

2.2. Iconic Aspects of a Text:

The founder of Semiotics De Saussure suggested that there are two types of signs such as **iconic** and **symbolic**.

2.2.1. Iconic Sign/ Icon:

It is the direct picture of what it refers to. Icons always bear resemblance to their referent.

Examples:

- A photograph is an iconic sign.
- A silhouette of a female or a male on a restroom door.

- **2.2.2. Indexical Sign/ Index:**

- It is a partial representative sample of its referent. It is not arbitrary because the referent is the cause of its index.

- **Examples:**

- Smoke is an index of fire
- The track of an animal is an index of the existence of an animal.

- **2.2.3. Symbolic Sign:**

- It is not a picture of what is being referred to (referent), but a picture of something that we associate with the referent.

- **Examples:**

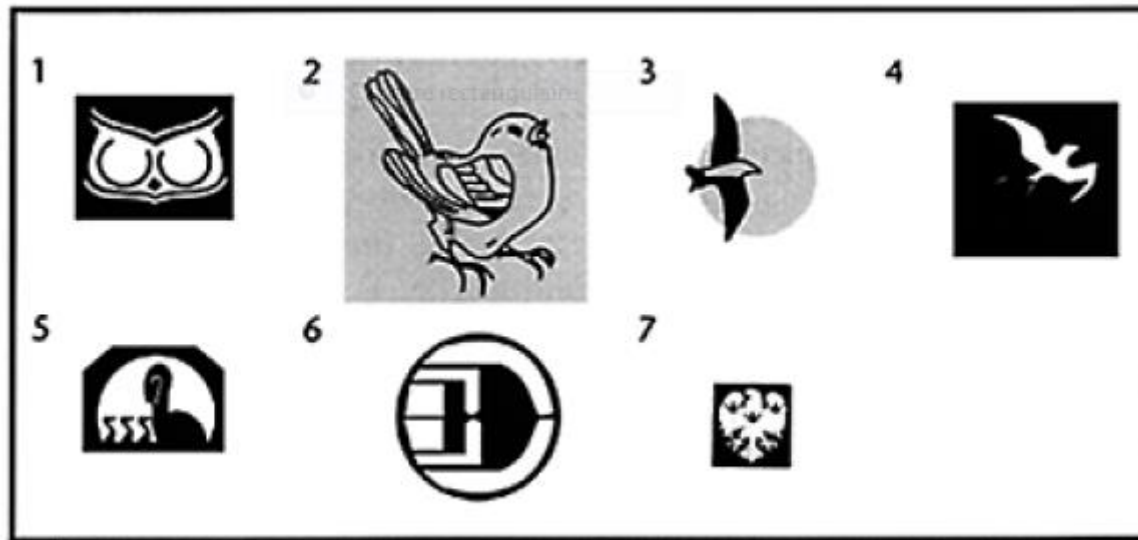
- Traffic lights are symbolic signs.
- The dove is a symbol of peace.

- The olive branch used to be a symbol of peace and victory in ancient Greece and has become associated with peace in the Mediterranean basin in modern world.
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- The raven symbolises death and doom in Western culture.
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- Symbolic icons are culture-bound because their meaning depends on the culture they belong to. For example, the colour white is associated with celebrations in the Arab world while it is a colour of mourning in India. Some of the symbolic signs become universal with time.
- **Time to React!**
- Study the following signs:
 - Identify the iconic and the symbolic ones.
 - What are the associations that symbolic signs make?



- **Key:**
 - All the signs are iconic except the sign for school which is symbolic.
 - The sign used for school does not represent the school, it symbolises it. The torch is usually used on public statues to symbolise 'enlightenment' and carries classical ideas of shedding the light of knowledge on dark places.
- **2.2.4. "A Picture Paints a Thousand Words"**
- **2.2.4.1. Logos:**
 - Some symbols have strong associations in the minds of the receivers which make them become logos for brands or appear in the language of advertisement which is known to be very manipulative.

Text: Bird images



1. Owl 2. Sparrow 3. Seagull 4. Swallow
5. Pelicans and chicks 6.=4 7. Eagle

- The previous bird images are used as logos with the advertisements of different goods and services. Although they are all bird images, each one of them brings different associations to the receivers' minds as explained below:
- **1- Owl:** used to advertise children's reading clubs in a local newspaper because the owl is regarded in children's literature as the wise old kind owl.
- **2- Sparrow:** Used as a logo of a local newspaper which aims to be associated with the bird's character which is bold and inquisitive.
- **3- Seagull:** Used by a holiday company to evoke the atmosphere of rest and leisure time.
- **4- Swallow:** Used by a futon company to make receivers have associations with elegance, freedom and oriental art since the futon is Japanese.
- **5- Pelicans and chicks:** Used by an insurance company to symbolise security and protection (It is known that pelican pecks out its own feathers to line the nest for its chicks)

- **6- Swallow:** Used by an airline company to suggest power and man-made speed as the image of the bird is mechanistic
- **7- Eagle:** Used by a bank to symbolise powerful institutions with extensive resources.
- Usually, receivers do not consciously analyse logos, they think of the associations brought by their images.
- **2.2.4.2. Images:**

Every image is constructed because image makers produce representations of reality.

In a time of technological development, a photograph is no longer regarded as a faithful representation of reality. The change in light effects, the distance of the subject, the angle and the position (centre or off-centre) play a prominent role in the design of an image being a photograph or an illustration.

As receivers of images, we need to think of three criteria for visual criticism:

1. The Visual Content: What/Who? :

- Who/what is in the image?
- What do I see?
- What is not seen?

2. Representation How? :

- How is the content represented?
- Shots/ Eye contact/ Angle/ Light/ Colour

3. Context: Where?

- In which context is the image used (textual, political, and social)?
- What is the text's purpose?

(Adapted from Doing Critical Literacy, 2014)