = \[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{signifier} \\
\text{signified}
\end{array}
\]

Anything that conveys meaning.

What is evoked in the mind - mental concept

Current Uses

- Advertising
  • Branding, Persuasion, Emotions
- Politics
  • Control, Ideas, Paradigms
- Communication
  • Warning, Situations, Objects

Learning Semiotics

- Observation
  • Literally describe this object
  • Be as honest and observant as you can

Your Answer

- "An apple"
- "A picture of an apple"
- "A line drawing of an apple"

My Answer

- "a digital, two dimensional, black pixel point sequence, roughly in the outline of one possible apple flickering at 60+ cycles per second."
Learning Semiotics

Context
- Describe this symbol
- Remember the relationships one color has to the others

Meaning
- Meaning is the trickiest and most elusive but powerful part to semiotics.
- Use one word associations you have with each color and then put them together

Your Answer
- "green bar on the left, white bar in the middle and red bar on the right that looks like the Italian flag"

My Answer
- green bar so long and so wide on the left with a white bar so long and so wide in the middle and a red bar so long and so wide on the right creating a 2 units by 3 units over all proportion."

Other Answers
- Green - Plains
- White - Snow
- Red - Blood
- Great food
- Green - hope, growth, fertility, joy
- White - peace, honesty, purity, fidelity
- Red - strength, bravery, honor, valor
- Rome, Catholic, boot, suits, Axis Power WWII
Semiosis is the process of continual re-evaluation of the separate symbols and their meanings into new and varied types of associations.

Write down some words associated with an apple.

Then take each of the words and write more words associated with the first set.

Repeat the process a few times.

Overlapping meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sign</th>
<th>STOP</th>
<th>Octagonal, “Stop”</th>
<th>Octagonal, “Stop”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elements</td>
<td>Red/white</td>
<td>Octagonal, red</td>
<td>Octagonal, “Stop”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a news feature on CNN accusations were made that link a prominent state official with terrorism.

Associations like this are not necessarily accurate.
Challenge

- Create a symbol that you want students in your class to do
  - Avoid the easy don't symbols
  - Create a positive symbol
  - Use art only (no words)
Appendix 3
Altered Education: Semiotics in the Classroom
Hidden meanings in Advertisements
• Expose subliminal implications
• The more aware we are the better our critical thinking
• To make decisions based on reason, not emotion

Contents
• Importance of using semiotics
• Teaching Social Studies through the use of semiotics
• Using semiotics to assist memory
• Teaching students the techniques of semiotics

Teaching Social Studies through the use of semiotics
• Tools
  • Political Cartoons
  • Graphic organizers
  • Video recreations
  • Artist interpretations
  • Iconic Images
Political Cartoons

- Information
- Layered icons of a culture group
- Stereotypes
- Cultural stratification
- Racial relations of an era

Culture Group: Irish

- Clover in hat
- Frowning Stubble jaw
- Shillelagh

Layered symbols become the stereotype

Culture Group: Chinese

- Almond Eyes
- Hair Que
- Colored Skin
- Light Tunic
- Little Facial Hair

Layered symbols become the stereotype

Cultural stratification

- Posture of Superiority
- The Chinese figure is smaller than the Irish figure
- Irish explains that the Chinese are not wanted
- The Chinese figure is smaller than the Irish figure

Kaleidoscope: Chinese

- Submissive Posture
- The Chinese figure is smaller than the Irish figure

Kaleidoscope: Irish

- Slouch hat
- Clay Pipe
- Gun in belt
- Whiskey bottle

Layered symbols become the stereotype
Racial relations of an era

- Audience of cartoon
- Harper's Weakley 1880
- English language Literate, White Males,

Irish associates himself with a National Committee, Washington, and Webster

Using semiotics to assist memory

- Establish an icon that already holds meaning for the unity you are about to teach.
- Examples:
  - A Unit on Colonia America
  - A Unit on WWII

Semiotic Information

- Stereotype figures
  - Irish - clover in the hat, slouch hat, frowning stubble jaw, clay pipe, gun in belt, shillelagh, whiskey bottle
  - Chinese - almond eyes, hair in Que, little facial hair, different colored skin, a light tunic
- Cultural stratification
  - Irish are ranked higher than Chinese
  - Chinese are unwanted immigrants
- Racial relations
  - Irish sought legitimacy through affiliation through founding fathers and governmental structures
  - Chinese were too foreign to be accepted

Colonial America

- The Bow/Arrow combination represents Native Americans
- Not necessarily aggressive but weapons alluding to conflict
- Pilgrim Hat represents colonists
- The symbols together imply a relationship between the two cultures
- Native Americans on West Pilgrims on East
Use

- Put the symbol on every paper that has to do with Early American history
- It becomes a visual reminder of the subject at hand
- Also put it on the end of unit assessments
- It becomes a visual memory cue that triggers unit learning
- It can also be used as a tab in a binder for organization

WWII

- "Rosie the Riveter" represents
  - World War II 1941-1945
  - The changing role Women in America
  - Civilian role in the war
  - Spirit of strength and sacrifice
  - Strength of industrialism
  - Use of propaganda
  - Positive message of determination
  - Message of community

Use

- Put the symbol on every paper that has to do with WWII
- Consistent use of established symbols makes for a consistent reminder
- The image is in proximity to their name so they are more likely to observe the picture
- "Rosie" becomes a strong historical female role model
- Using complex, colorful symbols adds interest to the topic

Teaching the Process

- A byproduct of teaching semiotics to students
  - Critical thinking about images
  - Increased awareness of hidden advertising images
  - A method of multicultural communication
  - Increased vocabulary ability
Imagine how you can use these techniques for your classroom

- Math
  - Pictures that represent numbers
  - Measuring real objects
- Science
  - Taxonomy of animals
  - Physical representations of atoms/molecules
- ELA
  - Rebus
  - Creative writing based on a picture