Images are a good way to understand writing.

Stage 1
Describe the image:
What do you see?

Examples of questions to ask:
- What is the subject matter?
- Who is involved?
- What is happening in the picture?
- What objects can you identify?

Patently describe all the elements you can identify to see if you interpret them in the next stage.

Stage 2
Analyze the image: what does it mean?

- How do the objects, emotions, symbols, and the objects mean?
- What is the context?
- How does it relate to society?
- What historical event is it related to?
- Who was Charlotte Corday?
- What is the title of it?

- Analytical writing

Stage 3
Reveal the image: what do you know?

- Analytical writing

- Academic writing

By including a range of heavily symbolic items in the painting, E.M. Ward, an Eighteenth-century creator, presents an argument while interpreting these objects as symbols of virility, hypocrisy, and death.

Descriptive writing

The central focus of this black and white engraving is Charles Corday sitting in a prison cell, a seemingly unlikely place for a beautiful woman like that. She is clad in an elegant white dress, which stands out in the darkness of the surroundings creating a jarring and intriguing portrait that evokes threatened innocence and virtue. Her hands are clasped on her knee, implying modesty and anxiety. A man in a capital, reminiscent of a prison guard, is looking down on the easel; his right hand is cutting her hair - a symbol of her femininity - while she's looking longingly at a painting on the wall to her left. She is wearing a headdress and her eyes look alert, creating an impression of determination in the face of adversity. An artist is watching her, perhaps looking for approval of her portrait, as she is packing up his paints on the table. Other objects in the cell include a palette knife in the right hand corner, which hints at a possible crime Corday committed, and a quill pen on the left that symbolises the power of written word, as well as a heap of dark fabric at the foot of the woman.

Analytical writing

Since the 1980s, women's subversion has been considered to be a response to the contemporary negative representations of her as an unattired, embittered and man-hating militant (Gullikson, 2014). The positioning of her body, with hands clasped on her knee, strongly implies modesty and anxiety, while her long, wavy and slightly exaggerated mane represents vulnerable femininity. A man in a liberty cap - a Roman symbol of freedom (Erichsen, 1987) that was popular in mid-nineteenth-century - is just about to cut this in, thus taking away her innocence and beauty. The shearing is a humiliating ritual and her averted eyes seem alert. The artist's juxtaposition of Corday's good looks and her shearer's crusty treatment creates her expression of determination in the face of indignity, resulting in the viewers' sympathy for the victim.

The mood of the painting is somber and anticipating as Corday will soon be walled off her execution at the guillotine, the preferred method of decapitating the enemies of state during the Reign of Terror in Revolutionary France (Croker, 1836). While being prepared through her ‘last toile’, Corday is looking longingly at a painting on the easel to her left. The artist whom she requested to paint her portrait, possibly Jean Jacque Helle (Gallot, 2004), is packing up his paints on the table and waiting for her approval of the portrait. This is perhaps Ward's indirect way of asking his own audience for an approval of his work, as he followed in the footsteps of many other artists who were fascinated with Corday. For Corday, her political art, Corday became a mythical figure, a symbol of the French Revolution, to which visual representations such as this one significantly contribute (Hilger, 2010, p. 71).

Task: Working with the image below, follow the 3 stages of analysis in order to produce an academic piece of writing.

Developing ideas into paragraphs: an example, c.700 words

Charlotte Corday has fascinated artists for over two centuries, becoming a subject of not only multiple paintings, engravings and cheap illustrations but also plays, novels, short stories and historical narratives (Kendigbeer, 1994, p.971). These portrayals vary greatly in terms of the sympathies expressed by their creators – from artists presenting Corday as an unattirable madwoman to those heralding her as a revolutionary heroine. The black and white engraving produced by E.M. Ward and discovered as part of a unique portrayal of this assassin of the French revolutionary Jean-Paul Marat during the terror stage of the French Revolution (1793), Corday quickly became a subject of not only multiple paintings, engravings and cheap illustrations but also plays, novels, short stories and historical narratives (Kendigbeer, 1994, p.971).

In this representation, she is clad in an elegant white dress, which stands out in the darkness of the surroundings creating a jarring and intriguing portrait that evokes threatened innocence and virtue, which her post mortem confirmed much to the chagrin of her critics (Gellart, 2004, p.205). Her hands are clasped on her knee, implying modesty and anxiety. A man in a cap (perhaps looking for approval of his portrait, as he is packing up his paints on the table. Other objects in the cell include a palette knife in the right hand corner, which hints at a possible crime Corday committed, and a quill pen on the left that symbolises the power of written word, as well as a heap of dark fabric at the foot of the woman.

The mood is somber and anticipating as she will soon be walled off to her execution.

Academic (critical) writing

The central focus of this black and white engraving is Charlotte Corday sitting in a prison cell, a seemingly unlikely place for a beautiful woman like that. Created by E.M. Ward, an Eighteenth-century artist and illustrator, and published in London in 1869 (The British Museum), seven decades after her tragic death. The image’s central focus is Corday herself, sitting in a dark prison cell, a seemingly unlikely place for a beautiful woman like that. She is clad in an elegant white dress, which stands out in the darkness of the surroundings creating a jarring and intriguing portrait that evokes threatened innocence and virtue, which her post mortem confirmed much to the chagrin of her critics (Gellart, 2004, p.205). Her hands are clasped on her knee, implying modesty and anxiety. A man in a cap (perhaps looking for approval of his portrait, as he is packing up his paints on the table. Other objects in the cell include a palette knife in the right hand corner, which hints at a possible crime Corday committed, and a quill pen on the left that symbolises the power of written word, as well as a heap of dark fabric at the foot of the woman.

The mood is somber and anticipating as she will soon be walled off to her execution. This image serves as an example, c.700 words, to illustrate the three stages of analysis in order to produce an academic piece of writing.