

picture this

75 colour photographs for conversation and reflection



Innovative
Resources

*‘Photographs may be more memorable than moving images,
because they are a neat slice of time ...*

*Each still photograph is a privileged moment turned into a slim
object that one can keep and look at again.’*

Susan Sontag

picture this

75 colour photographs for conversation and reflection



Booklet

Russell Deal

Photography and Design

Brent Seamer



Innovative
Resources



First published in 2007, reprinted in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2017 and 2019 by:
St Luke's Innovative Resources
62 Collins Street KANGAROO FLAT
Victoria 3555 Australia

Ph: 03 5446 0500 Fax: 03 5447 2099
Email: info@innovativeresources.org
www.innovativeresources.org
ABN: 97 397 067 466

Anglicare Victoria trading as St Luke's Innovative Resources

© St Luke's Innovative Resources 2007

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the publisher.

ISBN: 978 1 920945 27 5

St Luke's Innovative Resources acknowledges the Jaara people of Dja Dja Wurrung country, the traditional custodians of the land upon which our premises are located and where our resources are developed and published. We pay our respects to the elders—past, present and future—for they hold the memories, traditions, cultures and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and other First Nations peoples. We must remember that underneath this earth, upon which we so firmly stand, this is, was and always will be, the traditional land of First Nations peoples.

Contents

Introduction	2
Thinking about visual literacy	4
Thinking about the power of photos	6
The complete set of photographs	8
Using <i>Picture This</i>	14
Questions for building conversational pathways	16
Questions for creative writing	20
Picturing other resources	21
About St Luke's Innovative Resources	22



Introduction

Any booklet about the uses of photography as an example of visual communication should, by definition, be brief. Accordingly, this booklet makes no attempt to condense the millions of words of scholarship written about visual literacy, semiotics, phototherapy or visual metaphor.

We trust the power of the photos to do their own talking. We trust the creativity of the reader to enjoy their beauty and savour their meaning.

The aim of this booklet is to present the **75** intriguing images that make up the *Picture This* set with some suggestions about how they might be used to build conversations of reflection, hope and change.

Our suggestions, questions and activities are designed to spark the imagination of the user by suggesting a range of applications and possibilities. Above all, we value people's own assessments as to what activities may be useful, appropriate and respectful in their particular situations.

The photographs that make up *Picture This* are snapshots of everyday life. If anything, they can be likened to mirrors that reflect who we are – our playfulness, soulfulness, aspirations, dreams, struggles, disappointments and joys.

Some of the photos may be experienced as wistful, some as mundane and perhaps some as challenging—even chilling. Together, they can represent a tapestry of human life.



Since its inception Innovative Resources has had a fascination with the potential of visual imagery to transform lives. Innovative Resources grew out of the world of social work where words, both written and oral, tend to have prominence. Social workers, psychologists, educators and counsellors all do a lot of talking, and many tend to write in ways that are highly codified and removed from the potency of storytelling and poetry.

One of the earliest learnings we stumbled upon as an embryonic social work publisher was the capacity of illustration to augment the power of words and to express things that may be beyond the scope of words alone. Our first publication, *Strength Cards*, still in print more than 25 years later, is a simple set of cards, each with an illustration and a single word that identifies a ‘strength’.

Picture This contains evocative, interpretive photographs that can be used with individuals and groups. While the photographs capture specific situations and events, they can be used to reflect on universal themes; the images tend to take on the power of symbol.

We believe that *Picture This*, with its contemporary nature and the beauty and poignancy of Brent Seamer’s photography, will readily find a place in the tool kits of human service workers and educators who know: ‘often, words alone are not enough’.

Enjoy *Picture This* for the slices of time and fragments of meaning it offers.



Thinking about visual literacy

'Photography is a fad well nigh on its last legs thanks largely to the bicycle craze.'

Alfred Steiglitz



All the diverse approaches to visual literacy and visual communication pay homage to the adage 'A picture is worth a thousand words'. From the advertising industry to film and cinema critics, from political spin doctors to social media strategists, we are bombarded with pictures with a message.

However, human service professionals do not tend to use visual imagery. Despite the proliferation of creative arts approaches to counselling and therapy, so much of psychotherapeutic discourse is word-dominated. Words may well always remain the primary tool in our toolkit of skills, but the continuing lack of complementary visual materials suggests a deification of words to the detriment of visual communication techniques.

The implication of this for therapists is not simply the acceptance of inefficiency but the perpetuation of professional privilege. Put simply, the over-reliance on linguistic interaction (i.e. words) can disadvantage and colonise those whose preferred way of interacting with the words is visual.

Howard Gardner and others writing about multiple intelligences argue that predominantly white Western societies over-emphasise the value of linguistic intelligence to the detriment of those who may possess and prefer other intelligences such as spatial intelligence.

Therapists might generally be regarded as wordsmiths with high linguistic intelligence but many of their clients may not be. To disregard this dissonance lays these professionals open to charges of elitism and injustice. Thus, the use of multimedia and visual imagery in particular can be claimed to be a moral issue as well as an issue of efficacy.

Judy Weiser, a Canadian psychologist and photographer, has played a seminal role in exploring the multiple uses of photography in psychotherapy. She writes:

We can be certain that for most people the world is perceived and evaluated through a visual literacy far more complex than words could ever fully define or represent.

Judy Weiser, *PhotoTherapy Techniques*, PhotoTherapy Centre, Canada, 1999, p343

Picture This represents but one example in a growing pantheon of hands-on tools or artifacts. It attempts to redress the imbalance created by a traditional over-reliance on linguistic tools by providing a visual, tactile resource that is readily accessible to a wide range of human service workers and their clients, customers or students.



Thinking about the power of photos

'A good snapshot stops a moment from running away.'

Endora Welty



As a source of visual communication, photographs have a power and a resonance that are different from other visual media. Judy Weiser argues that any counselling techniques require grounding in perception and communication. Spoken or written language is frequently only an approximation of what is really inside us; words can never completely convey the totality of what is intended or comprehended.

She says:

I believe that most humans think, feel and recall memories not in direct words, but in iconic imagery, thought, pictures and visual concepts that comprise the cognitive maps that we try to encompass in our spoken or written representations, but that our words can never describe.

Judy Weiser, *PhotoTherapy Techniques*, PhotoTherapy Centre, Canada, 1999, p343

Weiser reserves the term 'phototherapy' to refer to strategies that incorporate the client as photographer; actively framing their world through a camera lens, and using these photographs as key elements in the therapeutic conversation. While the emphasis of Weiser's phototherapy is on the active doing of photography to create personal artifacts, she joins many others in acknowledging the therapeutic value of responding to other people's photographs.

When we look at photos, ours or other peoples, we respond to them, and regardless of any intentions we might have to the contrary we now verbally interact with them as well. Thus we actively take part in the meaning we perceive...and we subconsciously take the meanings we need at that time emotionally.

Judy Weiser, *PhotoTherapy Techniques*, PhotoTherapy Centre, Canada, 1999, p343

All metaphors act as short cuts to meaning and change. Photography, as visual metaphor, can carry worlds of meaning unapproachable through words alone, and in so doing can evoke emotional responses that can be surprising in both rapidity and power. Or as we often say in our workshops, with visual metaphors you don't have to scratch very hard or deep for profound meaning and powerful feelings to be let free.

And photos work differently from other visual imagery. In the words of John Berger:

All photographs are there to remind us of what we forget. In this, as in other ways, they are the opposite of paintings. Paintings record what the painter remembers, because each one of us forgets different things, a photo, more than a painting, may change its meaning according to who is looking at it.

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, Penguin Books, England, 1972, p76

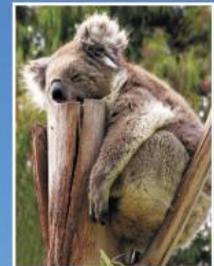
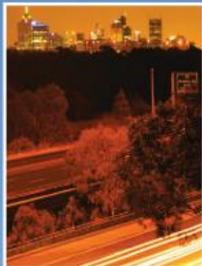
Photography retains a particular way of grabbing the attention of the observer. As American photographer Ansel Adams said: 'There are always two people in every picture: The photographer and the viewer'. As we place ourselves in the picture, we project our own experience onto photos.

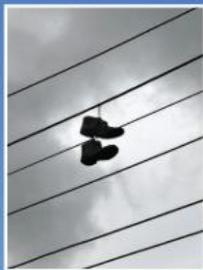
Being able to interpret photographs in accordance with our experience can be liberating in several ways. Firstly, a client's interpretation, by definition, is right for them, which, in itself, can be empowering. Equally, recognising that our responses to a photo can vary significantly over time can provide powerful learnings about how we actively construct meaning in an on-going way. Finally, meaning can be shaped by the questions or 'selection criteria' we might use to engage with photos. Making choices from a range of photos and adding layers of comparison can elicit a broad range of values, beliefs, emotions and stories.

The complete set of photographs

*‘Photographs may be more memorable than moving images, because they are a neat slice of time ...
Each still photograph is a privileged moment turned into a slim object that one can keep and look at again.’*

Susan Sontag

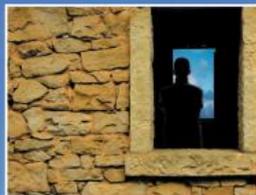




'I think a photography class should be a requirement in all educational programs because it makes you see the world rather than just look at it.'

Anon

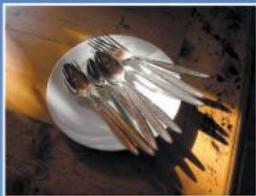
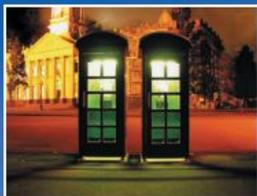




*‘The camera is an instrument of detection.
We photograph not only what we know, but also what we don’t know.’*

Lisette Model





Using *Picture This*

‘There are always two people in every picture: the photographer and the viewer.’

Ansel Adams

Since its earliest origins, photography has proved to be a powerful catalyst for conversation-building. As photographic technology and approaches to psychotherapy have developed, a broad spectrum of ways in which photography can be used in counselling have evolved.

Picture This is:

- simple: a set of 75 photographs that can be used separately, as a whole, or by selecting sub-sets.
- accessible: photography is ubiquitous; it’s everywhere and few, if any, cultures today would not be exposed to photos.
- immediate: as a conversation-building tool, *Picture This* needs minimal introduction. It does not require a process of photo creation or gathering, nor any training in using it.
- versatile: *Picture This* can be used with individuals, groups and teams. It does not require literacy or fluency in English. It can be used by people of any age, in just about any physical setting.



Like any hands-on tool *Picture This* should be used with care. Photos with this sort of metaphoric content can evoke strong emotions. How any tool is introduced, the timing of it, the level of trust and openness that exists between participants and the emotional and physical tiredness of those participants will all have a bearing on how useful any tool is perceived to be.

The following checklist of questions can be considered before introducing any hands-on tool into conversation-building or critical reflection:

- **Curiosity**
 - What am I curious about?
 - What would I like to know or discover?
 - What are the unknowns in this situation?
- **Creativity**
 - Am I at my creative best?
 - Are my senses alert?
 - Am I relaxed, open and excited by the proposed activity?
- **Purpose**
 - Are my goals clear?
 - Do I know what I want to achieve?
 - Is my purpose clear to others?
- **Respect**
 - Am I comfortable with the values I am enacting?
 - Do I recognise, value and reinforce the strengths, skills and resources of those with whom I am using the tools?
 - Have I done all I can to ensure that the tools I use are culturally-relevant and respectful?
 - Have I considered people's confidentiality?
 - Is it the right time and setting for the participants?
 - Can everyone in the group be respectfully included?
 - How can I ensure that no one in the group is pressured to participate?

- **Passion**

- Do I believe in what I am doing?
- Am I excited about working with these people?
- Am I excited about using this tool?

- **Imagination**

- Can I imagine this tool making a difference?
- Can I imagine all participants (including myself) learning from the activity?

As with any tool, *Picture This* is certainly not a panacea. It does not come with any guarantee that it will be found useful. If it doesn't work with any perceived success, this in itself may be a useful discovery about the dynamics of the tool, the group, the facilitator and the setting. Our sincere hope is that none of our tools will cause harm, but, of course, this depends on the discernment of the facilitator.

In the words of Scruffy the Tugboat (from one of the Little Golden Books): 'There is no start and no finish to the sea.' Conversational pathways are like that. There is no clear starting place and an endless array of possible questions. If you set sail with *Picture This*, however, the sea may not be as daunting as it was to Scruffy—hopefully this booklet—and most of all, your own creative imagination—will provide you with some maps, stars and landmarks for guidance on your conversational journey.

Questions for building conversational pathways

*‘Once you really commence to see things,
then you really commence to feel things.’*

Edward Steichen



Picture This, like other card sets published by Innovative Resources, uses visual imagery to create ‘conversational prompts’. Such prompts can help steer conversations in the directions suggested by our purpose, passion, curiosity and creativity.

Any visual metaphor (such as the 75 *Picture This* photos) can contain meaning—humour, poignancy, provocation, soulfulness, intrigue—by themselves, without the input of words. But when used therapeutically, most often it is the interplay (the dance) between the image and our questions that creates the magical conversation-building spark. By combining visual imagery with well-chosen words, especially questions, there can be a dynamic mix that magnifies the power of both elements.

There is, of course, no limit to the number of potential questions and no recipe that will guarantee the ‘right’ match between question and image. However, we don’t judge conversations by standards of perfection. Rather, it is more likely to be usefulness by which we evaluate any conversational intervention. It is the insight and creativity of the user or facilitator that will determine relevance, timeliness, cultural appropriateness and so on.

Some interesting questions to build around *Picture This* are listed below. Some might be considered ice-breakers; useful in the early stages of engagement with an individual or group. Some will be out of left field; seemingly unconventional but perhaps vital for overcoming the grip of 'stuckness'. Some demand a solid, trusting relationship; some are reflective; and some invite memories, reviews of events and movements towards change.

Finally, some questions are more oriented to one-on-one conversations while others lend themselves easily to group discussions. Generally, these questions are designed to be asked as participants scan all the cards, which have been spread out on a table or on the floor.



Questions for building conversational pathways (Continued)

An alternative method to spreading and scanning is building on serendipitous connections. Cards can be shuffled into a pack face down and one or more cards chosen at random with similar questions asked of those particular cards. At times, these serendipitous connections can be surprising and enlightening.

- Can you choose a photo that says something about you as a person?
- Which photos would your family, friends or loved ones say typified you or reflected your personality?
- Is there a particular photo that resonates with you? Can you say why?
- Is there a photo that challenges you or makes you feel uncomfortable? Can you say why?
- Is there a photo that represents how you feel about your situation at present?
- Can you say what it is in these photos that ‘speaks’ to you; a detail, the composition, the colour, the people, the background, the time of day?
- Is there anything in the photo you would change, if you could?
- If you were to put yourself in any of the photos which ones would they be? Would you be sitting or standing? What would you be wearing? What would you be doing?
- If you were in one of the photos, who do you imagine would be behind the camera?
- Are there two photos that describe contrasting parts of yourself; for example, your private self and your public self?
- Which photos remind you of your strengths and the strengths of others?
- Can you select photos to represent the blessings in your life? The times of joy and enchantment?
- Does one photo reflect that part of you that you are comfortable with as compared to a ‘shadow side’ that emerges occasionally?
- Is there a series of photos that sums up your life journey?
- Are there photos that represent your childhood or adolescence?
- Are there photos that allude to significant times of change and transition in your life?
- Are there photos that say something about your ‘picture of the future’?
- Which photos remind you of things lost; people, places, pets, abilities, treasures...?
- Are there any photos that you would choose to display in your home or workplace?
- Is there a photo that you would like your loved ones to associate with their memories of you?
- Can you choose a photo that you would like to give someone as a ‘blessing’ or as good wishes for them?

Another whole set of questions can be built around imagining the experience of the photographer:

- What is your picture of the photographer—young or old? patient or impetuous? detached from, or emotionally engaged with, the subject?
- Why do you think the photographer took this particular photo?
- What do you think the photographer is trying to communicate, if anything?
- What else can you imagine that the photographer saw just outside the frame?

Finally, if serendipitous or random choice selections are made, some interesting questions might include:

- What relevance, if any, do these cards have for you at present?
- Can you see any connections between the cards you have randomly selected?
- Is there anything that surprises you in the cards you have chosen?
- Would you like to replace one and select another at random?
- Do any of these cards suggest something meaningful for you?



Questions for creative writing

‘When words become unclear, I shall focus with photographs. When images become inadequate, I shall be content with silence.’

Ansell Adams

Words, photographs and silence—a powerful trinity of tools for reflection and creativity. As Adams suggests these tools are complementary. For the creative writer—whether of fiction, poetry, short stories, micro-stories, nano-stories, biography, autobiography, journalling or non-fiction—sometimes it can be a photo that provides the vital spark.

Picture This may contain that kernel of an idea that eludes the writer using words alone for inspiration. Great wordsmiths create pictures with words. Sometimes pictures can create great wordsmiths.

In workshops, we often ask participants to choose a picture from one of the Innovative Resources card sets that speaks to them in some way. For example, perhaps it reminds them of a situation they have encountered sometime in their professional life. Having selected such a card, sometimes they will not know why. They can then be invited to write about the picture for seven to ten minutes.

The results can be staggering in their beauty and poignancy. Magical stories can be written in seven minutes if the right prompt can be found.

The technique of viewing the *Picture This* collection and choosing one or more cards can work as a prompt for any form of creative writing. For people who are just discovering or rediscovering the therapeutic power of creative writing, it can be particularly useful to have some evocative starters.

An alternative to scanning and choosing a card according to a question of interest is the random selection of a card. In this case all the cards can be turned face down and one turned over. Alternatively, one person in the group can ‘deal’ several cards face down to each participant. The following questions can then be considered:

- What is the story behind this card?
- What has just happened?
- What is about to happen?
- Who are the main characters in this story?
- Are they pictured in the photograph or are they out of view?
- Is it full of humour? pathos? tragedy?
- Is it a murder mystery? a sitcom? a documentary? a film? a scene from a stand-up comedy routine?
- What are the main themes in this story?
- Can you write an imaginary dialogue to go with this scene?
- What music would accompany this scene if it were part of a movie?

Picturing other resources

Many of our ‘seriously optimistic’ therapeutic materials can be used conjointly to expand the array of possibilities for each tool. Here are some examples of other card sets that have considerable affinity with *Picture This*.

Signposts: Exploring everyday spirituality

Another evocative set of 48 photos from the studio of Brent Seamer. Each photo is accompanied by a short phrase that encapsulates an element of the human experience. In this card set the minimalist words work in harmony with the glorious photography to create a resource to revitalise the human spirit.



Next Steps: 52 full-colour photographs

When it comes to achieving big goals, it's the small steps that count. Simple, practical steps such as doing the dishes, writing a list, calling someone, making an appointment, can be profound and even life-changing. They are often the best way to gather momentum when we are feeling stuck. Use these full-colour photographs of everyday objects and activities to identify one or more achievable steps to take now, today, tomorrow or this week.



Symbols: 100 hand-drawn symbols



The *Symbols* cards feature such iconic images as a star, a chair, a candle, a cloud or... These simple pictures are visual metaphors containing layers of meaning. The *Symbols* cards can be physically laid alongside *Picture This* cards to build meaning or describe the content and potency of the *Picture This* images.

PaperWorks: For writing, drawing and recording



PaperWorks is a set of 12 photocopiable masters featuring simple line drawings of everyday objects including a light globe (What's your bright idea?), taxi (Where you are heading?), torch (What do you want to shine a light on?) and welcome mat (What do you want to welcome into your life?). Each master includes space for writing or drawing and three questions that can be used to initiate conversations. Also available as a PDF.

About St Luke's Innovative Resources

A photograph is memory in the raw.

Carrie Latet

Innovative Resources is part of Anglicare Victoria, one of Australia's leading community service organisations. Anglicare Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation providing a range of child, youth, family and community services throughout Victoria and New South Wales.

our publishing

Innovative Resources publishes card sets, stickers, books, picture books, digital and tactile materials to enrich conversations about feelings, strengths, relationships, stories and goals. Our resources bring colour and creativity to therapeutic and educational settings all over the world. They are used by counsellors, teachers, trainers, social workers, managers, mentors, parents, teams, supervisors ... and anyone who works with people to create positive change.



our training

Innovative Resources also offers highly-engaging training in 'strengths-based' approaches to working with people where change arises out of a focus on strengths, respect and hopeful possibilities. We also offer 'tools' workshops on ways of using our resources to invigorate human service work. Our workshops honour different learning styles and the power of visual images to open up storytelling and other ways to truly connect with children and adults alike.

www.innovativeresources.org



‘One hundred tellings are not as good as one seeing.’

Chinese Proverb

Photographs have a unique ability to stimulate the imagination, memory and emotions. They can be powerful catalysts for storytelling, writing and reflection about our values and priorities—and changes that we want to bring into our lives.

Picture This is a set of 75 full-colour, original photographs capturing different aspects of our journey through life: the mundane, the whimsical, the soulful, the playful, the challenging, the imaginative, the chilling and the joyful. With photography by Brent Seamer and other Australian colleagues, these powerful pictures give us slices of both urban and rural landscapes. They are evocative invitations to the observer to make them meaningful in their own way.

Picture This will be used in schools, workshops, teams, communities, organisations and in counselling sessions. Together with a comprehensive booklet of suggested uses and questions for getting conversations started, this card set will take its place as an essential component in the ‘toolkits’ of those who wish to work creatively with others.



Innovative
Resources

www.innovativeresources.org