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Visually Speaking: Using Visual Journaling to Build Elaboration Skills in Writing

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by Deirdre Prisco

Elaboration is essential to any piece of writing, whether it is narrative, expository or persuasive. The development of elaboration is what makes writing clearer, stronger and more effective. It is a challenge for writers of all ages and levels from Pulitzer Prize winning authors to elementary-school students. Writing curricula and programs are filled with lessons on elaboration. Teachers line the margins of student work with comments such as "add more details," "much too general," "show, don't tell," "tell more" and "explain better." Research and practical experience reveal that students who have strong visual-verbal connections, who link seeing and writing, will develop better thinking skills, expand their vocabulary, and improve the quality of the elaboration in their writing. This unit will focus on visual journaling, which is unlike typical journaling because it combines images and text and allows students to make those important visual-verbal connections. The use of personal journals in teaching has had powerful and far reaching effects. Journals allow students to express a variety of thoughts in a free, more non-judgmental format. Students are often motivated to write in journals as doing so seems less like a formal written assignment. The introduction of pictures in a journal opens students' minds even more. For many students who have a dread of writing, visual journals can increase the flow of words by providing a way to fill up a blank page easily with the aid of visual images. The visual journal is an on-going creation of observations and reflections designed to draw attention to sensory details in order to build elaboration skills. It addresses the needs of all learners from non-English speakers and students with learning disabilities to high achievers with extensive vocabularies. This unit can be easily adapted for any grade level, and it can be implemented in a variety of ways: as a weekly or monthly supplement to the language arts curriculum or as an autonomous unit.

I am a special education-inclusion teacher for the middle-school component of Edgewood Magnet School. I, therefore, collaborate, consult and co-teach in the regular education classrooms, modifying and differentiating instruction for students with special needs. I work primarily with fifth through eighth graders. Because the majority of my students find writing challenging, I am highly involved in the planning and direction of the writing classes in these grades. Edgewood is primarily a neighborhood magnet school with grades kindergarten through the eighth grade, and it has a diverse population. The students have a wide range of ethnicities, economical strata and varying degrees of academic and emotional strengths and weaknesses. The school has an enrollment of about 450 students with approximately 60% African-American population, 12% Hispanic population and the remaining 29% Caucasian and Asian. About half the school qualifies for free or reduced lunches, and approximately 7% of the population are identified as special education students. Edgewood School records a very high average daily attendance rate of 96%. In addition, it provides an arts-

integrated curriculum, an educational approach that supports multiple intelligence theory and uses arts education as a means to assist students to improve their academic performance and enrich their lives. Arts-integration curricula use art forms--music, visual art, theater, and dance to teach other core subjects, including math, reading, and language arts. This unit aligns with the philosophy of the school.

The seventh-grade language arts class prepares students for the Connecticut Mastery Test. In middle school students are required to write an expository or a persuasive essay as the Direct Assessment of Writing component of the state test. Tests and the never-ending collection of student data have driven the writing curriculum since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act and high-stakes testing. Fifty-two percent of the students in Grade 7 at Edgewood School achieved goal on the Connecticut Mastery Test in 2008, and 77% scored at or above Proficiency. In New Haven an average of 29.3% achieved Goal. According to No Child Left Behind, all students must be scoring at Proficient level or above by 2014. Reviewing these statistics, it is obvious that we as teachers have our work cut out for us.

Language arts classes have evolved into lessons that teach to this test and its format. Monthly writing prompts with very strict rubrics and formats have turned many of our students into formula writers. Practicing for writing prompts and assessments have had positive and negative effects on students. Most of them are able to write an organized five-paragraph essay, demonstrating understanding of the basic framework: introduction, three body paragraphs, and conclusion, each with a topic sentences. However, elaborations of the students' ideas are generally weak, lacking specific details and language. While structure and form are extremely important in teaching students writing skills, I have noticed a lack of spark or interest in their own writing. Students produce the bare minimum for a passing score of 4, which is Goal for the Direct Writing Assessment. Monthly writing prompts provide important data on the student writing, and they allow teachers to specifically pinpoint students' strengths and weaknesses. Student writing portfolios reveal that elaboration is clearly the weak area across the board. Visual journaling will allow students to sharpen their observational skills, which will in turn create more fully elaborated writing.

Rationale

Writing is a life-long skill, and it has become more and more apparent that good written communication skills are key to future success in careers. It is well documented that most employers are looking for job candidates who demonstrate strong writing skills.A report published by the National Commission on Writing titled "Writing: A Ticket to Work...Or a Ticket Out, A Survey of Business Leaders" and published by the National Commission on Writing supports this claim. The researchers surveyed 129 human-resource directors in companies affiliated with Business Roundtable, an association of chief executives officers from leading companies in the United States. They found that the ability to write well "opens doors to professional employment." This survey stated that two-thirds of salaried employees in large American companies have some writing responsibility. People who cannot write and communicate clearly have little chance of being hired. This report concludes that writing skills cannot be developed quickly or easily, and they should therefore be the focus across the curriculum of schools and colleges from kindergarten through college.a1a

However, it is difficult to get students motivated and excited about writing. Most languages arts teachers would agree that there is generally a strong resistance to most writing. It seems logical then to ask the question, "Why have students learned to dislike writing so much?" Most students react to writing assignments

with bored resignation. Their assignments contain an emotional flatness. Because writing lessons as well as writing assignments seem artificial and synthetic, students become passive. They are given "writing prompts" that ask them to explain or persuade an audience with the standard five-paragraph essay. These assignments are designed to mirror what students are to perform on the standardized assessments and they have created a student who has been "trained" to write a formatted essay. There is no real personal involvement in the writing except to achieve the coveted score of a 4 or 5 to pass the test.

We need to think honestly and deeply about why our students have grown to dislike writing. In many ways test-preparation activities for writing reinforce this pattern. Because these language arts lessons are so formatted, the student's creativity and personal voice can be stifled. Students need to become more deeply and personally involved in their writing, making it more authentic. Authentic writing releases thoughts and ideas without rigid rubrics that stress organization and mechanics. Authentic writing or "real" writing has some intrinsic value to the writer rather than being an academic activity performed for a grade. The natural connections in authentic writing increases creative expression. Research shows that writing instruction is most effective when it resembles real writing done for real purposes. a2a Students respond when we allow them to choose their own form, voice, and audience as well as subject. a3a They then can take ownership and responsibility and the assignment becomes a personal project rather than another dreaded writing task.

Students, particularly middle-school students, want to communicate. They feel a deep urgency to share ideas, experiences, and opinions. They love to pass notes, text message one another, write emails and communicate through social networking websites such as Facebook. Unfortunately, this type of writing is a far cry from the formal writing skills they need to develop for high school and college. Yet it is still evidence that they want to write when they feel that writing is authentic and meaningful. As we observe this behavior, we as teachers need to discover how we can use and expand on this natural and genuine urge to write. Writing can be a way for middle schoolers to sort out their ideas, thoughts and feelings as they struggle with social relationships among family and friends. As John Cheever once wrote, "When I began to write, I found this was the best way to make sense out of my life." Visual journaling provides a spontaneous, natural medium for such writing.

Another frustration that plagues many language arts teachers is that the students often do not transfer the skills learned from daily writing lessons to their final work. Why do they fall back on old habits of bland writing, forgetting the lessons on sentences, variety, using descriptive language, and so forth? What roles do short term-memory and long-term memory play in the writing process? It is important for teachers to understand how memory works and utilize this information in their teaching strategies to maximize the connection between the processes of teaching and learning. Understanding can help eliminate the frustration that occurs when a teacher assesses a student skill that has been taught and discovers that the skill was not learned.

Research

There is a significant amount of research devoted to memory. Why are some things committed to memory while others escape? An article in American Educator magazine titled "What Will Improve a Student's Memory" by cognitive scientist Daniel Willingham explains how the brain stores information and how memory relates to student learning. In his evaluation of the research, Willingham states that "memories are formed as the residue of thought. You remember what you think about, not every fleeing thought -only those matters to which you really devote some attention." a4a This claim supports the idea that the more one thinks about

something, the more lately it will become stored in one's memory for future reference. So thinking is central to the retention of skills taught in the classroom. If a teacher wants students to retain a specific skill in their memories, then the students need to have thought about it. This might explain why ditto sheets and drills are so ineffective in the classroom. Henry Ford observed, "Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is the probable reason why so few people engage in it." Moreover, thinking is slow. The brain does a better job with seeing and moving which are automatic processes in many ways. Our thinking system does not instantly calculate the answer to a problem the way our visual system takes in a visual scene. Thinking also takes concentration. Memory is not as reliable as one's visual and motor systems.a5a

Besides building visual-verbal connections, another powerful piece to improving writing skills, involves examining the reasons why our students struggle with writing. Willingham writes another insightful article in American Educator magazine, "Why Don't Students Like School? Because the Mind is Not Designed for Thinking" in which he addresses the issue of how to inspire and motivate students. According to Willingham, if a student finds a subject difficult, then the student will not experience successful thought, and thought is required for memory. He further explains that thinking requires concentration and effort.a6a In answering his question about why students don't like school, he develops an argument that school does not provide what he calls a "pleasurable rush," a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment in successful thinking. Students enjoy mental activity but not when it is too hard; if there is too much mental work involved, it is more unlikely that satisfaction will be achieved. Most of what Willingham reports supports the need for differentiated teaching and learning. Differentiated teaching recognizes that not all students are alike due to their varying background knowledge, language, learning styles and interests. Students need a multitude of ways to process information and those instructional approaches should be adapted in relation to the individual students learning thresholds. Students are motivated to "think" and therefore learn when they are engaged in work that peaks their curiosity on a level that their brains find pleasurable. Therefore, it is important for teachers to recognize that in order for students to learn, they need to experience challenging activities that interest individual students, that the activities should be thought-provoking, and that the lessons have visual/verbal connections to help in the retention of skills.

Key research findings from Robert Marzano, in his book Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement, prove that learners acquire knowledge and store knowledge in two ways: linguistic (by reading or hearing) and nonlinguistic (through visual images, kinesthetic or whole-body modes).a7a His research supports the theory that the more students use both systems of representing knowledge, the better they are able to think about and recall what they have learned. Students can improve reading, writing and thinking skills by using visual imagery to help them organize key concepts. Visual images can be very powerful aids in remembering information, and they can make even apparently meaningless material more meaningful. Visual images help organize information because they create associations. Research supports the idea that this strategy is one of the most under-used strategies in classrooms. Marzano outlines that best teacher practices would include activities that include nonlinguistic representations in lessons such as concept maps, idea webs, and thinking maps, sketches, graphs and symbols. Creating more verbal visual connections is important to building skills.

Although the educational community has recently been embracing visual enhancements in instruction, the connection of visual to verbal information is evident throughout history. Aristotle stated that, "without image, thinking is impossible." Characters in alphabets began as pictures with meaning.a8a Pictures, such as Egyptian hieroglyphics or Native American picture writing came before words in written language. Only after the printing press was invented were illustrations and type separated, with illustrations often falling by the wayside. Recent history shows a reversal in this separation with greater reliance on visually oriented

approaches to information presentation. With the onset of computer and computer graphics, the communication of ideas and concepts became increasingly graphic.

Teachers' instructional decisions are based on a mix of theories learned through teacher education classes, professional development, acquisition of content knowledge, and success and failures in the classrooms through trial and error. The impetus in education has increasingly been to apply strategies and techniques in the classroom that have proven to be successful. The findings from cognitive science, an interdisciplinary field of researchers from psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, philosophy, computer science and anthropology, help teachers identify the best educational strategies. All the research supports that visual journaling is an effective strategy to use in language arts classrooms.

Unit Overview

The basis of this unit will be for the students to keep a visual journal. The objective of this unit is for the students to develop better writing skills specifically in the area of elaboration. The overall goals of this visual journaling project directly address the problems outlined above.

Visual Journaling Goals include:

1. Emphasis on creativity rather than conformity
2. Emphasis on details and observation
3. Combining visual and verbal forms of expression
4. Motivating all students but especially those who struggle with reading
5. Looking at the middle-school student developmentally
6. Invoking deeper thought processes that help retention in memory.

Learning Objectives:

After completing this unit the student will be able to:

· combine images with text to create a visual journal.
· record his or her understanding/knowledge by creating pictures.
· explore and expand vocabulary to describe physical objects and surroundings.
· explore and expand vocabulary to describe thoughts and feelings in relation to visual images.
· use language to think critically in everyday life.
· develop tools and motivation to develop written communication skills.

As a result of this unit, students will be able to write with more details and thought in their elaboration. The students will be able to ask themselves questions that will help them use details in their writing. In addition,

the format of the visual journal will motivate students to write with elaboration. Dan Keller explains, "Students often resist writing, not because they really hate the act itself, but because they lack the strategies and confidence to meet the writing tasks we assign them." By incorporating exercises that provide enough structure with familiar objects and visual aids, students can get be easily engaged and their resistance to writing reduced. Visual journaling is a nice change from the writing process of drafting, editing and revising. Journals can serve as a resource and an inspiration for more formal assignments. Students will be encouraged to fill their pages with rich vocabulary and explore the use of different words in different contexts. Ideally students will continue to incorporate this type of journaling in their lives. This project embraces both the cognitive and affective aspects of a student's learning. Students will build verbal visual connections, enrich their vocabulary and increase the retention of learned skills through the attention that journaling encourages. Students will rediscover writing with a richness of detail and leave this class as more confident and competent writers, better prepared for high school, college and the world of work.

What is visual journaling?

A visual journal combines text with images. Visual journaling is a creative way to express and record one's experiences, feelings, and emotional reactions--one's inner world both visually and verbally. In addition to improving writing skills, journals also change student's attitudes, values, and sense of personal identity. Working with pictures accesses a different part of our brains than words. When students include a variety of visual imagery such as doodles, sketches, photos in their journals, in addition to making notes on specific feelings and observations, they strengthen their thinking and understanding about themselves and the world around them. This mix of words and images will help shape their thoughts. In turn, the attention to detail that visual journaling provides increases their elaboration skills.

During this series of lessons, students have many opportunities to practice manipulating letters, words and sentences. Activities include making lists, creating word associations and developing diversified word choices in descriptions that the students see or visualize for themselves. All these activities enrich their elaboration skills. Practicing writing with details in a visual journal will be highly motivating as well. Donald and Christine McQuade state in Seeing & Writing3,"by actively seeing the details of the ordinary, we hone our skills of observation, the first steps toward becoming a confident writer. Observing the ordinary with fresh eyes sharpens our skills of description: it also helps develop our ability to draw inferences." The visual journal will be an on-going creation of observations and reflections. Emphasis in this unit will not be on the product but on the process.

The unit can be utilized in a variety of different time formats, daily, weekly, or monthly. Visual journaling lessons can be mixed in with the regular writing curriculum, and students can use their visual journal as resources and references. The daily lessons on visual journaling are designed for an approximately forty-five minute class period. Each class will begin with a new activity/prompt. Music can be played in the background to set the tone while students reflect and respond independently in their journals. The teacher can be either modeling the expected behavior by writing, or this time can be used to have individual conferences with students. The last ten minutes of the period can be used for sharing and discussing responses to the prompt. Students will be encouraged to add to their visual journals outside of the classroom.

Introduction of Project

This project will begin with a discussion about visual journaling to provide a background and context for what the students will be doing. The teacher would begin by asking students to develop their own definition of the term "visual journaling." After some discussion, the historical background of visual journaling can be presented including information on the earliest text/image associations with written language such as is found in the ancient work of the Native Americans and Egyptians. Other examples of visual journals include the work of explorers such as James Cook and Lewis and Clark intheir records from their voyages around the world and across America in the eighteenth century. The notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, as well as the architectural journals of Frank Lloyd Wright can serve as other examples of different forms of visual journaling. Many artists such as Vincent Van Gogh and Frida Kahlo have kept notebooks/visual journals as well.

After sharing and discussing student comments, students respond with their impressions on why and how visual journaling can be an effective in developing writing skills. The following books and resources will then be passed around and viewed by students to provide some authentic examples of visual journals. I feel that providing these models will help students conceptualize this project.

· The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci
· The Diary of Frida Kahlo: An Intimate Self-Portrait
· The Journey is the Destination: The Journals of Dan Eldon
· The Principles of Uncertainty by Mira Kalman
· Examples of student work from Web sites on the Internet.

Students discuss these examples by comparing and contrasting the different examples. Responses are recorded on chart paper. Points to include in the discussion would be the different styles, characteristics of the journals; things the students noticed: drawings, paintings, doodles, hand-written notes, pasted in letters, collages, words, sentences, phrases, lists, labeling, descriptions, poems, newspaper clippings, and photographs. Students share their reactions to the introduction of project and hand in a personal written response about their own goals for their own visual journals and ideas about what they might want to explore. This information will be used to adapt and differentiate instruction for the students according to their individual interests. It is my hope that this presentation will generate a renewed interest in language arts class and an excitement about visual journaling. The overall objectives of the unit would be outlined to the students in order for them to understand that this process is designed to encourage writing, specifically elaboration skills, in a medium that would be motivating.

The next step would be to have students think about what kinds of journals they would like to make and about what the style of the notebook/sketchbook, size, and type of paper should be. Some visual journals use old scrapbooks, atlases, photo albums in which the student use their imagination to reuse and cover the pages. The class will have a collection of magazines, newspapers, photographs, postcards, art reproductions, old books that can be cut from, as well as other visual material, to be use for the activities. Crayons, colored pencils, watercolors, scissors, glue sticks, markers and other art tools will be available as well. Journal pages can be developed into collages. Students can paint colored washes on the pages of the journal in order to write on a colored background. Student can create borders around pages. Ideally there would be no computer

generated images and the text would all be hand written.

The following activities can be used in the classroom as prompts for student visual journal entries. Each has a visual and verbal component to it. Some rules about the visual journals could include a prohibition against tearing out pages: however, crossing out is allowed because there are no such things as mistakes in a visual journal. This rule reminds the student that this is a journal and not a finished piece of writing or art. It is not about making a pretty picture with perfect text; it is about writing and making visual images in a personal journal. Students can create images in response to journal entries, or there may be images that will inspire them to write poems, make observations and notes, or express their thoughts and feelings. Students will be allowed to share their entries with peers in partnering, small groups or whole class.

Learning Strategies

In this section I have included sample lessons or prompts for visual journaling. These are meant to serve as examples of how these lessons might be taught. For differentiated instruction, a framework can be provided for those students who need specific guidelines and parameters. However, those students who do not need to rely on a structure to help them understand what to do can be allowed and encouraged to move creatively in other directions. These activities ask students to look (either in the physical world or in their thoughts), to listen, to question and to respond. They use both factual and evaluative or interpretative language. Factual language is rooted in concrete observations. Questions that elicit factual language would include: What do you see? How was it made? What sounds do you hear? Evaluative language goes beyond the facts to present a person's interpretation of and feeling about an object or experiences. Unlike factual language, evaluative or interpretative language leaves room for opinion. Questions that elicit evaluative language include: How does this image/object make you feel? What do you think about when you see? When making observations, it is often helpful for students to develop an inventory list of the details they observe. I prefer to model lessons, walking through the steps of creating the visual journal pages with "think alouds" times when the teacher verbalizes inner speech as the students are working. I find that this teaching technique allows students a deeper, fuller understanding of what the concept is about. It models the process of thinking and then creating. This procedure will also allow students time to visualize and think about their own page. This reinforces the process of thinking to create a deeper understanding and retention in memory.

Visual Thesaurus

For vocabulary enrichment, I will introduce the students to a Web site called Visual Thesaurus. Students will have this resource available to them and know how to access it for any of the following activities. Using the computers in the school, students will be able to explore Visual Thesaurus. This Web site, an interactive dictionary and thesaurus that creates word maps, is designed to encourage word exploration. The students will begin their visual journal with an entry using this resource. The students will pick a word and see the word map that is generated. Students can explore and record the different word choices. Then the students will create images that they can associate with the different words they discover.

Sample Lesson 1: Feelings

Goal:

To enrich vocabulary and use of figurative language

Objectives:

As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:

1. Create a list of different words expressing feelings
2. Create an image of such a word of their choosing
3. Use figurative language to describe such words images

Required Materials:

Student visual journals, thesauri, computers (if available)

Procedure:

1. Students will brainstorm a list of words expressing feelings and record in their visual journal. Students can use thesauri available including the Visual Thesaurus program on the Internet.
2. From this list students choose one word and create three to four images that illustrate it.
3. Students will add text, including phrases, similes, and metaphors besides the images.

Closure:

The teacher will review the lists of words generated by the students. Students will have the opportunity to share their journal pages with the class.

Assessment:

The teacher will assess how well students use their creativity in their images as well as their descriptions using figurative language.

Sample Lesson 2: Poetry

Goal:

To create a poem from random words

Objectives:

As a result of this lesson, the students will be able to

1. Arrange a group of words to formulate a poem
2. Orally present the poem

Required Materials:

Magazines, scissors, student visual journals

Procedure:

1. Pass out magazines and have students cut out thirty random words. Collect magazines
2. Discuss and provide examples of different kinds of poetry, such as haiku and free verse that may be used as forms in this exercise.
3. Students will create a poem using the words they cut out (length and number of words used may vary). They paste the words in their visual journals to form the poem.

Closure:

The teacher will review how manipulating words to create meaning promotes creativity and thinking.

Assessment:

Poems should contain a thought or theme that conveys meaning.

Sample Lesson 3: Traveling through Art

Goal:

To reflect on a work of art in the format of a travel journal

Objectives:

As a result of this lesson the students will be able to,

1. List or write phrases that describe a location
2. Sketch important objects or people involved
3. Record reactions with emotional language

Required Materials:

Works of art depicting different places, (the images can be actual or imaginary places), art postcards or posters, colored pencils pens,

Procedure:

1. Discuss the importance of keeping a journal while traveling.
2. Provide art posters or postcards for students to view
3. Student chooses an image to explore.

4. Students write multiple journal entries as if they were on a trip. Students may imagine they are visiting a place for a certain reason such as pretending to be an actor filming a movie.
5. Students must include descriptions of the location, reactions and reflections ton the experiences.

Closure:

The teacher will review objectives of the lesson: writing in a travel journal using art.

Assessment:

The students will be given an opportunity to share their entries with their classmates as a peer review. In addition the teacher will provide feedback to student work.

Performance Assessment:

The students will be provided with teacher feedback after the completion of each assigned journal page. Feedback will also be given to those students who feel motivated to expand on their classroom requirements. Feedback would include comments about the amount of effort and thought demonstrated, fulfillment of basic requirements of each activity, creativity in the presentation (art design) and quality of the written component. Feedback rubrics or sticky notes can be used.

At the end of a designated period, the students will have created a visual journal that they can continue to add to. Each journal would provide an opportunity for a portfolio type of assessment of the student's work. This project supports a portfolio assessment because it focuses on self-directed learning, reflects change and growth over a period of time, and provides a way for students to value themselves as learners. The evaluation of the visual journal will focus on performance-based learning experiences as well as the acquisition of skills and attitudes. Students will meet with the teacher to review the journals. This meeting will provide further opportunities for collaborative reflection and metacognitive introspection. Students will respond to the end of the project with their own evaluations, which include answers to the following questions:

· Did you enjoy the project?
· What do you think you learned from doing this project?
· Do you intend to continue to use visual journaling?
· Do you think it helped with your writing skills? How?
· Did visual journaling increase your awareness of the world and your thoughts about the world?
· Has this changed your feelings about writing?

Additional Visual Journal Prompts:

· Observational Note-Taking

Students can select from a setting of their choice: park, school cafeteria, home, and classroom. Student will write a list of observations in words and phrases that describe the sight, sounds, smells, taste of that particular place for ten minutes. They could even make a chart categorizing the different senses and their observations under each category. There can be an inventory list designed for this and other lessons. The list could be a format that splits the page into the different senses. This structure helps the students focus on only what they see rather than on what they feel about what they see. Constructing such a list also helps students to base their information on what they actually see in a composition, object, place, event, or person. Developing more awareness of the details of ordinary objects, of seeing more clearly and paying closer attention to sensory details will encourage the students to write with more elaboration.

· An Important Object

There are many important objects in your home or school. Select an object that you think has made a very big difference in your life. Sketch this object and then explain in writing why this object is so important. Be sure to name the object and describe it carefully

(This same exercise can be done about a special place or a special person.)

· I Am

Students will first brainstorm a list of adjectives or descriptive phrases that describe them. From this list, the students can cut out letters from various magazines to form a collage of the words. The students can then write an "I Am" poem.

· Making a Title

Students will be given art reproduction postcards and asked to formulate a creative title. Students will have to evaluate setting characters, and mood of the image and overall impression it creates in a viewer. Questions to think about are: What different colors are used? What are the lines and shapes in the picture? Are you calm, anxious, afraid, happy or excited when viewing the piece? Once a title is created, the students can write an explanation of their title choice.

· What if Objects Could Talk

Giving inanimate objects human traits is fun and a wonderful way for students to practice writing dialogue. Objects come to life when students consider what they would say. A dialogue can be between an object and the student or between two objects. Topics for dialogue could include: the form and function of the object, the message the object conveys, the location of the object. Students can give their objects names, and each can have a personality. The object is sketched into a journal along with the dialogue.

· Talk Bubble

Student will select a photo or portrait of a person from a group of possible subjects provided by the teacher. Many examples can be found in art books. Students may even chose to draw a portrait. A talk bubble would be drawn from the mouth of the person and the students will fill in the talk bubble with the thoughts of that person. Possible topics could include historical events, social problems, humor, career, interests.

· Inside a Work of Art

Provide students with postcard reproductions of paintings for this visual journal entry. The works of art should reflect different places. Students would paste the postcards in their journal and write a response that would describe the place and then explain how they fit inside the paining. Possible written prompts could include: Who are the people with you? Where are you? Are you enjoying yourself? What are some of the sights and sounds around you? What is the weather, season? What are you feeling?

· Who are We?

This activity explores the idea of that people often appear different on the outside from their inner emotional being. The theme of "can't judge a book by its cover" is explored here. Students are to sketch a self-portrait by looking in the mirror. They write a description of themselves based purely on their outward appearance; for example, light skinned, black hair, gold stud earring, Next the students write an anecdote that reveals their inner feelings and concerns pertaining to an issue or experience. For example they can explain a situation and their reaction to it, relate a childhood experience or adventure, and describe their future goals and aspirations.

· Poem/ Song Lyrics/Quote

Have student select a favorite song, poem or inspirational quote. Paste it in the journal and create an image that represents the feeling evoked by the piece. Students make personal responses to their chosen piece in their journal.

· Footprint Activity

Draw a footprint. Have the students meditate on their footprint and consider some of the footprints that they have left behind, the things that people will remember them for. Write a letter explaining why they will be remembered. Also students could write about goals on the soles of the feet, or they could write about the footprints they want to leave behind.

· Fashion Designer

Students generally like to create something they can call their own. In this exercise, the students can sketch an outfit that they have designed. They would then have to describe in detail the outfit, either in a separate text or in notes along the sketch of the fashion design.

· Three Words

Students will brainstorm a list of words that can be used to summarize their life at that particular moment: the praises, the struggles, the little things in life that make it worthwhile. Then students will select three-words from the list. (This activity is derived from the three-word segment on Good Morning America during which people send in video clips of their three words that they have chosen.)

· Six Word Memoirs

This is similar to the three-word prompt. Show examples from the book: Not Quite What I Was Planning: Six Word Memoirs and I Can't Keep My Own Secrets: Six Word Memoirs by Teens Famous and Obscure. Have students create a single sentence summarizing their own lives. They then can illustrate their pages accordingly.

Notes

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[1] "A Ticket To Work or a Ticket Out." National Commission on Writing. 4.

[2] Duke, N.K. and L. A. Hall, "Authentic Literacy Activities for Developing Comprehension and Writing". 344.

[3] McCormick Calkins Lucy, The Art of Teaching Writing. 6.

[4] Willingham, Daniel. "What Will Improve a Student's Memory."

[5] Willingham, Daniel. "Why Students Don't Like School, Because the Mind is Not Designed for Thinking." 6.

[6] Ibid., 6.

[7] Marzano, John, Debra J. Pickering and Jane E. Pollack. Classroom Strategies That Work: Research - Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement, 73.

[8] Sinatra, R. Visual literacy Connections to Thinking, Reading and Writing, 15.

[9] McQuade, Donald and Christine McQuade. Seeing and Writing3, 32.

[10] Bell. Michael, Visual Journaling http.//www.visualjournaling.com

[11] McQuade, Donald, Christine McQuade prepared by Dan Keller, Anne Kress, and Suellyn Winkle.Teaching Seeing & Writing3

[12] Hoder, Jane S. Moved To Write, 8.

[13] Ibid., 31.

[14] Ibid., 36.

[15] Ibid., 42.

Appendix A: Implementing State Standards

Connecticut State Language Arts Standards - 7 th grade

Having completed this unit, the students will have achieved the following goals for language arts from the Connecticut State Department of Education English Language Arts Curriculum framework.

Standard 3: Communicating with Others

Students produce written, oral and visual texts to express, develop and substantiate ideas and experiences.

How do we write, speak and present effectively?

3.1 Students use descriptive, narrative, expository, persuasive and poetic modes.

- use oral language with clarity, voice and fluency to communicate a message.
- listen to or read a variety of genres to use as models for writing in different modes.
- use the appropriate features of persuasive, narrative, expository or poetic writing.
- write to delight in the imagination.

3.2 Students prepare, publish and/or present work appropriate to audience, purpose and task.

- determine purpose, point of view and audience, and choose an appropriate written, oral or visual format.
- apply the most effective processes to create and present a written, oral or visual piece.
- revise texts for organization, elaboration, fluency and clarity.
- research information from multiple sources for a specific purpose.
- publish and/or present final products in a myriad of ways, including the use of the arts and technology.

Annotated Bibliography

Research

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Comprehension and Writing". The Reading Teacher, 60 (4) 344-355.

Explains "authentic writing" and how it is effective in the classroom

Sinatra, R. Visual Literacy Connections to Thinking, Reading and Writing. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1986.

Analysis of visual and verbal connections.

"A Ticket to Work or…a Ticket Out". National Commission on Writing for America's

Families, Schools, and Colleges. 2004.

A publication with facts and statistics regarding the importance of writing and the work force.

West, T.G. In the Mind's Eye., Amherst NY: Prometheus Books, 1997.

Explains how many of the greatest minds such as Einstein were visual not verbal thinkers. Includes neurological research to support an association of visual talent and

verbal difficulties. Excellent examples of different learning styles.

Willingham, Daniel. "What Will Improve a Student's Memory." American Educator. 32 (2008) 17-25).

Educational article that outlines how memory works for students and provides strategies on improving students memories.

Willingham, Daniel. Why Students Don't Like School. New York: Jossey-Bass: 2009.

Book that explains how students think and what doe or does not motivate them. Offers good research to support his claim.

Willingham, Daniel. "Why Students Don't Like School, Because the Mind is Not Designed for Thinking." American Educator. 33 (2009): 4-13.

A condensed version of his book. Includes many of the main points in this concise educational article.

Resources on Teaching Strategies:

Graves, Donald H. Writing: Teachers and Children at Work. Portsmouth NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983.

Contains many ideas for writing activities.

McCormick Calkins Lucy, The Art of Teaching Writing. Portsmouth NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1986.

Comprehensive guide for ideas on teaching writing across all grade levels.

Marzano, John, Debra J. Pickering and Jane E. Pollack. Classroom Strategies That Work: Research - Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001.

Outlines effective strategies for the classroom that are based on educational research.

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This text includes many writing activities with visual and verbal components. Many examples of how to incorporate the visual with writing exercises.

Nagin, Carl and The National Writing Project, Because Writing Matters: Improving Student Writing in Our Schools. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006.

An excellent resource guide for teaching writing. Includes relevant information backed by educational research.

Visual Journaling

Bell. Michael. Visual Journaling http://visualjournaling.com 2006. A Web site that defines visual journaling and provides many examples of visual journals. Includes a video clip explaining visual journaling.

Feishleiser, Rachel and Larry Smith, ed., Not Quite What I was Planning: Six Word Memoirs. New York: Harper Collins, 2008.

Examples of how different individuals created concise memoirs.

Feishleiser, Rachel and Larry Smith, eds. I Can't Keep my Own Secrets: Six Word Memoirs by Teens Famous and Obscure. New York: Harper Collins, 2009.

Examples of teenagers' six-word memoirs.

Capacchione Lucia, The Creative Journal. Athens,OH: Ohio University Press, 1979.

Explains how to start a creative journal. Has excellent visual examples of visual journal pages. Gives suggestions for prompts.

Capacchione, Lucia, Creative Journal for Teens. New York: Career Press, 2008.

An updated version of her book by the same title but designed specifically for teenagers.

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Ganim, Barbara and Susan Fox, Visual Journaling, Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1999.

This book focuses exclusively on expressing emotions and feelings through visual journaling.

Hoden, Jane S. Moved To Write, Hartford: Wadsworth Athenaeum. n.d.

An excellent curriculum guide for teachers with many activities that connect fine art and writing. Concentrates on pieces from the Wadsworth Athenaeum collections but easily adapted to all works of art.

Readings for Students:

Da Vinci, Leonardo, The Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci rendered into English and introduced by Edward MacCurdy New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1939.

Great example of historical evidence of visual journaling.

Kalman, Maira, The Principles of Uncertainty, New York: Penguin, 2007.

Contemporary artist who uses visual journaling as her art form.

Kahlo, Frida,The Diary of Frida Kahlo: An Intimate Self-Portrait introduction by Carlos Fuentes ; essay and commentaries by Sarah M. Lowe. New York : H.N. Abrams. 1995.

An example of how an artist used visual journaling to collect observations and sketches for reference.