

# Insta-Reflections as Reading Reflections

**Educator:** Sarah Summers, Assistant Professor of English

**Context:** Out of class; English; graphic novels

**Keywords:** visuals, reading reflections, social media

**Student Activity Time:** 15-30 minutes outside of class each week

*Each week students reflected on their reading by posting pictures on Instagram.*

## Introducing the Reflection Activity

In an upper level English course, students read a range of graphic novels to explore meaning created when visuals and text are juxtaposed. Throughout the course, students responded to their readings by posting weekly reflections on Instagram. The purpose of this reflection was to support students making meaning of the readings; building arguments using visuals; and understanding how images and text work together.

In the first week of the course, the educator introduced the reflection assignment—Insta-Reflections. In the Insta-Reflections, each week students posted a visual related to their thoughts about the course on Instagram (e.g., something interesting, significant, confusing, and/or worthy to discuss), and students wrote a short reflection related to the visual they chose. Then students in the class responded to each other’s Insta-Reflection posts. Throughout the quarter, the educator periodically referred to and leveraged these visuals in class discussions.

The Insta-Reflections provided scaffolding for other assignments. For example, when student had to write a paper that analyzed the visual and textual features of a visual of their choice, they could start with one of their Insta-Reflections and build their argument from there. After students had submitted a few Instra-Reflections, the educator presented the students with a mock rubric as a way to show students where they were and how the reflection assignment would be graded. After the week 9 Insta-Reflections were submitted, the educator graded the reflections as a whole using a participation and quality rubric. Fifty percent of students’ Insta-Reflection grade was based on participation (i.e., did they complete all 16 posts? Did they complete them on time? Did they comment thoughtfully on others’ posts twice per week?). The other fifty percent of the Insta-Reflection grade was based on the quality of their posts and comments (i.e., analysis, application, and engagement). The Insta-Reflections were worth 10 percent of students’ final grade.

In terms of outcomes, there was potential for students to develop fluency with course vocabulary, practice critical reading, and develop and respond to multiple interpretations of a single text.

---

**DIGITAL  
LIBRARY  
CONTENT**

---

3.1 Instagram  
Assignment

---

3.2 Insta-  
Reflection Rubric

---

3.3 Example Insta-  
Reflection

---

### Recreating the Reflection Activity

	Description
1	Introduce the reflection activity to the students.
2	Use the students' Insta-Reflections throughout the quarter to inform discussion.
3	Grade the reflections using a participation and quality rubric.

#### In the words of the Educator: Tips and Inspiration

*Use visuals.* In order for this activity to work, the visual component has to be there. Additionally, I think the social component is an important part of the activity. I think it motivates the students to do their job. They're not just turning in something for me; it's for their fellow classmates. I also think the discussion back and forth is valuable because students will often challenge each other's interpretations. It gives them even more of an opportunity to reflect.

*Be aware that some students don't have the necessary technology.* The biggest challenge was students who didn't have smartphones, which I hadn't anticipated. One option for those students was to download a program on their computer that acted like Instagram. However, the students said it was pretty clunky and didn't really replicate the experience. And so those students (there were two of them) posted to each other on Moodle. It's definitely not the same experience as Instagram, which is a big drawback and one I don't quite know how to fix. I think about two more years will fix that.

*What was the inspiration for the reflection activity?* I hadn't taught an elective here yet, and I had heard that students don't always do the reading, so I wanted a way to encourage them to do their reading. I didn't want the activity to be a reading quiz as there is not a lot of reflection in a reading quiz and it's a time for regurgitation, plus it takes up too much class time. So I thought I could have them write reflections, and because I wanted to capture the visual feature of the activity, I thought I would give Instagram a try.