

May's Infobase Visual Literacy Lab: I Spy with My Little (Human) Eye

I Spy with My Little (Human) Eye puts two versions of a real historical image side by side—one original, one generated by AI—and asks readers to figure out which is which. The front walks them through a set of visual clues to help them slow down and actually look: at the edges, the lighting, the textures, the details that are almost right but not quite. They make their call, explain their reasoning, and then flip it over to see if they cracked it.

How It Works:

Thinkers study both images and work through the I Spy clues, circling the details that tip them off. Once they've made their call, they record their reasoning in the I Spy... Therefore I Think section—then flip it over to see if they got it right, read the real history behind the photograph, and explore the Infobase resources to dig deeper into the story.

Set Up:

Print front and back and laminate them—these are meant to be grabbed, studied, and argued over. Leave them out, or keep a pile on hand for anyone who's convinced they can easily spot a fake.

This Month's Visual Literacy Printable:

Lunch Atop a Skyscraper, 1932—eleven ironworkers eating lunch on a steel beam 850 feet above the streets of New York City, with no safety harnesses in sight.



I Spy with My Little Human Eye... Lunch Atop a Skyscraper

Somewhere in these two images is a very convincing lie. Work through the I Spy clues below, circle the fake, and head to the I Spy...Therefore I Think section to explain how you figured it out.



See something suspicious? Circle it!

I Spy... These Red Flags

- ✓ **Hands Full of the Future:** Look at what each worker is holding. Is it a 1932 lunch, or something that belongs in your backpack today?
- ✓ **A Skyline from a Storybook:** Are those real New York buildings, or something out of a fairytale?
- ✓ **Plane as Day:** Is that a 1932 sky, or did someone's vacation flight photobomb the shot?
- ✓ **Logos That Lie:** Peek at the packaging in their hands. Is that a 1932 lunch wrapper, or something you'd grab at the food court?
- ✓ **Smooth Operator:** Squint, then zoom in. Does it look grainy and worn like a real 1932 photo, or weirdly smooth once you get close?

I Spy... Therefore I Think

You've studied the evidence, now make your call. Which image is the fake, and what gave it away?

I Spy... The Truth

Lunch Atop a Skyscraper is one of the most famous photographs ever taken—eleven ironworkers eating lunch on a steel beam 850 feet above the streets of New York City, with no safety harnesses in sight. It was taken on September 20, 1932, during the construction of the RCA Building (now 30 Rockefeller Plaza). The photo was a publicity shot meant to promote the new skyscraper, but the workers were real, the beam was real, and the height was real. It's one of the most jaw-dropping real photographs in American history, which is exactly what makes this one tricky.



Here's What a Trained Human Eye Catches

File B is the AI image. The giveaways most people catch first are the modern devices in the workers' hands—an iPhone, a Nintendo Switch, an iPad, a Kindle, and a McDonald's bag, none of which existed in 1932. Look up and you'll spot a passenger jet cruising over Manhattan decades before commercial aviation took off.

The skyline is the biggest tell of all with floating fortresses, fairytale spires, and crystal towers that replace what should be 1932 New York. Zoom in close and the texture gives it away too—the image looks grainy from far away, but up close it's strangely smooth, like every imperfection has been polished out. The real photograph is rougher, simpler, and somehow more unbelievable. Eleven men, one steel beam, 850 feet of air below—and no AI needed to make it dramatic.

Keep Investigating

The men in this photo were part of a much bigger story—one of skyscrapers rising, cities transforming, and workers risking their lives to build the modern world. Dig deeper into the Industrial Revolution, the rise of American cities, and the dangerous conditions laborers endured using the Infobase resources below.



Impacts of the Industrial Revolution

Step into the factories, streets, and skylines of the Industrial Revolution—a time of dangerous workdays, child labor, and cities choking on their own smoke. This program traces how protests and new laws began to change things, and why some of those same fights are still going on today.

1. Login to the Infobase database, “History Center”
2. Type the following URL into your browser's search bar: <https://bit.ly/3QXpXDr>

