

Blind Imagination: Pictures into Words
by Georgina Kleege

Discussion Questions

1. The essay begins with a conversation about a photograph on a book jacket. Later Georgina Kleege says, “I ask for a gut reaction because I’ve learned that images can compel viewers to make instant judgments about the people pictured—why else put the author’s photo on the book?” Why do publishers put the author’s photo on the book jacket? When you look at an author’s photo, what does it tell you? Have you ever formed an impression about an author and then were later surprised when you saw the photo?
2. Kleege says that museums around the world offer guided tours and other services for blind and visually impaired visitors, and that these services are in response to civil rights legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act. Why is access to a museum a matter of civil rights?
3. Make a list of activities that you perform every day, such as getting ready for school, traveling to school, attending classes, eating meals, doing homework. How would you do these things differently if you were blind? Are there any activities that you would need assistance with if you were blind?
4. Kleege lists some terms for different shades of the color green: “bottle green, grass green, acid green.” Think about the names manufacturers come up with to describe the colors of such products as crayons, cosmetics, house paint, and clothing. What difference does it make to call something “navy blue” versus “midnight blue,” or “fire engine red” versus “apple red?”
5. There are many expressions in English such as “blind date,” “blind faith,” and “blind frenzy” where the word blind is used to mean something besides lacking eyesight. Discuss the meaning of these expressions and others that use the word blind in a similar way. Discuss how these expressions might affect people who are blind or visually impaired.

6. Imagine that you are talking to someone on the phone and want to describe something or someone that the other person has never seen. This could be a new friend, a new outfit, or a place you visited on vacation. How do you go about making a picture in the other person's mind?
7. Kleege mentions a class where blind people learn to get around using a white cane. Investigate where blind people go to get this kind of training. How does the white cane help them find their way? What other skills do they learn?
8. Wheelchair ramps and automatic doors are accommodations that make public places accessible to people with mobility impairments. Have you ever noticed accommodations designed for blind people? What kind of devices and technologies do you think would be helpful?
9. Think of some popular TV shows and imagine that you want to describe a recent episode to someone who is blind. What kind of information do you think the person would need to understand the program? Would you change your description if the person was older or younger than you? Would it make a difference if the person was male or female? Are there any parts of the program that would be impossible for the person to understand without your description?
10. Toward the end of the essay, Kleege mentions Helen Keller. Who was Helen Keller? What do you know about her life? Can you name any other famous blind individuals?

Writing Activities

- Look at a photograph of a stranger's face in a book or magazine. Write a description of the face in as much detail as possible. Include information about the impression you form about the person's mood or personality. Does the person look happy, sad, angry, friendly, smart, foolish, sleepy, frightened? What is it about the picture that makes you form these judgments?
- Think about a path or route from one place to another at school that you walk every day. This could be the path from a particular classroom to the gym, the path from your locker to the cafeteria, etc. Write a series of directions that could guide someone walking this path, even if that person could not see. Include as many nonvisual details as possible, such as scents, sounds, changes in temperature, changes in the surface underfoot, and so forth.

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