



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2008 Volume II: Storytelling: Fictional Narratives, Imaginary People, and the Reader's Real Life

Visualizing Myself Ten Years from Now

Curriculum Unit 08.02.09
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Introduction

This unit sets out to enrich my students, through the art of journalmaking, by helping to build a clearer understanding of themselves in their present lives and what they may hope to achieve in the future.

Although visualizing themselves in ten years is a challenging and important activity in any setting, I will be teaching my unit as part of the visual arts curriculum in the unique teaching environment of the Metropolitan Business Academy. At MBA, each department has a good deal of latitude to formulate its own curriculum. I have great freedom in designing my courses, so I try to create courses that will engage my students, integrate with elements of the business world, and enrich their lives personally. MBA is a New Haven magnet school serving one hundred and seventy-five students. Because it is a small urban school, three-quarters of the students are from the inner city and are chosen through a lottery process. The other quarter of our population are students from surrounding suburban areas that choose to come to MBA instead of attending their local public high school. Their parents are attracted to MBA due to its small size and the possibility of more one on one instruction. This selection process creates a more diverse community of students from a variety of different backgrounds. In our school, the student population is roughly two thirds black, and one third Latino, with a handful of white students. Each individual brings an extremely different set of experiences with him and her, creating a lively and challenging classroom dynamic.

Students are required to take one full credit of art. (some may combine art and physical education) The students who come through my doors have a staggering imbalance in their art education; some have strong art backgrounds and others haven't been in an art room for many years. I am forced to teach basic elements and principles of design to all my students so they will be prepared for the demands of my classes.

Rationale

“Visualizing Myself Ten Years from Now” is a unit with a mission. It aims at satisfying the ideals of the school which is to help encourage students to think ahead and prepare for a possible career in the business world, but on a more basic level it aims at building a greater level of self awareness and self confidence in our students.

The concept for this unit emerged from my teaching experience last year in a course called “Journals and Publications.” Last year I taught this course and assigned the making of individual journals as a series of self-help and visualization exercises. Once a student was pointed in the right direction, his journal would take on a life of its own. The best sign was when the student’s head was down and I could stand back and let the work take over. I could see how these journals clearly offered a quiet place from students’ stress filled lives. At the end of the semester when we were preparing to exhibit the journals in the Hall Gallery, I required that each student write a bio for himself which we posted above each journal. These turned out to be very lively descriptions of their present lives. Students who had shown no interest for the written text in their journals were suddenly opening their hearts and telling a story about themselves. It was then that I realized how much an integral part these bios were to the process of journalmaking. I handed out a questionnaire form which would help them with guided thinking about various responses concerning their roots, their interests and dreams, and those people closest to them.

The format for the first half of the journal is simple. Requirements include a “Name page” or a “Title page”. On this page the student name or journal name is included within a border design of his or her choosing. Next he presents his “ Bio page” (hopefully, a narrative, although there are many alternative possibilities). There may be a “Dedication” page for a major person in his life. If by this time the student hasn’t found a voice of his own to expand the journal, he can continue to follow a format to work on. One is called the “Friends and Family” page, and lastly the “Goals and Interests” page. In the first half of the journal, the student sets a personal preference for a formal or less formal style. Through text and graphics (which can include photos, drawings or cutouts), he conveys how he envisions himself or how he wants to be seen by others, Once he has appraised himself in his present world, he has fulfilled the requirement for the first half of the journal. He has provided the ground work for the second half of the journal. Last year I opened wide the creative possibilities in filling up the twenty pages of their journal. Students were free to extemporize. They worked with the required titles and chose what worked for them. But for the next school year when I present this new unit, I will ask students to limit themselves to filling the first ten pages of the journal with their present lives (choosing from the above titles), and leave the remaining ten pages for our new unit.

At this point we are ready to undertake the challenge called “Visualizing Myself Ten Years from Now”. By feeding their imaginations, the art of journalmaking will empower my students with new dreams for their futures. Furthermore, the simple act of envisioning themselves as they hope to be someday, is a powerful prerequisite to making it happen. The cavemen of Lascaux, France drew figures of bisons, horses and mammoths on the walls of their caves for the practical purpose of envisioning the animals they wanted to hunt for their food and clothing. They didn’t do this just for amusement or decoration, but because they thought that by painting pictures of these animals they were making it easier to hunt them. Of this we are reasonably sure because many of the paintings depict the beasts with spears in them; in other words they invested the pictures with magic powers. So too, can students through artful drawings, phrases and word, transform their own worlds through their imagination and begin to believe in the reality of their dreams.

Not everyone is capable of being a visionary. I will need to use other strategies for those who resist this imagination-oriented project, or those who may be harboring fears of looking ahead. In that case I will provide a variety of hands on art activities aimed at dispelling those fears. Those students need a happy blend of ingredients in order to find momentum and flow in working on their journals. I try to keep them motivated with the hope that they finally take ownership of something from all the tools I use. The tools to help motivate their imagination come in the way of films, art books, graphic novels, and art prints. They may learn that many of their ideas come from their roots. I also give them the freedom to select from a large range of media, subject matter, symbols, and ideas to create their new vision of themselves. More importantly, their goal will be to create a future vision for themselves, and perhaps a more optimistic one, which offers them a greater sense of self empowerment- artistically, imaginatively, and proactively.

Strategies

I plan to use a range of strategies that will convey information to my students. I try to teach every lesson to the wide diversity of learners in the class: auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. The variety of ways that I present material is an example of my effort to reach these different learners.

When students enter the class there is always a “to do” up on the board for them to begin once they enter class. The “do now” takes between three to five minutes. They may react to a piece of art hanging on the board by just describing it in six sentences. (What do they see in the picture?) It is a chance to focus them and get on to the review of what was covered in the previous class. This helps me lead into new material, or techniques, thus allowing students to connect the knowledge they are building on. Afterward, I may do a demonstration of what I’ve just discussed or explain what they will be working on. I will ask them to take me through the steps so they have a verbal understanding of what we’re doing.

If a new skill is extremely hard for them we will have a guided lesson. This means I hand out supplies and we do the process together, with students following my directions. The physical construction of the journals is one such lesson.

While students are working, I use a variety of strategies to monitor their progress so they can develop analytical and critical skills. I constantly walk around the room, looking at what they are doing and asking questions about what they are working on. If they question how to do something, I always answer them, “What do you think you should do?” I try to have them answer their own questions, or ask their neighbors.

One of my ways of communicating with them about their work is going to their journals or written work, and writing on sticky notes. This has been a successful way to praise them or suggest what their next step is. This is critical because every student works at a different pace. My response to their work is imperative because when they get their work back, they have an idea how to move on. Because I believe that the students are also each other’s best critics, I have used a means of evaluation that works well. They each get a sticky note. They are asked to exchange their journal with someone at the same table. Then I ask them to evaluate their friend’s journal for a variety of reasons. They all evaluate each other for the same reasons. Each lesson plan has a list of things to assess. Each one is a percentage of their grade for that project (see lesson plans). They are asked what works and what doesn’t work in their journal.

Lastly, and most importantly, I ask students to evaluate their own work. With each assignment, I ask the students to fill out a self evaluation. Their evaluation follows the same rubric that I use to determine their grade. Students are usually their own harshest critics and their grade for themselves is often less than what I would give them. So this helps me get an idea of their progress.

Classroom activities

Making a creative journal addressing the future calls for a spectacular visualization strategy. Viewing a Japanese animated adventure film by Hayao Miyazaki called “Spirited Away” or looking through graphic novels are ways to teach my students about communicating through their imaginations. In order to project them ten years into the future, they can see by the examples I show them how by using a metaphor for themselves in the form of a super-hero or a cartoon character, they can communicate their untold story effectively. The key then, is in finding the most effective symbol or metaphor to represent themselves.

Three lesson plans will be presented as necessary components of the unit. All three lessons help develop powers of visualization. The art of designing a logo, which reflects the future, is one of the important lessons presented here. We learn the purpose of logos and their value of signifying the students’ self image for the future. I ask them some things to consider:

“What message do you want to convey about yourself?”

“What symbol or letters or character shapes do you want to use to represent yourself?”

“How can you transfer your symbol into a black and white Linoleum Block Print?”

The technique of designing, cutting, and printing their own Logos will be a necessary part of a lesson called “Linoleum Block Logo Prints.” Last but not least we will make a rough draft or as they call it a “mock up” of the final journal. Students will be asked to plan the full ten pages and make the miniature rough copy (5 1/2” x 4”) as a guide for the finished journal. There will be choices they have to make for color, use of materials, style (formal or informal), what metaphor to use to represent themselves. And how will the writing be presented? Handwritten or typed on the computer?

Constructing a 6”x 6” x 6” three-dimensional, five sided UNI-cube out of cardboard will be the lesson to lead us into the unit. The student will choose what he wants to take with him into the future. He makes a thumbnail sketch, which will indicate how he pictures the interior of his cube. The three dimensionality of this project gives him wings and allows his imagination to soar.

Before I present the UNI-box lesson, I will introduce two particular artists whose work creates a different and distinct “sense of place.” The artists are Salvador Dali and Edward Hopper. While the landscapes of Dali are a

good example of a surrealistic dreamworld, those of Edward Hopper are perfect in their use of simplified planes against which figures are juxtaposed.

We will discuss the work of two artists whose graphic works are enhanced by writings or words. Joseph Cornell and Frida Kahlo are two such artists. Cornell's style of working stands in direct contrast to the artist Frida Kahlo. Each one drew from an inner world of imagination but Cornell's symbolism was mysterious and withdrawn, while Kahlo's was outspoken and bold. Two different personalities say things differently. Showing a film about Kahlo's life and a diary that she kept will enable the students to see the sources of her visual expression. Her life provides miraculous determination in the face of adversity. It stands as a powerful lesson for my students whose own success with this unit will transform any prospects of their own adversity into a powerful and positive statement. Their journals will represent their dreams and hopes for what lies ahead. Like Kahlo, the journals will be the place to go to. They can keep my students grounded by reminding them of those dreams.

On the other hand, Cornell's three-dimensional boxes filled with objects and memorabilia are often assemblages and collages, which represent the inner life of the artist. Each box is like a three dimensional diary of things that caught his fancy. Students are asked to recall the photos and memorabilia that they love. They are asked to bring in objects that they treasure for their journals. After looking at the work of Joseph Cornell we will create our own five sided cube which is filled with a vision of our future. This we call our "Unibox."

Lesson plan I

Time: One and a half hours.

Objectives

Students will construct an assemblage within a UNI-box. In it they project or forecast their future. Students will relate the three dimensional with the idea of looking ahead into their reality. Students will take ownership of this space in a way that will make it a personal space. Students will choose a color family that they will work with in their cube.

Materials

- 6"x6"cardboard squares (5 per student)
- masking tape
- assorted National Geographic magazines to cut up
- 12" rulers
- Travel Magazines
- brushes for glue

colored markers
fiskers scissors
wallpaper paste

Do Now

1. Students construct the Uni-box out of cardboard and tape.
2. Students view Joseph Cornell's box assemblages.
3. Students make a thumbnail sketch for the UNI-box. I ask them to draw the inside of a cube and fill it with an object, a landscape or a dream which will represent their future. They then choose three colors from the same color family. (ie. Red, yellow, orange)

Procedure

1. Students have a discussion about the box assemblages of Joseph Cornell.
2. Students name two things they will take with them for their UNI-box.
3. Students choose a color theme (three colors in the same family).
4. Students assemble the parts inside the UNI-box.
5. Students add color collage to their assemblage and add details that make it their own.

Closure (a written statement)

"How will my UNI-box empower me ten years from now?"

Assessment

1. Workmanship (33%)
2. Effective use of color to convey meaning (33%)
3. Does the UNI-box communicate the artist's intention? (33%)

Chalk talk and writings about ourselves

The class will have a motivational “chalk talk” in conjunction with the photographs of teenagers from the book, “One Hundred Young Americans” by Michael Franzini. Following it, there will be a discussion to open up their imagination by visualizing themselves “ten years from now.” This will take the form of a “chalk talk.” I will write a phrase on the board, “How do you see this boy ten years from now?” I will show a photo of a male teen whose mohawkish haircut is clearly that of a rebel. A student will raise his hand, answer the question with a written answer on the board, and give the chalk to someone else. When that round has gone full circle, the students can react to another photo. I will hand out paper for them to put down their visual judgment about themselves.

“How does my appearance inform others about me?”

“How does a person's appearance give us information about him?”

“How does my appearance now inform me what I will be like in the next ten years?”

If they are hesitant to write about themselves, I offer the opportunity to make a sketch or to write about someone in the class. Since the photos in the book are rich in color and detail, I have handed out copies of select photos of a variety of teenagers taken from a cross section of the United States. I will ask them to write or sketch something using the photos as an aid, or drawing from themselves. These writings will work hand in hand with the “Linoleum Block Logo Prints” which will be designed for Lesson two.

Lesson Plan II

Time: One and a half hours

Objectives

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Students will design, cut and print their own Logo Block prints. There are at least three separate learning parts to this lesson. Making the black and white (negative-positive space) design and relating the concept that what is black or positive space is the part of the design that is raised or a “relief” and does not need to be cut out from the linoleum block. That which is white in the design is negative space or “intaglio” and must be cut out of the linoleum block. The students will learn how to handle linoleum blockcutting tools. The students will learn how to roll out ink and handle printmaking materials properly. Students will also learn how to transfer the image onto a clean piece of paper.

Materials

- 4” x6” linoleum block pieces
- Tracing paper
- Printing inks (speedball)
- Pencils
- Linoleum cutting tools
- Ink rollers
- 12” x6” white paper
- Plexiglass plates (28” x20”)
- Paper towels & sponges for cleanup

Do Now

1. What message do you want to convey about yourself?
2. What symbol, letters, or shapes will you use to represent yourself?
3. Make a thumbnail sketch using pencil and paper and draw three possible logos (size 4” x6”)

Procedure

1. Pick one thumbnail sketch as your final choice. Use a permanent marker to outline and fill in black shapes.
2. Trace the 4" x6" logo BACKWARDS onto the linoleum piece.
3. Outline design on linoleum with marker and fill in lines and black shapes.
4. Cut out only WHITE shapes from linoleum.
5. Roll ink over plate and print. (go back and cut out more if the design is incomplete)

Assessment

1. Workmanship (33%)
2. Effective use of Black and White to convey meaning (33%)
3. Originality (33%)

Lesson Plan III

For Lesson Plan III, students will be asked to plan or make a mock-up of the ten pages of their journal. They will also be responsible to make a final presentation of the most successful parts of the unit until now which will be hung in the Hall Gallery. The idea of making a formal presentation is fully explained in a class discussion. They are required to mount five separate logo prints (one for hanging and the others to be part of the journal). Finally, they will be asked to assess their Logos, their UNI-box, and their journals.

Time: One and half-hours

Objectives

Students will make a mock-up or rough draft of the ten pages titled "Visualizing Myself Ten Years from now" (size 5 1/2" x 4"). The purpose of the mock-up is to serve as a quick means of planning the layout for the journals. Principles of good organization and layout are discussed. After they plan the layout for the mock up, they choose a color theme to use throughout the entire journal. Students are ready to work directly in the Journal Book (size 12" x 14") once these decisions have been made.

Materials

White paper (size 11" x 8")
Scissors and glue
Colored pencils and markers
Colored construction paper
Rulers
Tracing paper
Staplers

Do Now Suggestions

1. Students plan their first two-page spread using what ideas they gained from the UNI-cube project. What vehicle are you using in your journal as the key to what will empower you? Is it a "sense of place," "a superhero," or is it an object that will represent your future?
2. Students plan another set of pages using the logo prints as graphic decoration for the writing about what will empower them ten years from now.
3. Students decide the order of the journal: what will come first; what will follow; and what will close it. We review the principles of good layout and design.

Procedure

1. Students work with the rough draft alongside their journals.
2. Students spread out the materials and projects that they have so far completed. Three of these are: the logos, the UNI-box, and the writings and sketches of themselves.
3. Students need to arrange how these parts will come together in the journal.

Assessment

1. Continuity and flow (33%)
2. Originality and communication (33%)

3. A successful jump into the future (33%)

Journal Presentation

Once the journals are successfully completed we will present them in a group exhibit. I honor the wishes of those students who prefer not to share their personal writings and back out. We break up into two teams. One team will wrap the tables which will serve as a backdrop on which to lay out the journals. We can use brown or black packaging or construction paper. Whatever paper is available in large sizes can be taped to fit the display tables. The other team will set up a wall display within close proximity to the journals. This backdrop will inform and illuminate us of the many stages of making the journal. It may include a series of photos of students constructing the journal. On opening day we give out questionnaires for the student body. They return their comments concerning which journals were effective in being able to envision the future. This will be a rewarding critique for those students who have met the challenge.

Works Referenced

The works below are appropriate for both students and teachers.

Franzini, Michael. *One Hundred Young Americans*. New York: Collins\ Design, 2007.

Great color photos by the author alongside illuminating bios of teenagers from around the U.S.A.- What they have in common is their struggle to find their identity.

Bowman, Robin. *It's Complicated, The American Teenager*. New York: Umbrage Publishing: 2007. Beautiful black and white photos of a cross section of teens throughout the U.S.A.with accompanying bios.

Herrera, H. *The Diary of Frida Kahlo* . New York: Harry Abrams Publishing Co., 1995. The actual reprinted diary of Frida Kahlo.

Zieve, Karyn. Dali/ Miro. *Masters of Surrealism* . New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1967. Reproductions of the paintings of Salvador Dali and Joan Miro.

M. C. Escher. *29 Master Prints* . New York: Harry Abrams Publishers, 1985. Beautiful reproductions of the artists' graphic block prints.

Troyen, Barter and Comey, Davis. *Edward Hopper* . Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2007. Work shown at BMFA Spring exhibit of the artists' work.

Bagge, Peter. *Hey Buddy* . Seattle Washington: Fantagraphics Books, 1993. A graphic novel using cartoon illustration geared to the angst movement of youth in the twenty-first century.

Didio, Dan. *Bizarre World* . New York: DC Comics, 2005. A graphic novel using comic superheroes.

Oakley, Mark. *Thieves and Kings* . Montreal: 1 Box Publishing, 2004. A graphic novel of romantic heroes and villains in tales of

another era.

Bendis, Brian Michael. *Fortune and Glory* . Hollywood: Oni Press, 2000. A graphic novel about the trials and tribulations of contemporary lives.(with cartoon characters)

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