



# I-WITNESS

## PROBLEM:

You were the principle crime scene investigator on a case two years ago. It is now time for you to testify in court about your findings. The defense attorney challenges the accuracy of your testimony and implies that your observational skills are not so great. If he can show the jury you are not good at spotting details, he might have chance of getting his client off.

It is often the case in real life situation that the credibility of expert witness testimony is challenged. The thoroughness with which they do their jobs is critical.

Can you prove your observational skills are excellent?

## ONLINE ACTIVITY:

This activity is available online at:

[http://forensics.rice.edu/html/picture\\_begin.html](http://forensics.rice.edu/html/picture_begin.html)

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

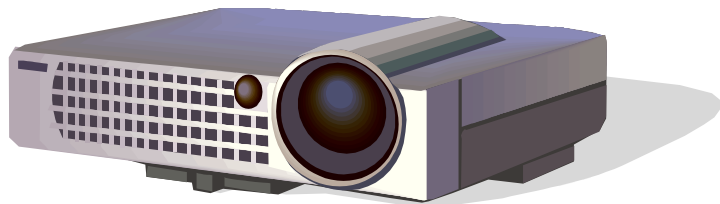
Show a photograph to the students for a set period of time (usually 30 seconds to a minute). Then remove the photograph and have them write down a description of the scene. Remind the students it is important to describe the overall appearance of the scene and as many details as they can remember. Some students may prefer to sketch the scene; others to make written descriptions.

## TEACHER NOTES:

The purpose of crime scene photography is to give a documented record of the scene as it is observed. \_ Everything\_ must be photographed, including overview shots of the entire scene, mid range pictures of important objects in context, and close-up shots of every piece of evidence (often from multiple angles and under various lighting conditions). In court the photographer testifies about the pictures, explaining to the jury their relevance to the case and pointing out the important parts of each photograph. As this testimony can occur weeks, months, or even years after the photos were taken, it is important for crime scene investigators to have a keen sense of observation and a very strong memory.

## MATERIALS:

Color copies or digital projections of an image.



## CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT:

This activity could be completed individually or in pairs. Pairs of students could compare notes to see how different people observe and remember different details. In addition, it may be interesting to have the students evaluate each other's descriptions before they see the photograph again. Scientific studies have shown that eye-witness descriptions can be altered simply by discussing what they remember, or being presented with opposing memories. As the students try to reconcile any differences in their descriptions they may actually move away from what was originally in the photograph.

## ALTERNATE VERSION:

Instead of having the students view a picture, you can also plan a classroom interruption for the students to view. Plan for a co-conspirator to create an unannounced scene in your classroom (a person searching for lost equipment, a visitor walks into the wrong classroom, etc.) Immediately afterwards, have the students write their own eye-witness accounts of what they saw. Have the students share their different accounts to see how they vary.